

DNR uncertain on wolf plan action

By Jim Servi
Contributing Writer

Madison — A federal judge's Dec. 19 decision to put wolves in the Great Lakes states back on the endangered species list could have state budget ramifications in Wisconsin.

Gov. Scott Walker's 2015-17 budget is to be released Feb. 3. As always, many groups are anxiously waiting to see how the budget will affect them. This year, a new group of citizens will be added to the list — sportsmen, farmers, ranchers, and anyone else concerned with future wolf management in Wisconsin.

Sen. Tom Tiffany, R-District 12, said legislators are waiting to see what the governor has in the budget regarding wolf management.

Walker could pull back funding for wolf management under the justification that the federal government is controlling the state's ability to manage wolves based on the recent court ruling by Judge Beryl Howell to relist wolves. For the state Legislature, that would mean legislators would have to look at the ramifications before taking any further steps in requesting federal money for wolf management.

On the other hand, if wolf management continues to be funded in the proposed state budget, then it will be up to the Joint Finance Committee to review and offer proposals. One of these proposals may be defunding wolf management altogether, according to Tiffany.

Over the next few months, legislators will determine if there is enough support to move forward with that plan of action. Tiffany, who sits on the Joint Finance Committee, said, "Me wanting it (defunding wolf management at the state level) to happen is one step, but gathering enough votes to make it happen is another."

Because of this, Tiffany said he's "anxious to hear from the people of Wisconsin."

DNR officials, including Tom Hauge, DNR Bureau of Wildlife director, continue to respond with a similar message. "We are likely looking at a couple-month delay from our previous timeline with a goal of getting the new wolf plan to the Natural Resources Board by summer or early fall," Hauge said.

What that new plan looks like will depend entirely on whether wolves remain on the federal endangered species list. Prior to the Howell's decision to relist wolves, the plan was to hold public hearings in January with hopes of presenting a revised wolf plan to the NRB by April and enacting any changes for the 2015 wolf season. Those plans and timeline were shelved following the December decision.

One thing remains clear, according to David MacFarland, DNR large canine biologist: "We're not abandoning the effort."

MacFarland aims to produce a wolf-management plan and expects the agency will have one soon. Hauge said he's been in discussions with Kurt Thiede, DNR Land Division administrator, but has to talk with Cathy Stepp, DNR secretary, and the NRB before proceeding.

The current wolf plan, approved in 1999, calls for a population of 350 wolves. Input on four prospective population goals were planned for the public hearings. The options included sustaining the population at 650 wolves, continuing with the 350-wolf goal, managing for 300 to 650 animals, or setting a minimum of 350 wolves. Unless wolves are delisted in the future, the DNR will not have the ability to manage wolves at any of these levels, which is why the DNR is uncertain as to how to proceed with its wolf plan.