

For: September 2014 Natural Resources Board meeting item 5.B.2.

DATE: September 24, 2014

TO: Natural Resources Board

FROM: Cathy Stepp, Secretary



SUBJECT: Voluntary Registration Guidelines to Aid in Data Collection

At the Board's request, we present recommended voluntary wolf registration guidelines to aid in the evaluation of injuries sustained to wolves during the harvest season.

**Background:**

State law requires the DNR to implement an annual wolf hunting and trapping season. Hunting with the aid of dogs is a hunting method approved by state statute. The use of dogs becomes legal on the Monday following the regular gun deer season through the end of the wolf hunting season. The use of dogs was first implemented in the 2013 wolf season when 35 wolves were killed with the aid of dogs. Wisconsin has a long tradition of ethical hunting behavior. We establish regulations with the presumption that hunters and trappers will follow established law. Law Enforcement personnel followed up on all internet and hot line contacts related to the use of dogs and no citations were issued.

At the request of the Natural Resources Board, the Department conducted evaluations of wolves harvested with the aid of dogs in 2013. Evaluations were designed to gather information on potential pre-mortem wolf/dog interactions. However, the current registration requirements were not sufficient to gather information of this nature. Due to the condition of wolf carcasses at the time of evaluation, the results of this effort were inconclusive. In response, the Board requested a recommendation for voluntary registration guidelines to allow for more thorough evaluations during the 2014-15 wolf season.

The primary regulation which precludes proper evaluation is the requirement to register wolves after the pelt has been removed. To best gather the information to address concerns over wolf – dog interactions, an investigation of the subcutaneous tissue is required. Removal of the pelt results in degradation of this tissue to the point where evaluation is no longer possible. This degradation occurs within hours of pelt removal. Thorough evaluation of carcasses requires a trained individual to be present during the skinning process.

Observations which may suggest pre-mortem aggressive encounters with other animals include subcutaneous hemorrhaging and puncture wounds. Evaluations of this nature are able to ascertain if a bite wound was received pre or post-mortem, however they cannot conclusively say how long before death a wound was received. Wolves are naturally aggressive toward each other in some situations. Given the physiological similarities between dogs and wolves it is not possible to differentiate between wounds originating from the 2 species. To determine if wolves hunted with the aid of dogs are experiencing aggressive encounters at a higher rate, it is necessary to document the background rate of bite wounds in wolves harvested using other methods. It is therefore necessary to collect information from wolves harvested with all methods to allow for comparison between methods.

**Recommended voluntary registration and evaluation procedure:**

- A letter would be sent to all license holders encouraging participation in this process regardless of harvest method to allow for comparison between methodologies.
- Participating hunters/trappers would register wolves prior to skinning the animal.
- Participating hunters/trappers would register wolves within 5 days of harvest.

- Following registration by DNR staff, a USDA Wildlife Services Specialist would observe the wolf skinning process by either the hunter/trapper or their designated taxidermist.
- The Wildlife Services Specialist would collect data using protocols developed by DNR Wildlife Health Staff. Data will include photographs and measurements of observed trauma.
- Data will be submitted to DNR Wildlife Health Staff for evaluation.
- Wildlife Health Staff will complete evaluations of the data, compare data from wolves harvested with the aid of dogs to those harvested using other methods and report findings to the NRB.

**Potential Limitations:**

The proposed registration procedures address the primary limitations identified through last year's evaluations. While we believe they will provide useful information from evaluated wolves, they will not conclusively answer questions on wolf/dog interactions. Limitations include the likelihood that a small proportion of wolves will be evaluated and hunters with known aggressive encounters are unlikely to voluntarily participate. If enacted, these regulations will however provide greater insight into hunting related injuries and help guide future registration procedures.