

WOLF ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

9/24/2013 Wausau Howard Johnson's

Introductions – Bill Vander Zouwen, WDNR

DNR administration will be talking to the NRB today or tomorrow about the pros and cons of a possible extension for bringing the wolf management plan to the NRB. The current timeline is to bring the plan to the NRB in June 2014 for board approval. The emergency rule for the wolf hunt will be in effect until new rules are approved. If the plan is approved as late as February 2015, it will still be in time for setting 2015 quotas. If it is approved as soon as June 2014, it can be first used to set quotas in 2015 as well.

Bob Nack has been hired to be the section chief for the new big game section. The large carnivore program, including wolves, will be in that section, beginning October 28. Bill will continue to facilitate Wolf Advisory Committee meetings until the Wolf Management Plan is drafted.

Staff will be starting to draft questions for the public attitudes survey soon. Questions will be reviewed by DNR administration and then will be brought to this committee for review.

Depredation Update – Information and opinions in this section presented by Brad Koele, WDNR and/or Jason Suckow, USDA-WS

So far this year, 23 hunting hounds & 3 pet dogs have been depredated. Last year was an unusually low year for hound depredations. This year is more consistent with other years. Subsequent hound depredations are occurring after caution areas have been advertised. No bird dogs have been depredated while hunting.

There have been fewer verified complaints overall than last year at this time. USDA-WS has euthanized 40 (41 as of this writing) wolves and landowners have taken 11 under permit so far this year for depredation control. Most likely, fewer wolves will be taken for depredation control this year than predicted. WDNR will start processing depredation claims for payment in January.

Answers to questions included:

- Bear depredations have been consistent with previous years.
- Bear damage payments are made for apiaries, livestock, & crops.
- Payments won't be made for dogs hunting wolves.
- Landowners receiving shooting permits or enrolled in the depredation control program are required to allow only wolf hunting & trapping on their property.
- A list is available of properties enrolled in the program & open to wolf hunting & trapping.
- The decrease in shooting permits may be partially due to people realizing they had little opportunity to take a wolf after receiving permits last year, as well as reluctance to open their land for public wolf hunting and trapping.

Wolf, Elk Restoration & Wolf Predation – Information and opinions in this section presented by Laine Stowell, WDNR (PowerPoint).

Currently, there are ~175 elk in WI, and 91 are radio-collared. The calf sex ratio is 145 bulls:100 cows. Based on scientific literature, a higher percentage of bull calves is an indication of good range. Bear predation is focused on young calves up to ~1 month old. In past years, 20-25% of calves were taken by bears. Recent aggressive harvest of bears may have contributed to no loss of collared calves to bears in recent years. The bear population in Zone A has declined 10-15%. Predation on calves may be learned behavior from sows. The elk program has requested USDA-WS not release translocated bears within 40 miles of elk range.

Methods used to determine the predator responsible for elk death include looking for tracks, examining remains, looking for a chase line at kills, and examining scat contents. They also check bone marrow to determine the health of the elk. Mature bulls 3 years & older are rarely taken by wolves. When they are, it's when antlers are off. Of 217 elk mortalities, 91 (42%) were due to wolves, 30 (14%) were due to vehicle collision, 25 (12%) were due to bears, 71 (32%) were due to other causes. Percentage of annual mortality due to wolf predation has varied from 0-69%. Wolves typically don't prey on calves <2 months old. In 2012-2013, there were 20 elk mortalities; 11 were due to wolf predation. The first elk killed by wolves occurred in 1998-1999, and then there were not many killed by wolves until 2003-2004, when the first adult elk was killed. There was discussion about whether killing elk is a learned behavior for wolves. Wolf predation on elk is highest in February & March, probably due to snow conditions (crusting). Forty-two percent of elk killed by wolves are calves, mostly in their first winter. An increasing number of adult females have been killed since 2007. Prime breeding age for cows is 3-16 years old. Two wolf packs have accounted for 90% of the wolf predation on elk. Radio-locations indicate elk groups shift territories away from wolf packs & wolf packs shift territories towards elk groups.

Timber harvest on the national forest around Clam Lake had been at a near standstill due to lawsuits for many years. Recently, some timber harvest has resumed. No wolf predation on elk has been observed in clear-cut areas. Clear-cuts are more common on some state and county lands further south, and there are plans to move some elk to those areas.

Management options could include:

1. Focused elk zone wolf removal – probably more effective if focused on the 2 packs responsible for most predation.
2. Focused pack removal near elk relocation sites.
3. Focused habitat management without wolf removal.
4. Focused habitat management with wolf removal.
5. Do nothing.

Discussion included:

- The marten restoration area is in the area of the Clam Lake elk herd and is closed to land trapping. There's little chance of catching a marten in a wolf trap. Possibly the area could be opened to wolf trapping.
- Board members recently inserted language into the elk management plan that would allow for predator management to attempt to increase elk population growth rate.
- Decreasing pack sizes may not affect predation on elk – most kills are by groups of 2 or 3 wolves.

Discuss wolf social tolerance research plan – Information and opinions in this section were presented by Bob Holsman, WDNR (PowerPoint).

It was suggested that survey questions should be aimed at:

- How many wolves?
- Where should they be?
- Wolf harvest zones and how to manage them.
- Questions that will help the committee make recommendations.

Brian Dhuey will again be surveying wolf hunters & trappers after the season. The intent of the social tolerance survey is to measure social carrying capacity at 3 points – minimum acceptable, preferred, and maximum acceptable. These could be presented in non-numerical or numerical terms. Biological information may be provided as background for each population level option.

Ideas on possible questions or topics for questions included:

- What influences social carrying capacity?
 - Personal experience
 - Perceived risk/benefit
 - Demographics – where you live, recreation participation, occupation
- When wolves are too many or creating conflict, how should they be managed?
- What conflicts justify control actions?
- Damage control – contracting, wardens, private trappers, landowners.
- Fair value for compensation of hounds & cattle with qualifiers to promote understanding of potential value.
- Intense management zones
 - Where should they be?
 - What should they accomplish?
- Hunting & trapping (possibly more appropriate for the hunter/trapper survey?)
- Favor elk over wolves, or recreational opportunities for wolves over elk?
- What type of areas should be managed for a sustainable population?
- Areas of no harvest for sustainability & research.
- Health strategies
- Surveys & monitoring

The sampling strata will be weighted towards counties with wolf packs. They are currently considering a 2-stage survey with a 1-2 page survey going to all 10,000 people

to be surveyed. It would include 1-2 attitude questions, 5-6 demographic questions, and then a request to participate in the longer survey, and if they don't wish to participate, why. An 8 page survey will be sent to those who agree to participate. There was discussion over weighting. Weighting in the sample design is done to ensure an adequate response from groups of interest. The survey is not a vote. Weighting for management decisions occurs later. There was a discussion of the level of sampling resolution. All wolf pack counties will be sampled, however some counties may be more heavily sampled to make finer resolution distinctions. After considerable discussion, the committee seemed to defer to the judgment of the social scientists in designing the sampling regime. They did suggest that sampling within counties be dispersed throughout the county. Sampling in non-wolf counties will be stratified by rural and non-rural areas.

Survey questions should be ready by the November 19 meeting. It was requested that questions be e-mailed to committee members before the meeting. It's hoped the survey will go out the first part of January.

Review of the wolf management plan background sections

The committee reviewed several draft portions of the background section of the new management plan. The goal is to come to agreement on the background that needs to be considered before proceeding to management recommendations. The background section will also help future readers of the plan to understand the basis for the recommendations. Committee member suggestions for each section are noted below:

**** It was noted that for future meetings, paper copies will be provided to committee members at the meeting.***

History – Dave MacFarland

- Add a list of where (nearest town to nearest town) & when wolves were translocated, along with text explaining the purpose behind the translocations (depredation control). Include the Sandhill wolf (this was a rehabilitating wolf that escaped from a pen within Sandhill).
- Change wording from statewide population to statewide overwinter minimum count throughout document.
- Add graphics showing wolf distribution over time.
- Add graph of overwinter minimum counts.

There was discussion about consistency in the timeframe of tables in the plan. It may be appropriate to include years prior to and years after the first harvest season.

Genetics & Taxonomy – Adrian Wydeven

- There is redundancy of information on pup weights listed in 2 places in the document.
- Add a sentence listing average weights at the beginning of the harvest season.
- Change terminology from pups to <1 year when talking about harvest, so no one is thinking that very small pups are harvested.

Physical Characteristics

Add a “Social System” heading between lines 326 & 327.

Reproduction

No changes

Biological Carrying Capacity & Sustained Yield – Dave MacFarland

- Clarify that information is based on existing occupied range.
- Between lines 391 & 392, add information about differences from earlier work.
 - Biological carrying capacity changes over time

There was discussion of what biological carrying capacity means. For managed species, we manage somewhere between minimum viable population & biological carrying capacity. The public has a wide range of attitudes from managing to biological carrying capacity to managing below minimum viable population.

- In lines 400-402, clarify why MN wasn't included in the analysis (the rate of wolf exchange between MN & WI is not significant for modeling).

Impact of Pack Structure & Territoriality on Management Decisions

Reduction of pack size has little effect on presence of packs or perception of local impact. It may make sense to consider a management objective based on number of packs as other states have done.

Disease

Lindsey Long will be editing and making additions to this section. Some of the additions are things to be included in all management plans. The committee will review again after Lindsey's edits are incorporated. There was discussion of the impact of mange on wolves. The impact may be underestimated because animals weakened by mange die from other causes, but mange was a contributing factor.

- It was suggested that a section on disease impact on livestock be added. It was decided this would more appropriately be placed in the Impacts on Livestock section. This section deals with the impact of disease on the wolf population.
- Remove sentence on baiting, line 510. It is a possible recommendation & doesn't belong in this background information section.

Food Habits – Adrian Wydeven

There have been 2 major wolf food habit studies in WI, 1 was pre-extirpation. It might be good to do an updated food analysis study.

Habitat Requirements

- Line 565 – discussion of using the term “suitable”. No alternative terminology was suggested.

Ecological Role & Impacts – Dave MacFarland

There was discussion of adding more negative impacts. The section is intended to be value free.

- Add a separate section on impacts on deer & elk to address the concern.

Human Risk

- Line 977 – there have been 2 confirmed fatal wolf attacks in North America.
- Add the recent attack in MN.
- Cite survey data regarding perceived risk (fear) if available.

Future meetings

Next meeting – more expert presentations for background information; finish reviewing the plan background sections; review social attitudes survey questions; begin discussion on the characteristics of places that a sustainable wolf population would be managed for and the desired results we would be looking for in any population goal.

Oct. 21 – meeting – probably will be canceled; committee members will be given at least 2 weeks notice. (note: an e-mail subsequently went to committee members notifying them that the Oct. 21 meeting is cancelled due to difficulty in getting an October date that both the committee chair and facilitator can attend and to allow more time to prepare for the next meeting)

Nov. 19 - meeting

Public Input Opportunity

Public Comment #1 – Person lives in Rothschild. His family owns several hunting parcels in Wisconsin. One of the parcels consists of 1200 acres in the Enterprise area which has been in their family since the 1940's. They manage this parcel primarily for grouse hunting and cooperate in management with nearby hunting land owners. They have noticed 2 deer population declines on this property, one in the 1970's and more recently, in the late 1990's & 2000's. He is frustrated by the decline, which he feels wolves are responsible for. It is difficult to keep hunters, including his sons, interested when they don't see deer. There is an economic impact as hunters drop out, not only to local businesses, but also in decreasing land values. He will not take his dogs into the woods on this parcel. His family also owns hunting lands in Idaho where he feels elk hunting has been decimated by wolves. He encouraged the committee to adopt aggressive wolf management similar to Idaho.

Meeting adjourned at 3:08 p.m.