

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Wolf Briefing

January 5, 2012

Background

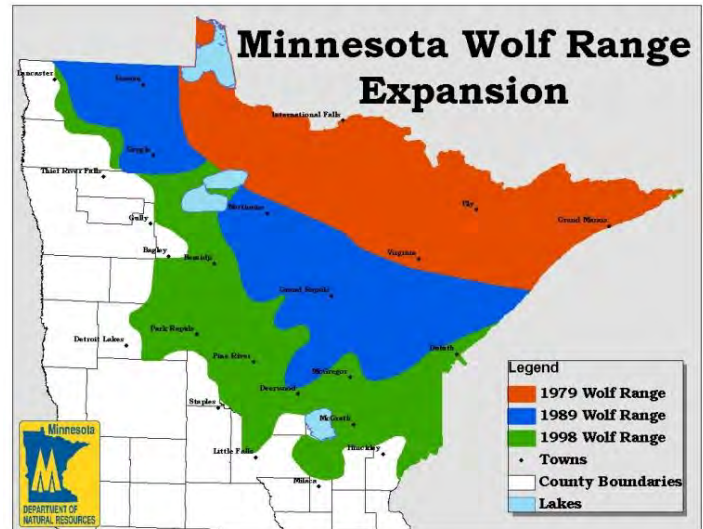
- Wolves were unprotected in Minnesota prior to federal protection in 1974 under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).
- The federal wolf recovery plan (1992) identified a recovered population number of 1,251 – 1,400 wolves for the Minnesota portion of the western Great Lakes population.
- The Minnesota Wolf Management Plan (2001) identifies a minimum statewide winter population goal of 1,600 wolves; there is no maximum population objective and wolves are allowed to occur naturally in suitable wolf habitat throughout the state.
- The wolf population in Minnesota has fully recovered and will be delisted for the 3rd time in January 2012 (two previous delistings in 2007 and 2009 were overturned following federal court challenges)
- Wolf control has been conducted by the federal government since the late 1970s, with USDA Wildlife Services performing the work since 1986. The USDA wolf control program was suspended December 31, 2011 due to loss of federal funding.
- Minnesota statutes were amended to change the state status of wolves to a small game species and provide the ability to authorize a season without a five year waiting period effective July 2011.

Minnesota Wolf Population Information

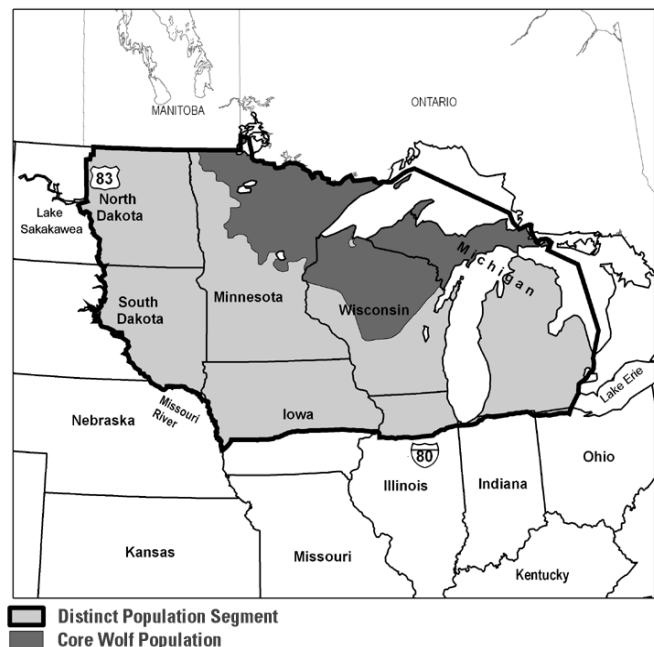
- Minnesota DNR has conducted systematic wolf surveys since 1978 at 10 and 5 year intervals.
- The most recent survey (winter 2007-2008) estimated the wolf population to be 2,921 (confidence range of 2,192 to 3,525).
- There has been no significant change in wolf population size or distribution since 1998, based on surveys in 1998, 2004, and 2008.
- The next survey will be conducted in winter 2012-2013.

Details of Wolf Delisting

- US Fish and Wildlife Service published a final delisting rule in the Federal Register on December 28, 2011; the rule will take effect on January 27, 2012.
- ESA protections will no longer apply to wolves in Minnesota or adjacent states that are part of the Western Great Lakes Distinct Population Segment -- see map.



Gray Wolf Western Great Lakes Distinct Population Segment



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- A 5-year post delisting monitoring period is required to ensure the wolf population remains recovered; during this time the US Fish and Wildlife Service can relist wolves if threats to the wolf population are identified and recovery goals are not maintained.

State management of wolves

- Beginning January 27, 2012 wolves will return to state management
- State statute divides the state into two management zones, with more protective regulations in the northern third, considered the wolf's core range (Zone A – see map on last page).
- Under state law, owners of livestock and domestic animals will have the ability to control wolves themselves under certain circumstances. Owners of livestock, guard animals, or domestic animals may shoot or destroy wolves that pose an **immediate threat** to their animals, on property they own or lease in accordance with local statutes. Outside the wolf's core range, in the southern two thirds of the state (Zone B), a person may shoot a wolf at any time to protect livestock, domestic animals or pets on land they own, lease, or manage. The circumstance of "immediate threat" does not apply. A DNR conservation officer must be notified within 48 hours, and the wolf carcass must be surrendered to the conservation officer.
- The state will also certify private "predator controllers" with expertise in hunting or trapping who can remove wolves in areas with verified loss.

Wolf Depredation Management

- USDA Wildlife Services has conducted a wolf depredation control program based in Grand Rapids, MN.
- Since 2006, Wolf depredation complaints have averaged 200 per year, with about 100 of those verified to be caused by wolves.
- About 80 farms have verified complaints each year and an average of 170 wolves are captured and/or killed in response to verified depredation.
- DNR intends to work with USDA Wildlife Services to continue some level of depredation management through June 2012, while working with other agricultural and wildlife agencies and organizations on the possibility of securing long term funding for the continuation of this type of program.
- In the absence of a continuing USDA Wildlife Services wolf control program, DNR will emphasize training and certification of private predator controllers, technical assistance on wolf control and depredation management techniques, and wolf season management to help address conflicts with wolves.
- In addition to the federal Department of Agriculture wolf control program, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture administers a state wolf livestock damage compensation program to pay for damage to livestock caused by wolves. Recent statistics on these programs are provided on the top of the next page.

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2011 WOLF DAMAGE CONTROL DATA – USDA

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Total complaints received | 211 |
| Total complaints verified | 109 |
| Total livestock complaints verified | 88 |
| Percentage of total complaints verified | 51.7 |
| # of farms with verified complaints | 96 |
| # of domestic dog verified complaints | 9 |
| | |
| Complaints trapped | 97 |
| Wolves captured | 215 |
| Wolves killed | 203 |

MDA ANNUAL WOLF DAMAGE PAYMENT CLAIMS

| Fiscal Year | Number of Claims | Total of Claims |
|-------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 2006 | 71 | \$72,895 |
| 2007 | 82 | \$81,683 |
| 2008 | 82 | \$95,526 |
| 2009 | 87 | \$88,366 |
| 2010 | 104 | \$106,615 |
| 2011 | 128 | \$102,230 |
| 2012--Nov11 | 61 | \$81,300 |

Wolf Hunting and Trapping Season Development

1. DNR will work with the Legislature to seek additional authorization related to wolf season management, including creating a wolf license and providing clear authority to limit numbers of hunters and quotas.
2. Likely several wolf harvest management units would be established. Given the high densities of hunters in Minnesota compared to western states and the absence of Minnesota data on a managed wolf season, initial seasons will need to be conservative to gather data on wolf populations, harvest, and success rates to inform future management.
3. The DNR will be proposing a separate season for wolves that takes into account when pelts are prime and provides opportunity for hunters and trappers to specifically target wolves while minimizing conflicts with other seasons. Likely components of a season include:
 - a. Timing similar to bobcat hunting and trapping season in Minnesota (late November – early January).
 - b. Identify harvest quotas based on management units. Provide various levels of harvest pressure for conservative, moderate, or liberal harvest in areas depending on management objectives and potential for conflicts with livestock depredation.
 - c. Limit hunters and trappers through lottery.
4. Additional considerations for implementing wolf season
 - a. Manage for a sustainable wolf population consistent with the Minnesota wolf management plan. Failure to carefully manage harvest in accordance with plan objectives could lead to relisting under ESA.
 - b. Assess and refine wolf survey methods and monitoring techniques to develop a long term wolf harvest model to track wolf harvest impacts and annual population estimates.
 - c. Develop tagging, registration and reporting requirements, and carcass collection for biological data collection.
 - d. Wolf licensing development, including application, lottery, registration, and potential to control harvest through direct quota.

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Minnesota Wolf Management Zones

