

Living with wolves and resolving conflict

Updated plan seeks to find solutions

Many people live, work and recreate in wolf country in Minnesota. A person's reaction to a wolf encounter may vary depending on their experience and understanding of wolf behavior. To one person, seeing a wolf may be thrilling, while for another it could be very concerning.

Wolves can have real impacts on livestock producers and pet owners. It's important that methods are in place to prevent and avoid these interactions and to reduce conflicts when they occur.

Years ago, wolf-human interactions were very rare in Minnesota. It is not that way anymore.

That's because the state's wolf range, once confined to the far north, now covers 30,000 square miles, including forested areas near major population centers such as Brainerd, Bemidji, Detroit Lakes, Duluth and Grand Rapids.

As wolves expanded south there has been, not surprisingly, a corresponding increase in conflict.



The DNR is committed to a responsible, conservative and science-based management strategy that ensures the long-term survival of wolves and recognizes their legacy.

Things to know about living with wolves include:

- Wolves in Minnesota can be killed only in defense of human life. No fatal wolf attacks have ever been reported in Minnesota.
- Only agents of the government are authorized to take wolves if pets or livestock are threatened, attacked or killed.
- Wolf depredation on livestock does not have a statewide impact but it can have a local impact and certainly an impact for individual producers.
- In 2019, Minnesota wolves killed 74 calves, 11 cows, two sheep and two dogs.
- In the rare event you encounter an aggressive wolf, don't run. Face it and stare at it. If it approaches, aggressively step toward it while yelling and clapping. If attacked, fight.

Planning for the future

There are mechanisms in place to try to address the conflicts that domestic animal owners have with wolves. When the state adopted the 2001 Wolf Management Plan, it adopted many of the same practices that address wolf-livestock conflicts under the federal Endangered Species Act, and allows more flexibility for individuals to take wolves that are causing damage. As part of the DNR's commitment to a responsible, conservative and science-based management strategy, the updated wolf plan will continue to ensure the long-term survival of wolves and address wolf-human conflicts.

Under state law, Minnesota created two state wolf management zones (not in effect when wolves managed by the federal government under Endangered Species Act). They differed only in depredation policies. In Zone A, which constituted about 85 percent of the wolf range, wolves could be taken by private citizens, under certain conditions, if they posed an immediate threat (as defined in state statutes) to livestock or domestic pets under owner supervision.

Furthermore, when losses of livestock or pets had been verified as wolf depredations, the state would provide a government or state-certified private trapper to remove wolves in a defined area. Those same rules applied in Zone B, but landowners, under certain

conditions, were given added flexibility (immediate threat does not apply) to take wolves to protect livestock, and they could individually hire a state-certified trapper to protect livestock in a defined area.

Minnesota Wolf Management Zones



Because management to address damage concerns occurs regardless of Endangered Species Status, the DNR should evaluate these practices and see how they best address the needs of Minnesota's residents in resolving, or reducing conflicts, while assessing methods that may prevent or mitigate conflicts.

Additional information

- Wolf removal is intended to prevent future damage, and currently is limited to within one-half mile of the depredation site.
- Federal trappers only remove wolves following verified damage.
- In 2019, federal trappers removed 188 wolves.
- Removal is quite effective. A high percentage of livestock producers have no depredations following wolf removal (a recent average is 2.2 wolves per site).
- Non-lethal options exist to prevent livestock damage. These include more human presence, enhanced fencing and scare tactics, improved carcass disposal and even the use of guard animals.
- From 2014 to 2018, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture made annual depredation payments of \$158,000 to livestock producers.