

# Wolf hunting and trapping background, attitudes

As the Department of Natural Resources updates the existing Minnesota wolf management plan, the topic of hunting and trapping will be discussed by the 20-member wolf advisory committee and a related technical committee comprised of government, tribal and university wolf experts. Currently, it is illegal for people to hunt and trap wolves in Minnesota. Minnesotans have diverse attitudes about the topic.

## Background

Until the early 1970s wolves were unprotected in Minnesota. Historically, trappers pursued wolves for their valuable fur during winter or where they caused problems with livestock. Even though an average of about 200 wolves were taken annually in the 1960s, the population was increasing, starting with about 500 wolves and reaching about 1,000 by the early 1970s.

Prior to 2012, there had never been a regulated wolf hunting and trapping season. However, from 2012 through 2014—years when wolves were legally managed by the State of Minnesota rather than the federal government—state law allowed hunting and trapping under highly regulated conditions to ensure they would not have a negative impact on the population. There is a significant amount of research to indicate wolf populations are resilient even with a moderate level of hunting and trapping.



Minnesota held wolf hunting and trapping seasons from 2012 through 2014 under highly regulated conditions.

In order to assure that Minnesota did not kill more wolves than the population could sustain there were a number of mechanisms in place to limit wolf season mortality.

### Things to know about wolf hunting and trapping in Minnesota:

- In 2011, the Minnesota Legislature authorized the DNR to implement a wolf season following the removal of wolves from the federal Endangered Species Act and classified wolves as small game in state statute.
- Wolf season harvest was restricted by using a lottery to limit the number of licenses available. The season was closed when total harvests reached a limit set prior to the start of the season.
- The wolf season harvest was divided into three segments: an early hunting season that coincided with the firearms deer season, a late hunting season and a concurrent late trapping season.
- The total harvest of wolves was 413 in 2012, 238 in 2013 and 272 in 2014. About five percent of hunters successfully harvested a wolf.
- Wolf trappers were more successful than wolf hunters, having success rates of 29 percent in 2012, 20 percent in 2013 and 17 percent in 2014.

## Attitudes toward hunting and trapping

Wolf hunting and trapping can be an emotionally charged topic. While there is not a compelling management need to hunt or trap wolves in Minnesota, the state has a long history of supporting hunting and trapping opportunities. Citizens can hunt and trap dozens of species of wildlife. Support for hunting and fishing has been so strong in Minnesota that in 1998, 77 percent of Minnesota voters supported a constitutional amendment that affirmed that “hunting and fishing and the taking of game are a valued part of the heritage of Minnesota and shall be preserved for the people.”

Recently, the DNR contracted with the U.S. Geological Survey through the Minnesota Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at the University of Minnesota to survey

nearly 10,000 Minnesota residents to gather information about their values, beliefs and attitudes with respect to wolves and wolf management.

### Among survey findings were:

- A minority of Minnesota’s residents support establishing a wolf hunting season (41 percent); fewer supported a trapping season (30 percent).
- The majority of livestock producers (88 percent and 84 percent) and deer hunters (88 percent and 80 percent) support establishing wolf hunting and wolf trapping seasons.
- Even though most deer hunters support a wolf season, the majority (67 percent) agreed that “It is important to maintain a wolf population in Minnesota.”



## Residents’ attitudes toward hunting

Residents answered the following question: Some Minnesotans want the opportunity to hunt and trap wolves while others feel hunting and trapping is wrong. If wolves were removed from the endangered species list and management authority moves to Minnesota, how much do you support or oppose establishing a regulated hunting season?

