

WOLVES: THE WISCONSIN RURAL PERSPECTIVE
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WOLVES: THE WISCONSIN RURAL PERSPECTIVE

SUMMARY

Wolves: The Wisconsin Rural Perspective, is the first survey measuring public opinions about wolves in exclusively rural areas of the state. These Towns are: Hansen, Wood Co., Russell, Lincoln Co., Maple, Douglas Co., and Alvin, Forest Co. A control Town, Richwood, Richland Co., was chosen to determine differences and similarities in opinions.

The survey is brief – two questions – with an additional item measuring respondents' exposure to wolves and knowledge of conflicts.

In the four Towns surveyed with wolf presence, 69.6% of respondents wanted less wolves in Wisconsin. In the control Town of Richwood, Richland Co., 46.7% of respondents chose "less wolves" in Wisconsin.

When asked their opinions about a potential wolf goal in Wisconsin, the most frequently selected option in the 4 wolf occupied towns was "350", "350 or less", or "less than 350" (55). The second most popular wolf goal in those 4 towns was "zero". Forty-five respondents chose this goal.

I began this project wondering about the differences I might discover in towns with varying amounts of time, different habitats, and intensity of conflict between wolves and humans. As it turned out, I am more impressed with the similarities and rather unified opinions about wolf management.

"Each time the proposed delisting has been blocked in court by protectionist groups arguing legal technicalities. This continued full protection for flourishing wolf populations creates a real problem, not only for farmers and ranchers, who are generally hostile to wolves, but also for the wolves themselves. Because when wolves proliferate where they conflict with people, they will be killed – legally or notWeenvisioned that once recovery had been met, the wolf would be delisted and where necessary, their numbers Controlled, like those of bears, deer, geese, and other wildlife." Wolf Island: Discovering the Secrets of a Mythic Animal L. David Mech, with Greg Breining. U. of MN Press, 2020.

BACKGROUND

Early wolf recovery in WI paid no attention to the social acceptability of wolves. Management decisions were focused on recovery of wolves, and it was believed by state managers that wolves would only live in large blocks of public land with little to no human presence. The concept of social acceptability as it relates to wolf numbers was not on the radar.

Studies of public attitudes towards wolves were small-scaled questionnaire-based studies (Nelson & Franson, 1988; Wilson, 1999, Schanning 2009). The results of these surveys showed support for wolf expansion. Some samples may have been biased. Schanning chose a representative sample, but had a very low return rate of less than 20% (source, unpublished preliminary draft DNR wolf management plan 4/10).

In 2001, Adrian Treves and others began a “Longitudinal Analysis of Attitudes Toward Wolves”. Different samples were used for each stage, 2001, 2004, 2009, but some continuity in sampled respondents allowed for Treves to follow people’s attitudes towards wolves over time. “Over time, 656 respondents increased agreement with statements reflecting fear of wolves, the belief that wolves compete with hunters for deer...and inclinations to poach a wolf.” These studies took place between 2001 – 2009, when Wisconsin’s minimum wolf count rose from 257 to 655. “Over time residents living in the range of Wisconsin’s gray wolf became less tolerant of wolves.” (Source, Conservation Biology, 2013) (Wisconsin Wolf Policy Survey: Changing Attitudes 2001 – 2009, Adrian Treves, Lisa Naughton, Tory Shelley)

A Wisconsin DNR study of public opinion released in 2014, in preparation for the second attempt to revise the 1999/2007 approved wolf plan, sampled 8750 addresses in Wisconsin with oversampling in wolf range. The study assumed that people with addresses in wolf areas would have had a greater exposure to wolves. “...human interactions should be more frequent in places where wolves occupy more space (with more wolves) and/or where there are more human settlements...To the extent that these assumptions are true, we expected to see some differences in the social carrying capacity of wolves across its Wisconsin range.” (Public Attitudes Towards Wolves and Wolf Management in Wisconsin August, 2014, WI DNR)

For the sample areas identified as “wolf range” in Wisconsin’s study, respondents self-identified as “rural” or “urban”. The rural/urban split was one method used to analyze data. Opinions were split, with 40% of rural wolf country respondents rating their feelings towards wolves as unfavorable or very unfavorable, 22% neutral, and 38% favorable or very favorable. When it came to questions about how many wolves should reside in the state, 47% of rural wolf range residents wanted fewer or none, 24% wanted the same number, 16% wanted more or many more. The wolf minimum count was 809 while this survey was done.

Another method of wolf range data analysis consisted of large groupings of counties into one cluster. For example, one cluster was Bayfield, Ashland, Sawyer, Iron and Price Counties. Cluster data did not separate urban and rural, so may not reflect the most important population, rural residents, who interact more freely with wolves. In the above cluster of counties, 46% of respondents (rural and urban) indicated they wanted to see the wolf population decreased or eliminated in their county. 32% were in favor of the same number of wolves, and 11% wanted an increase in their county.

In another cluster – Burnett, Washburn, Rusk, and Taylor Counties – 50% of respondents wanted a decrease or elimination of wolves, while 31% wanted the same number (809 at the time) and 9% wanted an increase in wolf numbers.

This most recent study done by DNR staff noted the department and wolf advisory committee were particularly interested in "...the opinions of people living among wolves, especially in the rural areas, because those residents are most likely to encounter wolves and be impacted by them. People who are the most impacted by wolves are also the ones whose acceptance and cooperation are most needed to ensure continued success with management efforts." Sample selection and the method of reporting findings may not have captured the rural voice.

In late 2020, preparing for delisting, Minnesota completed research on public attitudes for their new wolf management plan. "Minnesotans' Attitudes Toward Wolves and Wolf Management" (Summary Report) U. of MN, MN DNR, MN Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, Dept. of Fisheries, Wildlife and Conservation Biology, Schroeder, S.A, Landon, A.C., Cornicelli, L., McInenly, L. & Stark, D. 2020) targeted three groups in MN. These were: the general population 18+, sample 5250; Minnesota livestock farmers in counties within wolf range, sample 2500; and MN deer hunters 18+, sample 2000. These respondents were mailed surveys based on addresses with four follow up reminders.

Residents responded at 33%, deer hunters at 47%, and livestock farmers at 53%.

Livestock producers in wolf range were negative towards wolves at a rate of 62.2%. Their preference for a wolf population of "0", fewer or many fewer was 72.2%. Their preference for wolf range was none, much less, or less at a rate of 65.6%.

Deer hunters, a statewide sample, were negative about wolves at a rate of 51.5%. Their desire to see wolf numbers reduced to fewer, many fewer, or zero was 59.8% of respondents. They wanted wolf range of none, less, or much less at 48.3%.

The general MN population had a different outlook. Only 19.6% of residents had a negative view of wolves. Only 14% wanted a wolf population of zero, less, or many less. As for wolf range reductions, 11.1% wanted no range, less or much less.

This survey mirrors public opinion surveys in many areas of the world. Where people have little experience or exposure to wolves, attitudes are more positive. In cases where people have direct exposure to wolves and live near them, attitudes are much less positive.

In "On Wisconsin", a publication of the University of Wisconsin Alumni Association, Fall, 2009, Volume 110, Number 3, an article called "Wolves at the Door" by John Allen appeared. The article examined the opinions of UW faculty wondering how many wolves the state should have. "If you look at the habitat wolves currently occupy, it's not all good quality", according to David Mladenoff, Ph.D., the professor who first did population modeling of the landscapes in Wisconsin that could support wolf recovery. The article continues "And in the poorer-quality areas, the wolf population 'probably isn't sustainable'. The single most important habitat attribute which promotes successful wolf territory is lack of roads (and its companion, lack of people)." The article goes on to say both Mladenoff and Van Deelen, another UW professor

who has worked on wolf population modeling, believed in 2009 that the days of rapid multiplication may be coming to an end. In 2009, Van Deelen figured that 1300 wolves between MI and WI would be the maximum.

All these numbers and the vague concept of biological carrying capacity do the wolves no favors. The real importance of social carrying capacity is crucial to understanding wolf management. And keep in mind, no sensible person would advocate for wolves to be held at biological or social carrying capacity, because that implies we are willing to risk the wolves themselves and peoples' good-will towards wolves, by standing at the precipice.

METHODOLOGY

A study of true rural attitudes towards wolves was needed. This has never been done in Wisconsin.

Five rural Wisconsin Towns were chosen for this study. These Towns were not chosen randomly, but rather for their attributes. Attributes considered were the truly rural nature of each Town, length of time wolves had occupied the Town, and degree of conflicts experienced. Variation between towns was intentional to capture possible differences. The most important variable impacting the success of wolves is human population density. Previous research proves the more remote regions without human presence create optimal locations for wolves.

According to L. David Mech, in a keynote presentation at the October, 2018 International Wolf Center International Wolf Symposium 2018, in areas without human presence, wolves are the primary cause of wolf mortality. In human dominated landscapes, humans are the primary cause of most wolf deaths. The Towns chosen have varying degrees of human density, but all are without any significant settlements. The human density per square mile of territory is included in each Town description.

These five Towns chosen for this survey are: Town of Hansen, Wood Co., Town of Maple, Douglas Co., Town of Russell, Lincoln Co., Town of Richwood, Richland Co., and Town of Alvin, Forest Co. All Towns were chosen because they lacked cities or villages of any major size. This was needed to avoid areas where people have had little opportunity to interact with wolves.

The Town of Hansen in Wood. Co. (human population density 19.5/sq. mi.) has a mixed landscape of small farms and forested areas. Hansen straddles two wolf management zones, zone 5 which is considered by the department to be optimal wolf habitat, and zone 6, which is unsuitable wolf habitat. Some large public land is nearby, but Hansen is mostly private owners of small, sometimes agricultural, parcels. Wolves have occupied this area for about 10 years and have been a major source of conflicts recently, mainly with livestock, but also pets.

The Town of Maple in Douglas Co. (20.2/sq. mi. human density) has the longest history with wolves, well over 25 years. The landscape is mixed farming and rural residences, and the Brule River State Forest. Chronic problems and conflicts with wolves have been the experience of

this Town. Maple is located in Wolf Harvest Zone #1, considered primary wolf habitat by the WI DNR.

The Town of Russell in Lincoln Co. (18.7/sq. mi. human density) is a mixed landscape of forested areas and farms. Most of Russell is smaller private lands, with some agriculture present and a few public access areas of county forest and state fishing areas. Wolves have occupied this area for over 20 years, but have increased their presence for the past 10 years. Very few documented conflict incidents have occurred. Russell is located in Wolf Harvest Zone #4, considered to be sub-optimal or marginal wolf range.

The Town of Richwood in Richland Co. (14.5/sq. mi. human density) is located in the SW portion of the state in the driftless area. While very few wolves have been present in this area, and few problems have been verified, a control Town was needed to represent an area where wolves probably could live, but have not established permanent residence as of yet (as determined by DNR wolf tracking methods). Most of Richwood is private ownership. Richwood is located entirely in wolf harvest zone 6, which is considered unsuitable wolf habitat. But some advocate for allowing the establishment of wolves in areas such as this with a very low human density.

The Town of Alvin in Forest Co. (1.3/sq. mi. human density) was originally not part of the sample. But I had left over materials and wanted another wolf harvest zone represented. Alvin is quite different than the other sample towns because it is almost entirely lacking agriculture, and contains mostly USFS National Forest lands. Being located in Wolf Harvest Zone #2, it represents what the DNR classifies as optimal wolf habitat.

The survey sample was obtained from voter registration lists provided by county or town clerks. Using voter lists avoided return as undeliverable surveys common in address-based mailed surveys. Undeliverables were very low.

Sampling within each town was completely random, with every-other name selected and mailed the survey (see appendix to view the survey). The recipient also received a self-addressed, stamped envelope to return the survey. The mailing was the only contact with each respondent, except for a few that called to get more information and one who sent the survey back from the control Town stating that it was inappropriate as no wolves live there. I sent a personal communication back, since the person included their name and address explaining the concept of having a control town.

The survey was designed to be very simple, short, and not a burden for the recipient. This was primarily because many respondents will throw away a long survey. Also, context laden terms and questions used in previous surveys probably caused certain types of respondents to become frustrated or interpret the questions as invasive or leading the respondent. For this reason, the survey contained some brief, factual information followed by simple choices for the respondent to circle or write numbers. A "no opinion" option was also included. The respondent was given the opportunity to write notes, which are included as an appendix.

The total sample is approximately 9% of the recent survey sample for the entire state of MN. The sample used is 10% of the last mailed WI public opinion survey in 2013.

RESULTS - Response rates

The sample:

Town of Hansen:	247 minus 1 undeliverable = 246
Town of Russell:	208 minus 7 undeliverable = 201
Town of Maple:	241 minus 4 undeliverable = 237
Town of Richwood:	159 zero undeliverable = 159
Town of Alvin:	<u>65 minus 3 undeliverable = 62</u>
TOTAL SAMPLE	905

The sample consisted of every other name on the registered voter list obtained from the county clerk or the town clerk. The response rates for the five towns were quite good, considering this was a one-time contact from an unknown source. The five towns responded as follows:

Town of Hansen, Wood Co.: total sample 247 minus one undeliverable = 246; response from 119 = 48.4% responded.

Town of Russell, Lincoln Co.: total sample 208 minus 7 undeliverable = 201; response from 79 = 39.3% responded.

Town of Maple, Douglas Co.: total sample 241 minus 4 undeliverable = 237; response from 99 = 41.8% responded.

Town of Richwood, Richland Co.: total sample 159; response from 60 = 37.7% responded.

Town of Alvin, Forest Co.; total sample 65 minus 3 undeliverable = 62; response from 22 = 35.5% responded.

RESULTS – Less, Same, More, No Opinion

The survey questions asked whether the respondent wanted less wolves in Wisconsin, the same number of wolves in Wisconsin, more wolves, or had no opinion. (see full survey of 1 page)

Town of Hansen: Less Wolves 76.4%; Same Wolves 10.9%; More Wolves 2.5%; No Opinion 6.7%. There were also 4 surveys where results were contradictory. These included: 1) the selection of “same” but a quota suggested at 400, which would be less than current. 2) two surveys where the respondent selected “more wolves” but indicated a preferred goal of “0”, and 3) one survey selected “more” wolves but indicated a goal of 200. Inconclusive results totaled 3.4% of the total.

Town of Russell: Less Wolves 63.3%; Same Wolves 15.2%; More Wolves 5.1%; No Opinion 11.4%. Inconclusive 5.1%. For these inconclusive surveys, two surveys selected “More Wolves” but wrote a recommended goal of “0”, one survey selected “More Wolves”, but recommended a goal of 350, and one survey selected “More Wolves”, but recommended a goal of 20.

Town of Maple: Less Wolves 65.7%; Same Wolves 11.1%; More Wolves 7.0%; No Opinion 12.2%, inconclusive 4.0%. Three inconclusive surveys selected “More Wolves” but recommended goals of 300 – 500, 100, or 350+. The fourth circled “no opinion” but wrote statements indicating fear and worries about conflicts.

Town of Richwood: Less Wolves 46.7%; Same Wolves 13.3%; More Wolves 10.0%; No Opinion 25.0%; inconclusive 5.0%. One survey questioned why Richwood was in the sample. I returned a response to this individual since he gave me his contact information, explaining that Richwood was the “control” Town because it was by some people’s judgement suitable wolf habitat, but had experienced little presence of wolves. Another inconclusive circled both “less” and “same”. A third selected “more wolves” but wrote a management goal of 500.

Town of Alvin: Less Wolves: 72.7%; Same Wolves 9.1%; More Wolves 13.6%; No Opinion 4.5%. All surveys were valid.

TOWN	LESS	SAME	MORE	NO OPINION	?
HANSEN	76.4%	10.9%	2.5%	6.7%	3.4%
RUSSELL	63.3%	15.2%	5.1%	11.4%	5.1%
MAPLE	65.7%	11.1%	7.0%	12.2%	4.0%
RICHWOOD	46.7%	13.3%	10.0%	25.0%	5.0%
ALVIN	72.7%	9.1%	13.6%	4.5%	0

RESULTS - PREFERENCE FOR STATEWIDE WOLF GOAL

Respondents were able to note their ideas about the state wolf goal. The results are as follows:

Hansen - Less wolves (91)

Goal of zero – 21

Goal of 350 – 17

No opinion – 14

300 – 5

400 – 4

Less than or equal to 350 – 4

200 – 4

100 – 3

500 - 3

Less than now - 2

275, 125 -150, 200 or less, 250, 50 – 150, less than 100, 0 – 500, 50, 150, 0 – 100, 0 – 200, 20, 450 – 650, 600 – Each received one vote (total 14).

Hansen same # wolves (13)

No goal – 9

1000 – 3

500 – 1000 – 1

Hansen more wolves (3)

None had any opinion on a goal

Hansen no opinion (8)

None had any opinion on a goal

Russell – Less Wolves (50)

Goal of Zero – 12

Goal of 350 – 11

No opinion – 11

Less – 2

500 – 2

100 – 2

0 – 350, 600, one, minimum, 350 – 500, 200, 250, 550, 850, 999 – each received one vote (10)

Russell – same wolves (12)

No opinion - 6

1200 - 2

1000 – 2

1034 – 1

400 – 1

Russell – more wolves (4)

No opinion – 3

2000+ - 1

Russell – no opinion (9)

No opinion – 8

350 – 1

Maple – Less Wolves (65)

350 – 16

Zero – 8

200 – 4

500 – 3

100 – 2

300 – 500 – 2

300 - 2

<350, 250 – 350, 500 – 700, 400, 700, <100, 1000, 450, 150, 800, small - all received one vote (11)

No opinion – 17 (chose “less” or no entry)

Maple – same wolves (12)

1200 – 2

800 – 1000, 1000, 1195 – 1 each

No opinion – 6

Maple more wolves (7)

1500 – 2

1200+ - 2

1400 – 1600 - 1

No opinion – 2

Maple no opinion (12)

Richwood – Less Wolves (28)

Zero – 8

350 – 6

500 – 3

144, 250, 0 – 50, 200, 350 or less, 700 – 900, 100 all received one vote (7)

No opinion - 4

Richwood - same wolves (8)

1034 – 2

1200 - 1

900 – 1

No opinion - 4

Richwood – more wolves (6)

1200 – 1

1500 – 1

No opinion - 4

Richwood - No opinion (15)

Alvin – less wolves (16)

300 – 350 – 5

Zero – 4

350 or less, 250 – 350, 350, 100 or less, 500+ - each received one vote (5)

No opinion - 2

Alvin – same wolves (2)
1200 – 1
No opinion - 1

Alvin more wolves (3)
1500 – 1
1000 – 1
No opinion - 1

No opinion (1)

RESULTS - EXPERIENCE WITH WOLVES AND KNOWLEDGE OF CONFLICTS

Within groups that chose “less”, “same”, “more” and “no opinion”, varying degrees of knowledge and experience existed. There may be some duplication in responses as a person could have checked a level of experience and a level of knowledge of conflicts on the same survey. Some examples of how experience related to choices are listed below.

Town of Richwood - of the eight people who selected “zero” for a wolf goal, 7 had no direct experience with wolves. Fourteen of the people who wanted “less” wolves also had no experience with wolves. Richwood by far had the most surveys indicating no experience with wolves (34). It also had by far the most people with “no opinion” (24.5%) over twice the other towns. Of the 15 who had no opinion, 12 had no experience with wolves and none indicated they knew of any conflict situations in their area.

There is a large difference in respondents indicating they have no opinion between the 4 towns with wolf presence and the town with little wolf presence (Richwood). One quarter of Richwood folks had no opinion, while the other towns had largely made up their minds, with Hansen at 6.7% no opinion, Alvin 4.5% no opinion, Russell 11.3% no opinion, and Maple 12.2% no opinion. Once people’s attitudes are formed, it is difficult to change minds.

In Maple, 7 of 12 selecting “no opinion” had no experience with wolves and were unaware of any conflicts. Of Maple residents who wanted “less wolves”, 50 had some or a lot of experience with wolves and only 3 had no experience.

Of the Russell residents who wanted “less wolves” only 4 had no experience with wolves while 40 had some experience or a lot of experience, and 25 were aware of conflicts. This is an area where few documented conflicts have occurred.

Town of Hansen – of the 91 respondents who wanted less wolves, only 2 had no experience with wolves. Forty-two had experienced multiple contacts with wolves, wolf tracks, howling, or a combination of these. Seventy indicated they were aware of conflict situations that had happened to them, their family, or other residents in their town.

In Alvin, all respondents had some experience with wolves or awareness of problems except two who chose “less wolves” for their preference.

In general, the choice of more wolves or no opinion was associated with no experience with wolves. In Hansen 2 of 3 wanting more wolves had no experience with wolves, and ½ (4 of 8) with no opinion had no experience with wolves. Russell was similar with ½ the “more wolves” group having no experience and 4 of 9 “no opinion” having no experience. Of these two choices, only one was aware of conflicts in their Town.

DISCUSSION

The general results of these five rural towns indicate a high level of desire to see the wolf numbers reduced. The most popular goal number in Russell, Richwood, and Hansen was zero. In Maple and Alvin, the most popular goal was 350, the current goal. 350 rated highly in every Town, coming in second in Hansen, Russell, Richwood. Zero for a goal rated second in Maple and Alvin. These numbers indicate a high level of support by rural people for wolf population controls, even in areas where wolves have not been active, and even in areas the department considers to be prime wolf habitat.

As in many other surveys, this rural opinion survey again documents that experience with wolves and knowledge of conflicts decreases acceptance of Wisconsin’s wolf management.

What happens when the general population in wolf areas does not support the current program? That question is not within the scope of the current survey. However, as previously noted, experts throughout the years and world-wide recognize that for a wildlife management program to be successful, the people most directly impacted must be in support of the program. In spite of Wisconsin boasting of its wolf management success, these results do not support that concept as legitimate. More wolves does not = a better wolf management program. Quality of life counts more.

What do the wolves want out of life? I posed this question to a high level DNR manager. It was obvious that he never had considered this question. Do the wolves want to inhabit marginal or unsuitable territories? Do they want to be forced, by uncontrolled numbers, to occupy substandard territory and as a price, suffer the human-caused mortality that all experts agree accompanies occupation of human-dominated landscapes? These are questions I hope this research helps explain.

A former, well-liked wildlife manager in my area who retired was quoted in the newspaper giving this advice: “If the people don’t like what you are doing, it won’t work.” The people directly interfacing with wolves are the most important in implementing wolf management. Just ask the wolves.

THIS SURVEY IS BEING DONE TO ASSESS RURAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS WOLF MANAGEMENT IN WISCONSIN. *All numbers are minimum at the lowest point in the wolf population.*

1. THE CURRENT MINIMUM NUMBER OF WOLVES IN WISCONSIN, DETERMINED BY THE WI DNR COUNT WINTER 2019 – 2020, WAS 1034. USING A NEW STATISTICAL POPULATION MODEL, THE WI DNR ESTMATES THE MOST PROBABLE NUMBER OF WISCONSIN WOLVES AT THE LOWEST POINT IN THE POPULATION IS AS 1195 (winter 2019 – 2020). Please select your preferred wolf management option:

LESS WOLVES SAME NUMBER OF WOLVES MORE WOLVES NO OPINION

2. THE WI DNR WOLF MANAGEMENT PLAN, CREATED IN 1999 AND REVISED IN 2007, APPROVED A WOLF MANAGEMENT GOAL OF 350 WOLVES. THIS NUMBER WAS SURPASSED IN WISCONSIN IN 2004. Please share your preferred wolf management goal or select no opinion:

PREFERRED MANAGEMENT GOAL OR RANGE OF NUMBERS: _____ NO OPINION _____

TO UNDERSTAND YOUR EXPOSURE TO WOLVES, PLEASE SELECT ANY OF THE FOLLOWING TO DESCRIBE YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH WOLVES:

_____ I HAVE NO EXPERIENCE WITH WOLVES

_____ I HAVE SEEN A WOLF, TRACKS, OR HEARD THEM HOWLING

_____ I HAVE SEEN MANY WOLVES, TRACKS, HEARD HOWLING

_____ I AM AWARE OF INCIDENTS WITH WOLVES THAT HAVE HAPPENED TO ME, MY FAMILY, OR RESIDENTS IN MY TOWNSHIP.

THANKS FOR RETURNING THE SURVEY IN THE ENCLOSED SELF-ADDRESSED STAMPED ENVELOPE. YOUR RESONSES WILL BE ANONYMOUS AND WILL BE PROVIDED IN COMBINATION WITH THE RESPONSES FROM YOUR TOWNSHIP. IF YOU DON'T CARE TO PARTICIPATE, I WOULD APPRECIATE A RETURN.

THE RESULTS FROM THIS SURVEY WILL BE SHARED WITH WI DNR STAFF, POLICTY MAKERS, THE NATURAL RESOURCES BOARD, AND ACADEMICS AND RESEARCHERS IN THE FIELD OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT.

FOUR RURAL TOWNSHIPS WERE CHOSEN FOR THIS SURVEY TO REFLECT THE OPINIONS OF THOSE PEOPLE MOST EXPOSED TO WOLVES OR POTENTIALLY EXPOSED TO WOLVES. ANOTHER PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY WILL BE DONE BY THE WI DNR THIS SPRING ON-LINE, AND A PREVIOUS SURVEY OF PUBLIC OPINION DONE IN 2013 IS AVAILABLE ON THE DNR WEB SITE.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT ME AT HOME, LAURIE GROSKOPF, TOMAHAWK, WI 715-453-6301

ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS OR EXPERIENCE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE – FEEL FREE TO USE THE BACK OF THE SURVEY. 3/2021

TOWN OF HANSEN SURVEY COMMENTS:

I have livestock and they harass them all the time. I haven't had any killed YET by wolves but I have many friends that have. I think there should be a few up north and that's it.

Keep up the fight.

I just wanted to say that the DNR counts are way off in my opinion. There is no way that hunters could kill 20% of the population in less than three days. I have had multiple wolves on my land in the last year and I have seen pictures of 10 wolves on one picture from a friend's trail cam overlooking a food plot. I am not making that up, there were 10. So anyone who believes that there isn't a problem doesn't spend any time in the woods. (name and address withheld)

As a teenage girl who hunts, there are already a lot of challenges one has to endure. I did not think there would be a problem when I wanted to hunt the rut during bow season. 10 minutes into the hunt, I started to hear howling. Before I realized that it wasn't just my neighbor's hunting dogs, it was probably 150 yards away. I ran out to the truck, bow in hand, as fast as I possibly could go. 5 minutes after I arrived at the truck, a wolf popped out of the woods less than 100 feet away from me. This was my first experience with seeing a wolf in those woods. They had been in there for years. Every year, without fail, we would see them on our trail cameras. Some of these experiences have terrified me. The more we manage the wolf number, the less scared others may be to go back into the woods to pursue hunting, a family tradition in Wisconsin for many generations. While I understand many think we have overkilled wolves, I feel that if the limit was reached in two days of hunting, estimates may be a little bit off. I am very educated on this matter as I go to a very good natural resource school.

I had a wolf at the end of my driveway when garbage containers was put out. Scary. Also, one on the other side of my garage. I used to walk everyday, but don't consider it safe anymore.

Our fathers got rid of the wolves. As they serve no purpose, also are you sending money to the state to help pay for all the damage wolves do?

I can't think of one reason why I have to fear for my dogs' lives every time I put them out at night.

Our forefathers had a bounty on them for a reason. I feel there should be less than 100 in the state.

In the spring of 2019, we had a calf with substantial wounds on the side of his neck and hind quarters (gaping wounds). USDA came out and confirmed it was a wolf attack. On separate

occasions, we had a neighbor who lost several sheep in wolf attacks and another neighbor also had a calf attacked by a wolf.

As a livestock producer in heavy wolf country it is only a matter of when, not if, they find my cattle. The neighbors lost all their sheep to wolves and the DNR did nothing. It's time the DNR allows for ag damage tags to us producers that lose our livelihood to a government dog!!

Killed my dog in my yard.

The DNR is not being honest about the number of wolves in the state. I hunt coyotes, bobcat, and coon in a four township area in central Wisconsin and the number of wolves here is unbelievable and they try to say there is only around 1200 in the state. I believe 2400 is closer to the truth. I don't trust the DNR at all!

I have read or been informed that one wolf will kill, on average, 30 deer per year. I do not know how accurate this number is, but if it is accurate, that would be approximately 36,000 deer per year killed by wolves per year or an average of 500 per county. These numbers are not even close to accurate, just wonder if there is any reason for concern. Thank you for this survey.

My next door neighbor has (had) raised prize winning sheep for decades. His flock, number over 20, were completely killed in one night by wolves. There was no compensation. The children were devastated. Thank God they were not injured.

Our dog has been attacked twice!!

We can no longer walk our Woodland trails safely. Must carry a firearm! Have a horse with high voltage fencing around him. Still see wolves up close around the buildings! Have lights! We keep a shot gun with 00 buck loaded and ready at all times! Wolves are no longer afraid of humans, they cross our yard!! We live close to the family who lost their sheep to wolves. About 5 miles! We are seniors who love the outdoors and used to hunt deer, we can no longer hunt or enjoy our woodlands, or any state park trails! Children in our neighborhood can no longer play outside or ride their bike safely! We may need to fence all of our property with high voltage fence which is only way we can safely walk with our dog. We have 72 acres. Our neighbor's dog was killed by a wolf!

Numerous times I have heard 3 different wolf packs howling @ different locations.

Issue with coyotes in area. Deer population is decreasing due to coyotes killing them off. I know people say it is nature taking care of nature when coyotes kill deer. Some nights it sounds like they are killing their prey right out our back door. We don't hunt and I know they opened up for hunting coyotes and I think they, like wolves, need to be decreased in population. Need safety for our pets, etc. so we can let them roam in our yard and not fear of an attack. Thanks for allowing us to give you our opinion.

I am 74 and have always spent a lot of time outdoors. I saw exactly 1 wild wolf in Wisconsin before 1990. The estimate of 1200 wolves in Wisconsin is ridiculous. Probably twice that. Why does the DNR always over-count deer and under-count predators?

Our township has seen way too much carnage left behind because of packs of wolves. One neighbor had her dog killed. Another neighbor had a calf destroyed. Yet another neighbor had 13 sheep slaughtered. Last summer our teenage grandson and a couple of friends were camping in a tent a short distance from our barn in a little wooded area. In the morning, they told us that 2 wolves were within 20 feet of the tent. It sickened us so much. That was the last time they camped out.

They are nothing but killing machines.

Good management is a key to wolf control. Over the years, have only seen 1 wolf in my area that was about 6 years ago.

No wolves below Hwy 64. A friend lost a number of sheep to wolves. This is farm country. Landowners below Hwy 64 should be able to protect their livestock.

I have no issue with the idea of having some wolves around but the number of them allowed now is a pile of B.S. Let's keep pouring money into elk program so the damn wolves have even more protein available to them, rather than rabbits and mice. Wish I knew who is allowing this to go on and why??? I admire your time and work you've put in to this issue. Thanks for your efforts!

Have seen about 6 wolves in the last 10 – 12 years. Always single, never multiple. Always on dead run or jog. Never stalking or prowling. This area has many coyotes. Name withheld.

TOWN OF MAPLE SURVEY RESPONDENT COMMENTS

Better management needed as wolves have killed large amounts of livestock and many not being compensated!

The packs in our area are having a large impact on the deer population and domestic animals too. We lost our older dog last Feb. to wolves – she had two picture wounds on either side of her neck. She didn't recover.

Too many deer.

Several years ago I encountered a lone wolf while cross-country skiing behind my home. This year, I have seen several wolf tracks.

Share the earth!

Way too many wolves – cattle/livestock have been killed or badly injured. A pack of wolves, teaching their young to kill, will wipe out deer yarding up in heavy snow winters – not even eating them – just killing the entire group!. Happens near Lake Superior sometimes – I've seen it...or the remains of an attack. The wolf is a beautiful animal but there needs to be a huge reduction in their numbers in Wisconsin.

Less wolves = more deer for me to eat. Thank you.

A pack lived behind my parents home. Even came into the yard while they were working in the garden. They were snarled at and told by DNR to carry mace.

I just feel there is too many now.

No transplants. I have had bears and wolves and coyotes in my 40 acre woods. I feed cracked corn but only in limited amounts that can be cleaned up. I deal with wolves and bear by surprising them with banging frying pans together, and running towards them. I have seen a lot of does, but not a buck in three years. Land owners should be given a doe stamp (1) Too many does, not enough bucks. Don't make the same mistakes DNR did years back – bucks only – for too many years.

Wolves are sacred and should be respected – only killed as a last resort.

We need wolves. Not over populated, but enough to control other wildlife that can be a nuisance (problem).

They have killed many of my cattle, have made my farm a nightmare.

Why are we so far above the original goal? I have had them answer my coyote call – with a howl! Very close – too close.

No wolves.

My son and grandsons run a beef cow/calf operation in Douglas County. They have sustained losses every year since wolves were reintroduced. Last year, I believe they lost 16 animals – reimbursements do not ever actually cover their losses. My wife has returned home at night to find a wolf between her and the house. She had to wait it out in the car before she dared to walk to the house. Another incident at the farm was to find a cow having her calf with the calf half eaten with the calf still half in the mother. So, that said, the wolf population needs to be reduced. They find cows and calves easier to catch and kill than white tailed deer. They also had an impact on bear cubs.

If the people in Madison who think they know something about wolves would reimburse farmers for their losses, there wouldn't be a problem but farmers are not reimbursed

adequately. Releasing wolves in farming communities is idiocy. The people who want them clearly don't know where their food comes from.

I am aware of wolves in my area. In fact, I'm afraid to walk the dog after dark. Wolves have been in my yard. Less wolves would be my preference!

Wolves and hunters compete as top predators. They depress the numbers severely in local hunting grounds in transient fashion. They have high hunting success.

I do a 9 hour grooming run every week for a snowmobile club. I have seen wolves on the trail but not very often. I do see tracks quite regularly though. If they're bigger tracks, like the size of my fist, I take notice. Not every year, but I have run across kill sites. Messed up the whole width of the trail. No guarantee it is a wolf kill but was deer hair on the trail.

During hunting season my family that were hunting seen wolves chasing deer. There don't need to be that many wolves. My brother and I did not get deer this past year because of them. I don't want to see any in northern WI. He has had them raise havoc with his cows also.

The Farmers have had a lot of cows and calves killed by wolves, including our farm. People have lost dogs killed by wolves. DNR has tried to help some farmers but nothing they have done has worked for many farmers. There are too many wolves and they should be gotten rid of.

Thank you! For requesting the opinions and experiences of the people living in the wolf habitat areas. I own a large farm. Daytime wolf sightings are common place.

Wolves are here to stay in WI which I have no problem with. Our DNR need to talk to us hunter and trappers and get out of their fantasy world. My family and I run a bear guiding service, where we run bear baits in Bayfield and Douglas Counties. I can assure you there are at least 1000 wolves in these 2 counties alone. I personally have seen hundreds over the past 3 or 4 years. We need to have a season and manage them, not for 2 or 3 days in the spring – ridiculous.

The wolf population has far exceeded what is appropriate. These animals are destructive and dangerous to the cattle and children.

I would prefer to have the state in control of wolf management. However, I have some qualifiers that need to be addressed by the DNR. We need a science-based wolf management plan that reflects the viewpoints of all stake-holders. Wyoming does not allow dogs in the chase, both night hunting and electronic calls are not allowed, I believe. We need strict registration requirements. Personally, I would like to see tighter trapping restrictions as well. As an aside, a farmer friend of mine lost a calf to wolves this past winter. The DNR reimbursed him \$600. His comment was "I should start raising bear dogs, I'd get \$2,500 instead if I lost one." I hear a lot of anger and frustration over that one issue.

One cow was killed on my grandson's property last summer. As I was walking north on _____ Rd. where I live, about ¾ mile from the house, I had a stand off with a wolf, waving my hands and yelling at it. Didn't seem to affect him. He showed his teeth and looked angry. Finally it walked in the woods. Its almost like they are not afraid.

I typically run 10 – 15 trail cameras throughout the year all around Bayfield and Douglas Counties, and in the early 2000's a wolf picture was very rare, so rare it was very neat to capture one on camera. In the last 5 years, it has gotten to the point that I can count on nearly every camera having a picture of at least one in not several wolves on it. Over the years, I have had several encounters with them and some area packs have become so bold in showing their presence I have removed cameras and gave up hunting/scouting all together to avoid conflict. We also have to keep our dog on a lead at all times and keep a close eye on her when we let her outside after dark. I know of several people who have had dogs attacked either in the woods or in their own yards over the last few years. Several times we have been woke up by them howling and tracks show they have been within 8 feet of our home. I'm not saying I would like to see them eradicated by any means. But we need to get the population back down to a more easily manageable number or I fear they could easily spiral out of control, which I feel they are doing currently. Thank you.

I would like to see all wolves killed off. They killed deer hunting for myself and everyone else.

They need to be managed at the state and local level!

No transplanted wolves in Maple!

TOWN OF RUSSELL RESPONDENT COMMENTS

I think trappers should get a chance @ wolves before dog runners fill all permits. Also, a area that gets a quota of 5 wolves gets 5. Not 3 and shut down because other areas shoot more in their area and it fills up the quota for other areas. One note: I live in the woods with small animals that have to be locked up every night for their safety. Not fair for my animals just for them to stay alive.

Discussing the issue of wolves in this State is like discussing religion or politics. You will never get a group of people to agree. I feel sorry for the wolves because they are just being what they are. They have to eat flesh to survive and most time must kill. Who can blame them for that? They are a species with a complex family structure and it must be disturbing to the pack when their members are shot and killed. Owning cattle, however, I can certainly understand the anger that comes with losing a calf/cow to a predator. Or as a pet owner losing a dog. Maybe the answer is not killing, but sterilization to keep the wolf population from exploding. Good luck with the issue of wolf management. They are a beautiful animal and certainly should have a place in our ecosystem.

Get rid of all. We don't need one single wolf in Wisconsin.

They are nuisances that kill livestock and potentially take down a small child. The less the better.

I believe in a common sense hunt of wolves to keep the population in check. I also believe farmers and family should not fear wolves on their property.

I'm sending this because our Mennonite neighbors will not reply and this happened in the Township of Birch. Birch is not in your survey group. With 4 persons in the house located on Co. J, they watched 4 – 5 wolves kill a deer who was pregnant with twin fawns. The wolves ripped her apart and ate her but laid 2 fetus aside. They, they carried the fetuses with them when they were done cleaning up the doe. This is just too close to us. DNR needs to attempt to keep wolves in wilderness areas – tranquilize and move them to northern wilderness. Thank you for doing this.

The wolf population needs to find its own equilibrium. They are a native population and endangered because of the rampant killing of the past. We should be beyond such ignorance but, as the recent hunt shows, hatred and bloodlust is driving this slaughter.

Farmers and individuals should prove they are having wolf problems and then a permit should be issued. Not just blanket to kill. There are more problems with coyotes and loose wild dogs than wolves. Also, why doesn't the DNR control the bear population? That is a serious problem in our area.

Number of wolves need to be determined by someone with more knowledge than I have. My only concern is deer fawn predation.

We know of a pair and a lone male that regularly travel in our area.

I was born on a small farm in _____ and lived in Lincoln Co. all my life. I presently live in the village of _____, where we have lived since 1968. I do have acreage and a log cabin in the Town of _____, where my wife says, I spend most of my time. Having this property has enabled me to spend many hours in the woods, as do my 2 sons who live about 1 hour away. I first saw a wolf on my property about 20 – 25 years ago. One of my 40's borders a private landowner, and when he started to have wolf problems. They were after his horses. This was substantiated by the DNR agent who visited the farm. I believe we can live with wolves, but I most definitely believe they are way over-populated. I found a young doe's remains only 3 weeks ago on my property. It was a fresh kill scattered all over, and by the next morning, there was only some hair left.

Finding many deer carcasses in one area. Five in a 20 acre area of woods on private property.

My father was attacked by two timber wolves on our property in 2015.

I don't believe the DNR actually knows how to count wolves and that these numbers are bogus. But I do believe there should be a yearly season with similar bag counts as this last hunt.

I hate wolves. Kill on site!

We have too many coyotes.

I don't understand the sense behind adding another predator. Such as wolves to Wisconsin that our beloved DNR did around 10 years ago. Blaming it on the wolves migrating from Canada.... (expletive)...and to all the ones saying that the last wolf hunt was just "a mass killing" obviously doesn't live with the animals nor sees the destruction these animals do. So to end my conclusion, that nothing will come from anyway, I don't believe that wolves should be in Wisconsin Period. Our fellow forefathers as always put a stop to something that the DNR just comes back in and says it's for the better reason.

Family dogs killed. Judges and DNR personnel need to have required field trips to New Wood for at least a weekend, with their family's dogs, and let them run and bark. Judges with no skin in the game will never understand. DNR knows they should have set a goal of 500 wolves for the wolf season, reaching over 200 in 3 days. New World order lovers, who want 500 to 800 million people in the world, there is 7 billion now. If you get rid of people, then wolves are necessary to keep the deer in check. No hunter or guns needed.

If you like deer you don't like wolves. They are predators and have no population control other than humans and sickness.

Wisconsin's Feb, 2021 wolf hunt was an example of the worst management of wildlife possible. The state DNR issues a huge number of wolf hunting permits – 2380 – twice as many as typical – for a quota of 119 wolves. 216 wolves were killed in less than 60 hours! Nearly 85% were hunted down and killed by hunters using packs of dogs, which is an extremely cruel and unsporting practice (for hunting down bear as well, I might add). Why was the hunt held in February when the females are pregnant?? 45% of the wolves killed were female! I have never seen or heard of such a mismanaged hunt. The WI DNR should be ashamed of themselves! Now they are planning another "trophy hunt" in November? The Feb. hunt was scientifically unjustifiable and illegal under WI State Law. The wolves need to return to the Endangered Species status.

TOWN OF RICHWOOD, RICHLAND COUNTY

I have not seen any wolves here. One time several years ago, I saw one when we had a flood and it was standing across the creek on dry land. I read about the society of wolves and was impressed. I think they are very smart animals. Thank you for the work you are doing.

I can't imagine that Richwood Twp. in Richland Co. was one of the four townships selected. Other than a very occasional wanderer, there are no wolves in the SW Wisconsin.

I seen a wolf about 10 yrs. ago. I live less than 3 miles from the Wisconsin R. That wolf was coming off the bluffs and going into the river bottoms. Crossed the road in front of me. Got a good look at him. About 3 yrs. Ago I found a set of tracks on some land I rent. In Feb. of this year (2021) I saw 2 wolves as they were as tall as the deer they were chasing. I have lived and farmed in this area for 42 years and have seen 100's of coyotes and you can tell a wolf by the height of them. I live 3 miles north of the WI River, Richwood Township.

We have bobcats and coyotes that are hard on small game birds.

Wolves are beautiful creatures and should not be hunted for sport. I never seen a wolf before, but would love to see one. Someday, I personally would love to see these animals thrive so future generations can experience them.

They have every right to be here, same as you and I. We need to stress conservation and wildlife respect to WI residents.

My opinion is properly managed.

Wolves enough to keep deer population low. Too many deer in our area!

I feel that without a hunt to manage the population wolves will lose their fear of humans and aren't afraid to enter areas populated by humans. I saw a large, thin, very old looking wolf within 1/8 mile of our house 2 nights in a row about 1 ½ weeks ago. We see single wolves or pairs around here occasionally. There are several beef herds in the area and I occasionally hear of calves lost to wolves or coyotes, but its been awhile.

1200 or more only if I can hunt and trap. (this record selected same number of wolves)

Don't need wolves!

Wolves should be treated as coyotes are. Open season year round.

As for wolves in this area, we have seen and heard them for 20 some years and we don't need them in this area.

Do not want any predation in my animals. When I worry every time an animal is pastured, the joy of country life is reduced. Keep a small number of wolves in the "north country" if you want them at all. Our herd does not need to see them.

Kill them all. SHOULD NEVER HAVE REINTRODUCED TO OUR STATE.

Have enough problems with coyotes killing animals without wolves added!!!

TOWN OF ALVIN, FOREST COUNTY

I would like to see no wolves in Wisconsin.

350 or less in the state, not 350 in one county – Forest Co.

My son-in-law sees wolves at his cabin area.

I and my wife have nothing against wolves. Its great to know they are out there. In fact, they add some mystic to our great Northwoods. I bow hunt a lot and have seen far more bears than wolves. Just not out of control. Thank you.

The wolves are not the issue in our county. We have had more significant problems from bear hunters with their dogs and training than having wolves in the forest. Considering how much time we spend in the National Forest, and having experienced no negative contact with wolves, the current population does not pose any issues for us, our family, or friends. It's time to stop catering to the hunters and start considering the residents of the state and counties. One additional comment: As a resident who lost a dog due to those poisoning the wolves, its really time to re-evaluate the real problem here, and it isn't wolves.

You got a live one when you sent this to me. We are overrun with deer. I have no idea about the management goal or range, but I'd like to be near them or see one once in a while. I feel like seeing a wolf up here is about the same chance as seeing a sasquatch. How do you change the attitudes people have? People here have an irrational, vitriolic rabid attitude against wolves. No one here has sheep or cattle to get riled about a wolf predating.

Too many deer, not enough wolves.

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About the author: Laurie Groskopf has been an activist on wolf issues for over 25 years, most intensively since 2009. She has lived in the Northwoods since 1974, and prior to that, was a student at UW Madison, 1969 – 1971 and graduated with a B.A. in Psychology from UW Platteville in 1974.

Serving in many organizations in the past, Laurie represented the WI Wildlife Federation on the DNR Wolf Management Revision effort last time wolves were delisted.

Laurie has volunteered as a wolf tracker for the DNR for 8 winters. She was a co-creator and on the board of WI Wolf Facts, a non-profit organization which is a consortium of wildlife and agriculture groups dedicated to sensible and responsible wolf management. She also organized and worked with hundreds of citizens and many organizations to enable county boards to discuss and act on recommendations regarding wolf management and goals. Between 2010 – 2017, 36 County Boards (1/2 of all counties in WI) passed resolutions in favor of a wolf management goal of 350, 350 or less, or several counties less than that. In addition, a number of statewide organizations also enacted policy to promote a goal of 350 or 350 or less due to Laurie’s work with hundreds of stakeholder and groups. As a board member of WI Wolf Facts, Laurie helped organize and run “Wolf Summit II” and arranged for 7 videos to be made (posted on their web site) giving farmers and hunters a chance to tell the public about their personal experiences with wolves.

Twenty-two years of survey work gathering information for USDA, DATCP, ERS, and other federal agencies have taught Laurie the complexities as well as simple usefulness of public surveys. In addition, Laurie has worked in public information including training by EPA, done outreach with UW Madison School of Medicine and Public Health, served as Planner/Program Coordinator for community-based elderly programs in 17 counties in northern WI, and run a number of non-profits.

Laurie has attended many major wolf conferences and spoke at the Mid-West Wolf Stewards Conference in Minnesota. She also attended a college course offered at the International Wolf Center in Ely, MN. Laurie lives in rural Lincoln Co. with her retired hounds and very supportive hunting partner, who is just about the best tracker in Wisconsin and the best friend and most experienced outdoors person a Northwoods lover could ever ask for.