

Overview

The Wolf Management Plan that directs wolf management activities in MN was developed through consensus agreement with the public and multiple stakeholders. Key plan elements were passed into MN state law in 2000. The Wolf Management Plan directs that hunting and trapping will be considered for population management purposes and decisions to allow a public take would be based on sound biological data. There is no established population upper limit for wolves in MN. The DNR has not demonstrated a need for wolf population management activities (including hunting and trapping seasons). The DNR stated the purpose of the 2012-13 wolf season was for recreational hunting and trapping, yet the Wolf Management Plan does not include any provision directing that a wolf hunt will be offered solely for recreational purposes.

DNR Wolf Management Goals

DNR wolf management goals are to ensure the long-term survival of the wolf in Minnesota, and reduce conflicts between wolves and humans. A recreational hunting and trapping season does not support the long-term survival of the wolf in Minnesota. The random killing of non-problem wolves can destabilize wolf packs and increase conflicts.

Wolf Population Minimum/Maximum

The minimum population goal for wolves in Minnesota is 1,600 and there is no maximum population limit. Wolves are allowed to naturally expand their range across Minnesota.

Wolf Population Size

The most recent comprehensive population survey was conducted in Winter 2012-2013, there were an estimated 2,211 wolves in Minnesota (confidence range 1,652 to 2,641). The previous population survey was conducted in Winter 2007-2008, and estimated 2,921 wolves in Minnesota (confidence range 2,192-3,525). Prior to the 2012-13 inaugural wolf hunting and trapping season, there was no significant change in wolf population size or distribution since 1998. After a single season of recreational wolf hunting and trapping that killed 413 wolves, the population declined 25% to near 1988 levels.

Wolf Mortality Rates

Excluding hunting and trapping, wolves naturally face high rates of mortality. According to the DNR Wolf Management Plan approximately 35% of adult wolves die each year from starvation, intraspecific strife (territory disputes with other wolves), and human related causes such as poaching and car collisions. Wolf pups naturally experience a mortality rate of 50-60%. Pack reproduction abilities are diminished significantly through the loss of pack members, as it takes the entire pack to raise the pups. In Minnesota, average pack size has been steadily declining since the late 1980's and is now 4.3 wolves per pack.

Wolf Conflicts

State law allows wolves to be killed in protection of livestock, pets, and people. According to the DNR, (a recreational) wolf hunting is not effective at reducing or preventing wolf conflicts because corrective action for problem wolves needs to be taken at the time and place the problem wolf is active.

Public Opinion

- 79% of DNR survey respondents opposed shooting, trapping and snaring wolves.
- 79% of Minnesotans believe wolves are an asset that should be protected for future generations*.
- 66% of Minnesotans oppose the use of traps and snares to hunt wolves*.
- 66% of Minnesotans believe a recreational wolf hunt is unnecessary if people already have the right to kill wolves to protect themselves and their animals*.

*Independent statewide survey of registered voters conducted by Lake Research Partners, Spring 2013.

Current Minnesota Wolf Legislation

S.F. 666 was introduced during the 2013 legislative session to instate the five-year moratorium on recreational wolf hunting and trapping that was removed from law without public input during the special session of 2011. On March 14, 2013 S.F. 666 was approved by the Minnesota Senate Environment and Energy committee and referred to the Environment, Economic Development and Agriculture Division. The companion bill, H.F. 1163 introduced by Rep. Jason Isaacson, awaits a hearing in the Minnesota House of Representatives.