

Review and Analysis

Our Comments to the Wisconsin DNR Regarding the

“Wisconsin Wolf Management Public Input Questionnaire” -- April 15 - May 15, 2021

We understand that creating this type of survey is difficult. We assume that the DNR was attempting a fair, balanced survey that would, in general terms, gather public opinion on wolf management, population, hunting, and conservation. That said, we found some of the survey to be ambiguous. We felt that data harvested from the survey could be used in a manner not intended, especially for wolf conservation advocates (the constituency we represent); therefore, we issued the following specific concerns ***prior to the release of the data summary and conclusions from the survey.***

Technical issues with the survey:

The 300-character boxes did not show all the text input and did not show how many characters were used or remained when text was added. The system merely blocked moving forward with survey if the input exceeded 300 characters. On some devices, the person completing the survey could not see or read their entire input block to select text to delete to meet the 300-character maximum allowed. As character restriction did not allow us to include full thoughts, **we added input comments at the end of our letter. We asked that these comments be included in the final survey tally and analysis.**

Survey Introduction:

- ***“The most recent winter population (from April 2020) indicated approximately 1,200 wolves (based on population modeling efforts).”***

This statement is misleading. The Department reported a registered kill of 218 wolves in the February 2021 hunt. The introduction did not include this most recent information based on available data. Therefore, the introduction would have been more accurate to state: ***“Based on available data and calculating the February 2021 wolf harvest, the current wolf population is estimated at 1,000 individuals.”***

- ***The introduction showed a map with wolf territories labeled “Changes in Wisconsin Gray Wolf Population 1980-2020.”***

It would have been helpful to indicate how many acres of territory wolves currently occupy. The Nicolet-Chequamegon National Forest, for example, appears to be where many wolves live. With over 1.5 million acres in the national forest, the number of acres per wolf would be a critical piece of data for the average person to understand population density.

Survey Question Comments:

- **3. Population management: wolf population objectives and strategies to meet those objectives.**

What does this mean? Whose objectives? What strategies? The objective of a trophy hunter may be to kill as many wolves as possible. The objective of a conservationist may be that no wolves be killed. The strategy of a wolf hunter may be to kill more

wolves and expand the ways that is done, while the conservationist may desire strategies to protect wolves. The data gathered from this question can be manipulated to support strategies and meet objectives NOT intended by the person filling out the survey

- **3. Depredation conflicts: wolf depredation of livestock and dogs**

Does this question refer to pet and farm dogs or does it refer to the hounds / dogs purposely used by their owners to engage in training, chasing, hunting, scenting wolves and other large fur bearing animals?

Further, many people support depredation payments for livestock and PET and FARM dogs but do NOT support depredation payments for hunting hounds. The way this question was posed, people were not able to make that distinction.

- **3. Depredation compensation: reimbursement payments for animals killed or injured by wolves**

What animals are included in question? Is this about farm and domestic animals OR does it INCLUDE in “animal” the hound dogs used in training, chasing, hunting, scenting wolves and other fur bearing animals?

These comments also apply to Sect 3 (6): ***Depredation conflicts: wolf depredation of livestock and dogs***

- **3. Impacts on deer and elk: wolf population impacts on deer and elk**

What does this mean? Impacts? --“I am concerned that wolves are **killing** deer and elk?” OR “I am concerned that **wolves help to control CWD and make herds stronger by culling weak individuals**”

These comments also apply to: ***4. I am “concerned” about the potential impacts of wolves on deer and elk***

- **4. I have an “emotional” attachment to wolves**

Emotion runs the spectrum from Extreme Hate to Extreme Love, from Extreme Disregard to Extreme Concern. The person completing the survey has no way to indicate which end of the spectrum of emotion they are expressing in their answer. As government should attempt to make decisions based on logic and balance, we do not understand why this question is included at all. To some, it is dangerous territory and could be used to disregard the survey with the excuse, “This is just an EMOTIONAL response” or is “from a person who is ruled by their emotions” rather than by the logic necessary to manage / protect / hunt wolves in Wisconsin. Too often, people with concerns are marginalized because of their emotions about a topic.

- **4. I have changed the way I recreate (hunt, camp, hike, etc.) in response to the presence of wolves in the areas I recreate**

What does this mean? “I recreate in areas trying to get closer to wolves to see / observe / admire them?” OR “I recreate away from wolves because I am AFRAID of them?” OR “I recreate away from wolves to avoid conflict with hunters and hounds engaged in hunting and training activities?”

- **4. I am “concerned” about the potential impacts of wolves on deer and elk**

What does “impacts” mean? “I am concerned that wolves are killing deer and elk?” OR “I am concerned that wolves help to control CWD and make herds stronger by culling weak individuals.”

These comments also apply to: **3. Impacts on deer and elk: wolf population impacts on deer and elk**

- **5. More about You**

We thought that asking anything about the sex of person completing the survey was completely unnecessary, especially given the choices provided. All the people of the State of Wisconsin “own” our public lands and the wildlife those places hold regardless of sex.

Assuming that most hunters are male, but it is possible that most people that complete the survey are female, adding the element of one’s sex into the survey could be used to marginalize results.

While age might be of interest to divide voters and taxpayers from youngsters, any other age input seems unnecessary and should not have been included. What was the purpose of the nine-year age brackets?

While we understand that the DNR may wish to divide resident input from non-resident input, asking Wisconsinites their specific county of residence was not necessary. The people in Dane County where wolves do not typically live have as much right to provide input as the people living in Vilas County where wolves do live. Again, gathering this data opens the door to marginalizing the survey data based on the region of residence of the people providing the input.

As we discussed, the survey was already released when we developed these concerns. We understand the need for a certain level of generalization in this type of survey. We are concerned that survey results could easily be manipulated and might abuse the true intent of those who completed it. Misrepresentation of survey data happens when the collected data is generalized to meet a particular agenda and when clarification via text box input character quota is very limited and difficult to use.

We also respectfully request that the following comments be included in the survey summary and analysis:

Specific to Question 6:

- Regarding “wolf hunting and trapping: regulated public harvest of wolves by licensed participants” -- Any interest we have relates to prohibiting or greatly reducing hunting and trapping of wolves. Hound hunting wolves should be prohibited.
- Specific to “Depredation compensation”—Depredation payments should not be paid for hounds purposely put in harm’s way by hunters.

Specific to Text Boxes 10 and 13:

- The land, water, and animals of Wisconsin, including Federal forests, belong to ALL the people, not just hunters and trappers.
- The DNR data does not show number of acres per wolf on the title page map. That information is necessary to understand the population. Simply saying there are 1,200 wolves in Wisconsin is misleading. Additionally, the 1,200 number is an estimate PRIOR to the February 2021 hunt.
- Wolf management programs that include hunting and hunting with hounds seem to be governed by special interest groups and not by the best available science or public will.
- The impact of the February 2021 wolf hunt has not been analyzed. Until the impact of the over-kill and collateral impacts to packs can be studied, no further hunts or trapping of wolves should be allowed.
- The February wolf hunt was an embarrassment to the people of the State of Wisconsin.
- The DNR has not calculated overharvest in quotas. That has led to over-kill of the wolf population, particularly in the recent February 2021 hunt. More zone monitoring must be done by additional wardens to address overkill.
- The poorly planned and rushed February hunt caused significant collateral damage to established packs during breeding season.
- As the impacts of the February 2021 wolf hunt are not yet fully known, I support a ZERO quota for a fall 2021 wolf hunt.
- The February 2021 wolf hunt did not honor treaty, land, and heritage rights of Native tribes. Tribal rights should always be respected and protected.
- Wolves are not a human food source, therefore the hunt is only “thrill kill” trophy hunting.
- Livestock depredation is frequently given as the main reason wolves should be hunted -- but the percentage of livestock killed by wolves is relatively small.
- There is no evidence of direct harm to humans by wolves. That wolves attack people is a myth.

- Previous DNR Wolf Management Plans and management while wolves were protected as endangered contained effective measures for “controlling nuisance wolves and reimbursing landowners for losses caused by wolves without hunting.”
- Hunting wolves destroys pack order and the ecosystem.
- As apex predators, the wolves help to control CWD by using weakened deer as a food source.
- It is NOT a "hunter's rights" issue -- more and more ethical hunters are speaking out AGAINST trophy hunting, hounding, and trapping of wolves. They believe in “fair chase” hunting.
- Collared wolves are a part of (desperately needed) scientific study of wolves. Collared individuals should be considered to “belong to” the scientist and their studies. The taking of a collared wolf should be illegal.
- Wolf hunters and hunters with hounds often violate the rights of private property owners. Hunting hounds do not know property borders, the hunters do not respect them.
- Traps, snares, cable ties, and packs of hunting hounds create conflicts and pose dangers to other users of public lands, to private property owners and to their pets.
- Depredation payments currently in place can adequately compensate ranchers and farmers. These payments should NOT be paid to hounders who purposely put their animals in harm’s way.
- To our shame, Wisconsin is the ONLY state in the country to allow the use of dogs to track and trail wolves, with nearly unrestrained in-the-wild training of these dogs. This is NOT the type of leadership that reflects well on our state!
- Hunting wolves with hounds is just a form of “legalized dog fighting”.
- Hunting at night with dogs, ATVs and snowmobiles is disruptive to the environment and to people who live in rural areas.
- Pursuing wolves with ATVs, snowmobiles, and hounds—chasing the wolves to exhaustion—is unethical, cruel, and is not “fair chase” hunting.
- The Nicolet-Chequamegon National Forest appears to be where most of the wolves live. With over 1.5 MILLION acres and low population density, it does not appear that “conflict” would be a big problem, unless you are a hunter with hounds looking for trouble.
- I oppose paying depredations to hunters who purposely set their dogs upon wildlife. Depredation payments are “rewards” for animal abuse. That is wrong.
- I have changed the way I recreate in Wisconsin NOT because of wolves—but to avoid conflict, noise, disruption, and FEAR of hound hunters and their untethered hounds.

- A minimum five mile NO HUNT buffer zone should be created around tribal lands, camping sites, hiking trails and other places used for silent sports to provide for the safety of both the tribal wolves and the public.
- Livestock depredation is frequently given. The DNR has publicly stated that a “wolf hunt” is an ineffective tool to remove the few depredating wolves that target farms and that non-lethal methods of control are readily available. The occasional, necessary removal of problem individuals must be done at the site of the depredation to be effective.

Statisticians know that surveys can be used to “massage data to meet spec.” We believe the intent of the DNR was a fair and balanced survey. We hope the results are used by the DNR and its advisors in that spirit.