

Is Wisconsin crying wolf too many times?

BY DOUG HISSOM · JULY 16, 2012 · 0 COMMENTS



Wolves in Minnesota and Wisconsin have gone from being protected as an endangered species into the gun sights of hunters in a little less than a year.

Beginning in October, 201 of the 800 wolves can be killed or trapped in the Badger State, the state Department of Natural Resources announced last week. In Minnesota, as of this week it appears they can hunt or trap 400 of their 3,000 wolves a year in a plan moving through the state Capitol.



Farmers say wolves are a threat to livestock.

The federal government took the wolf off the Endangered Species protection for Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan in January.

The argument for the hunt in Wisconsin is that the state has more than 800 wolves in its population and they are threatening livestock, dogs and people. Most of the packs run north of Highway 8 way up north but there are some in the central region as far south as Marquette County.

Lawmakers say they have to protect farmers' animals. And they're allowing hunters a full arsenal to do it with. Wolves can be hunted with firearms, bows, crossbows and leg traps. Bait, dogs and electronic calls are also legal.

But in 2010, only 47 calves, 34 dogs, 16 cows, and six sheep were killed in Wisconsin. The dogs were usually out hunting bears, but in some cases they were family pets.

Nonetheless, the state has a fund where livestock owners can claim refunds for their animals that are killed by wolves.

The state paid \$214,794 in wolf depredation payments in 2012. It paid \$155,063 in 2011 and \$202,843 in 2010. Most of that, as always, has gone to factory farmers. Many of the same names keep showing up on the claims list.



Wolves are no longer on the Endangered Species list and hunters in the midwest are taking aim.

I was walking in a farm field one night along the banks of the Kickapoo River in southwestern Wisconsin and startled pigs on a farm. Their commotion had the farmer out shortly with a shotgun firing blindly across the field. I suspect, like me, a wolf confronted with that situation would get out of there fast. No need for the farmer to go hunting. A study in the early 1980s showed that the diet of Wisconsin wolves was comprised of 55 percent white-tailed deer, 16 percent beavers, 10 percent snowshoe hares and 19 percent mice, squirrels, muskrats and other small mammals. Despite nearly hunting the animal to extinction in the past, and the fact that wolves tend to avoid humans at all costs, (how many can actually claim to have seen a wolf in the wild?) the fear of the wolf as a threat to humans still permeates the hunting argument.

I saw a wolf once in my extensive wilderness travels in the past 30 years. We almost hit one with our Ford Expedition on a gravel road in northern Saskatchewan, having just finished a four-week canoe trip in Nunavut. After running in front of the truck the wolf stopped and stared back at us while my partner scrambled for a camera. The wolf headed into the brush. I've heard the howls of wolves at night many times, along the banks of the Namakagon River in northern Wisconsin, in the Boundary Waters in Minnesota, and in northern Manitoba.

A Facebook page recently formed to spread information about the predation of wolves and their perceived threat to humans.

The fact is only two people in North America have been killed by wolves in 90 years—one in Saskatchewan and one in Alaska.



Kenton Carnegie's mutilated body was found where aggressive incidents involving wolves and bears against people have been previously reported. (Photo: Wikipedia Commons)

In 2005, Canadian geological engineering student Kenton Joel Carnegie, 22, died in Saskatchewan because a pack of wolves had gotten used to humans after feeding on a town dump for years. Carnegie had taken a walk and failed to return to the surveyors' camp. His chewed-up body was found partially consumed in an area where four wolves fed on human refuse.

In 2010 Candice Berner, a 32-year-old teacher and avid jogger, was found dead near a road in [Chignik Lake, Alaska](#), about 475 miles southwest of Anchorage. Snowmobilers found her mutilated body next to wolf tracks in the snow.

Prior to those deaths, authorities reported three other wolf-related deaths since 1978 – all of them involving young children.

A conservation student at UW-Milwaukee argued for all-out hunting to me recently citing that a 9-year-old girl in Wisconsin was attacked last year even though reports exist of humans being attacked in the state of Wisconsin for years.

How well is that UWM program doing if they are spreading those rumors. Or perhaps it's something the student got off the Facebook sight and is repeating as fact.

Here's one scientist's take on wolf vs. human interaction.

Ethologist Valerius Geist of the University of Calgary in Alberta has seven hypothetical stages which lead to wolf attacks on humans based on historical and modern accounts:

- The first outlined stage is scarcity of wild game, be it due to poaching, habitat loss or seasonal migration.
- Wolves begin approaching human habitations; though limit their visits to nocturnal hours. Their presence is usually established by barking matches with local dogs.
- After a certain amount of time, wolves begin to frequent human habitations in daylight hours, and observe people and livestock at a distance.
- The wolves begin acting bolder by attacking small livestock and pets during daylight, sometimes pursuing their prey up to verandas. At this point the wolves do not focus on humans, but will growl and act threateningly toward them.
- The wolves begin attacking large-bodied livestock and may follow riders, as well as mount verandas and look into windows.
- People begin to be harassed, usually in a playful manner. The wolves will chase people over short distances and nip at them, though will retreat if confronted.
- Wolves begin attacking people in predatory fashions.

Stage seven simply hasn't happened in Wisconsin, although the state Department of Natural Resources killed 16 wolves last year for fear of human safety.



Are wolves really endangering Wisconsin's livestock or are these just over-hyped isolated incidents?

Perhaps a good dose of Aldo Leopold's book "Game Management" would leave UWM conservation students with a clearer view of what needs to be done. Leopold, whose best known for the seminal "A Sand County Almanac," is also considered the profit in this state in terms of hunting strategy. But state game officials in the 1940s wouldn't listen to his urging to reduce the deer herd and he acrimoniously split with them on the issue. Deer hunting policy was in chaos for decades, and some say until now when we have our state's first "deer czar."

Leopold himself had a convergence about killing wolves, after shooting them with vigor in the southwest. That changed when he killed a wolf family one day. "I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters' paradise. But after seeing the green fire die (in the mother's eyes), I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view."

A legislative committee earlier this year held a hearing in Madison on the bill where it was pointed out that if hunters reduce the number of wolves in the state to when they had "threatened" status, the state would be in constant flux of protecting the animal and hunting it to extremes. The state's last target for an acceptable number of wolves was 350, a number that it came up with in 1992 when there were maybe 25 wolves here. They're sticking with that now.

There were 3,000 to 5,000 wolves in the state around 1900, but by 1960 it was officially declared there were no wolves in

Wisconsin. The few that were left in Minnesota started coming across the border in the 1970s which led to the population now.

When I lived in northern Minnesota in the Ely area, locals would claim wolves were “range wolves” (also vernacular for coyotes) threatening man and beast, and then they would shoot them with nonchalance. Lack of game wardens made that quite easy.

Another cautionary note from scientists is that allowing dogs to hunt wolves will just increase wolf vs. dog attacks since the wolves will start to view all dogs as mortal enemies. That, of course, will lead to more animosity toward wolves, since they are not dogs with humans at the helm.

In Alaska, they don't need dogs to hunt their wolves. They can use airplanes and helicopters. Then-Gov. Sarah Palin in 2007 approved the controversial move. There were intense TV campaigns pitching both sides of the issue airing at the time. Being so big, it's tough to guess how many animals are there. The estimate is 7,000 to 11,000 and the hunting argument is to protect caribou and moose from predation. Trappers and hunters kill about 1,400 a year, but there are no limits.

There are about 5,000 wolves lower 48. Hunting goes on in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming where the wolf was delisted in 2010. There are about 1,800 wolves there. In Montana, hunters weren't doing a good enough job killing wolves and trapping is now allowed.

But as long as one farmer's calf, or hunter's dog is killed, those backing the hunt position will say one wolf near them is too many. The opportunity to head up north and hear the howl of wolves at night has never been better. Once the bullets start flying, the traps get set and the dogs unleashed that will diminish quickly.

A GOOD WOLF
IS A DEAD WOLF

IMPROVE YOUR
FOREST
SHOOT A WOLF

University of Wisconsin-Madison researchers reported in a 2001 study that hunters indicated that the only good wolf is a dead wolf.. “Hunters were some of the least tolerant of wolves among our respondents, and the closer you got to wolf range the less tolerant they were,” said Adrian Treves, a professor in the UW-Madison Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies. (Photo: whitewolvepack.com)

- See more at: <http://baltimorepostexaminer.com/is-wisconsin-crying-wolf-too-many-times/2012/07/16#sthash.MpJaA737.dpuf>