

Wisconsin's Green Fire: Statement on August 11, 2021 Wisconsin Natural Resources Board action on the fall wolf hunt quota

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Rhineland, WI -

On August 11, 2021, the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board (NRB) voted 5-2 to establish a quota of 300 wolves for the fall 2021 wolf hunt.

The removal of 300 wolves again this fall, on top of the removal of at least 218 wolves during the three-day February wolf hunt, could result in a population of as many as 1000 wolves being reduced by over 50 to 60% or more.

This unprecedented reduction will risk long-term damage to the viability of the wolf population. It would also be likely to trigger a review of Wisconsin's wolf management by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and will support arguments for re-listing wolves under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Wolf biologist Adrian Wydeven, testified to the NRB Wednesday on behalf of Wisconsin's Green Fire. Wydeven, who spent 23 years as the wolf specialist for Wisconsin DNR, offered this comment: *"Removing 300 wolves in another hunt would likely have a de-stabilizing effect on almost every wolf pack in the state. There is no other wildlife species where that level of reduction would be acceptable. And it's highly likely it would trigger a US Fish and Wildlife Service review of state management"*.

Given the significant uncertainties resulting from the February 2021 hunt there is in

fact no quota number for a fall wolf hunt that can be justified if we want to maintain stability of our wolf population. The models used to track Wisconsin's wolf population were not designed to account for the large and unprecedented hunt that occurred in February, in the middle of the wolf breeding season.

Wydeven's testimony points to three levels of uncertainty regarding the current status of wolves in Wisconsin, making it difficult to justify a state-wide wolf harvest:

1. **The winter 2020/2021 wolf population estimating process was cut short** of the normal surveying opportunity through mid or late March due to the February wolf harvest.
2. **The number of wolves actually removed from the population in February is certain to be larger than the number of registered kills**, although it is difficult to estimate to what extent.
3. **The impact of the harvest occurring during the middle of the wolf breeding season removed pregnant females and alpha males, and caused overall disruptions of packs**, all of which will have drastically reduced pup recruitment in spring 2021. Preliminary evidence of this effect can be seen in howling surveys currently being conducted, but it is too early to know the extent of that loss.

According to Wydeven: *"Given these high levels of uncertainty over the pre-harvest wolf population, uncertainty over the actual removal due to the harvest, and uncertainty over impacts of the harvest on pup production and recruitment, it is difficult if not impossible to justify any wolf harvest quota in Wisconsin if we are committed to maintaining the long-term sustainability of the population".*

Wisconsin's adjacent states of Michigan and Minnesota are not planning a fall 2021 wolf harvest. The adjacent states of Minnesota and Michigan are not planning wolf harvest in fall 2021. Michigan with a wolf population of about 700 wolves has no immediate plans for a wolf harvest. Minnesota with a population of about 2,800 wolves has decided to hold off on holding a wolf harvest until an updated approved state wolf plan is in place. Wisconsin alone is pushing ahead with a wolf harvest because it is required to do so by state law.

Wisconsin's Green Fire is a statewide membership organization dedicated to science-based management of natural resources. The WGF Wildlife work group members and authors of this testimony are natural resource professionals have carefully evaluated wolf population and harvest data and are deeply familiar with

the populations models used by WDNR.