



Recovery!

Gray Wolves in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan

Wolves in Peril

Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and adjacent states were once home to a healthy gray wolf population. Killing by people and declining numbers of prey - bison, elk, and white-tailed deer in the south and moose, deer, caribou, and beaver in the north - caused wolf declines early on. By 1838, wolves were eliminated from the southern portion of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan. Bounties paid for dead wolves began during the 1800s and by the early 1900s wolves were also gone from southern Minnesota and Wisconsin. By 1960 wolves were nearly eliminated from Wisconsin, Michigan (except Isle Royale), and most of Minnesota. Then, the gray wolf gained protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in May 1974.

Wolf Recovery

Important factors led to wolf recovery in the Midwest: the ESA's legal protection against killing or harming wolves, the fact that white-tailed deer herds increased because of mild winters and timber management, and the ESA requirement that a Recovery Plan be prepared.

The Recovery Plan focused time, money, and energy on priority conservation actions. Perhaps the Recovery Plan's greatest value was that it brought together a wide range of partners and stakeholders whose collaborative efforts led ultimately to delisting the gray wolf in the Western Great Lakes. States, tribes,



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conservation groups and citizens approached the task of recovery as a common goal, and each partner played a part in achieving success.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provided support, research, law enforcement, and other administrative activities that promoted recovery of wolves in Minnesota – an accomplishment that led, in turn, to wolves naturally recolonizing areas in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. As recovery success and potential delisting approached, the Minnesota DNR held scoping meetings to receive public input and convened a roundtable that brought constituents together to provide management recommendations. Those recommendations gave the state's wolf management plan its breadth in addressing concerns

from the full spectrum of interested parties.

The Wisconsin DNR played a critical role in wolf recovery. Among the agency's innumerable contributions are wolf monitoring, research, depredation control and reimbursements for depredation losses, and active law enforcement, while dealing with challenging public concerns. Wisconsin conserved the state's growing wolf population, helping wolves recolonize northern Michigan. The Wisconsin DNR has held numerous public meetings to develop and update a sound state wolf management plan with stakeholder input and support.

Similar efforts yielded success in Michigan. In 1974, the Michigan DNR made the first attempt in North America to translocate wild wolves to re-establish a population. That attempt failed,

but wolves eventually emigrated from Wisconsin and the Michigan DNR conducted wolf monitoring, research, and law enforcement to cultivate a robust and growing wolf population in the UP. The Michigan DNR has held numerous public and stakeholder meetings to develop and update their state wolf management plan and has been a leader in addressing the human dimensions of predator recovery.

In tandem with state efforts were critical contributions by tribes, conservation organizations and private citizens. Non-governmental groups tackled challenges - such as negative public perception of wolves - through outreach and education. Institutions such as the International Wolf Center, Timber Wolf Alliance, and Timber Wolf Information Network used science-based information about wolves to keep the public informed about wolf issues, leading to public and political support for agencies as they worked toward wolf recovery and delisting.

Wolf Populations

Minnesota

During the mid- to late 1970s, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) estimated their wolf population at about 1,000 to 1,200. Over the last three decades wolves increased their range into north central and central Minnesota. Today, wolves live in areas with higher road and human densities than previously believed could be suitable for wolf survival, although these two factors still limit the areas suitable for wolf packs. Wolves continue to disperse to areas in west-central and east-central Minnesota (just north of Minneapolis/St. Paul), North and South Dakota, and Wisconsin. The DNR's most recent survey in 2003-2004

estimated the state's wolf population at 3,020 animals.

Wisconsin

From 1960 to 1975 there were no breeding wolves in Wisconsin. But after the wolf was federally listed as endangered, wolves began returning, apparently dispersing from Minnesota. The Wisconsin DNR started monitoring wolves in 1979. At that time 25 wolves were documented in the state. During the mid-1980s wolf numbers reached a low of only 15, probably due to an epidemic of canine parvovirus. Wild wolves seemed to develop some degree of natural resistance and wolf numbers increased after 1985. Since that time, the Wisconsin wolf population has steadily increased. Population estimates between 1985 and late winter 2006-2007 increased from 83 to 540 wolves.

Michigan

As wolves began getting a foothold in Wisconsin during the late 1970s, biologists documented increasing numbers of single wolves in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Finally, in the late 1980s they documented a pair of wolves traveling together in the central Upper Peninsula. This pair had pups in the spring of 1991. The next year (summer of 1992), Wisconsin and Michigan DNR biologists radio-collared one of the wolves in the only known pack. By the end of 1992, Michigan biologists verified at least 20 wolves in the Upper Peninsula. Since then, except for 1996, numbers have steadily increased. Michigan DNR trackers estimate that there were at least 174 wolves in 1998-99, increasing to 509 by late winter 2006-2007. Radio-collaring and monitoring Michigan's wolf population continues.

There have been wolves residing on Isle Royale, Michigan, near the Minnesota-Ontario shore of Lake Superior, since the winter of 1948-49. Their population has moved up and down with that of their prime prey -moose. Disease is also believed to be an important factor in population fluctuations. Following a peak of 50 wolves in 1979, the population plummeted to the low teens in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They have since rebounded to the current number of 21 wolves. Due to their isolation from other wolves, these wolves do not contribute to federal wolf recovery goals.

Success – Wolf Recovery

Due to the efforts of numerous and varied parties, wolves expanded in numbers and range in the western Great Lakes states to the extent that their population is healthy and recovered. So healthy, in fact, that wolves were removed from the list of threatened and endangered species in March 2007. A top predator has returned to the northwoods ecosystem.

Minnesota Wolf Population

1973	500 to 1,000
1979	1,235
1989	1,500 to 1,750
1998	2,450
2004	3,020

Wisconsin Wolf Population

1973	0
1980	25
1995	83
2000	248
2007	540

Michigan Wolf Population

1973	0
1980	0
1995	80
2000	216
2007	509