

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



News Release

Midwest Region

External Affairs Office

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Investigating Wolf Killings in Three States

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Office of Law Enforcement, is investigating 16 incidents of wolves being killed illegally in November and December of 2009 in Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Two wolves were killed in Minnesota, eight were killed in Wisconsin and six were killed in Michigan in the last two months of 2009. It isn't uncommon to see a spike in the number of wolves killed in the fall, according to Greg Jackson, special agent-in-charge for the Midwest Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"Wolf/human encounters are increasing every year and outdoor enthusiasts need to approach these encounters responsibly," Jackson said. "The law applies to everyone regardless of whether they agree or disagree with the level of protection currently afforded to wolves."

In Wisconsin, eight wolves were killed in late fall in Burnett, Douglas, Bayfield, Ashland, Adams, Monroe and Jackson Counties and on two Native American reservations. Four of the wolves were radio-collared by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Two wolves were killed in Northern Minnesota in early November. One wolf was shot northwest of Grand Rapids, Minn., in the Ball Club area; the second was killed northwest of Two Harbors. The wolf killed near Two Harbors had been fitted with a radio tracking collar.

Six incidents of wolves being killed were reported in Michigan's Upper Peninsula in December. All of the wolves were discovered after their radio collars began emitting a mortality signal.

"We know when a collared wolf dies," Resident Agent-in-Charge Tom Tidwell said. "We have no doubt that wolves without collars are getting killed too."

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The dead wolves were found throughout the Upper Peninsula in Ontonagon, Iron, Menominee, Schoolcraft, Luce and Mackinac Counties.

The Service has a goal of conserving wolves in the United States, consistent with the intent of the Endangered Species Act. However, over the past decade Service decisions to reduce or remove protections for wolves in the Midwest have been legally contested. The most recent court action in 2009 once again placed wolves in the western Great Lakes under the protection of the Endangered Species Act. Wolves in Michigan and Wisconsin remain endangered under the ESA; in Minnesota, they are considered threatened.

“We have a healthy, viable wolf population in the western Great Lakes,” according to Tony Sullins, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service supervisor for Endangered Species Act issues in Minnesota. “In that respect, we believe that we have met the intent of the Endangered Species Act in this portion of the wolf’s range. Our ultimate goal for the wolf, and indeed for every imperiled species, is to remove the species from the list of threatened and endangered species in a manner that is both biologically sound and legally defensible.”

“Delisting species that have recovered frees up precious resources and staff time for those species still on the brink,” Sullins added.

Service biologists are currently conducting a comprehensive review of gray wolf recovery and conservation in the United States. This team is examining the way the gray wolf is listed under the Endangered Species Act and will make recommendations on how wolf populations in the lower 48 states should be covered by the ESA. The results of the review will provide a roadmap for decision makers outlining listing issues and will provide an improved understanding of the wolf’s conservation status in North America.

In the meantime, the Service is working with states and tribes in the western Great Lakes to address wolf depredation problems and other issues. In Minnesota, where the wolf is listed as threatened, the ability to address depredation has been written into the regulations. In Wisconsin and Michigan, where the wolf is listed as endangered, an Endangered Species Act permit is required for personnel to implement lethal control programs. State personnel may address depredation abatement using live-trapping and translocating animals within the state, and they may kill individual wolves that are a demonstrable but non-immediate threat to human safety. In addition, any individual may take an endangered species in defense of human life.

The Service is investigating the wolf killings in conjunction with appropriate state agencies and tribal law enforcement.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is offering up to \$1,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of persons responsible for killing wolves. In addition, non-governmental organizations are also offering rewards for information leading to the arrest and conviction of people responsible for killing wolves. The Humane Society of the United States is offering up to \$2,500 per case, and Defenders of Wildlife is also offering a reward.

If you have any information related to these or any other incidents, please call the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Law Enforcement, or the appropriate state department of natural resources. Callers can remain anonymous if they so choose. In Minnesota, please call Special Agent Ron Kramer at 218-720-5357 or the Minnesota DNR's TIP line at 1-800-652-9093. In Wisconsin please call Special Agent Steve Stoinski at 920-866-1750 or the Wisconsin TIP line at 1-800-847-9367. In Michigan please call Resident Agent-in-Charge Tom Tidwell at 734-995-0387 or call the Michigan Department of Natural Resources RAP line at 1-800-292-7800.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov>.