

**Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources  
Natural Resources Board Agenda Item**

**SUBJECT:** Update on the status of the wolf management plan.

**FOR:** January 2022 Board meeting

**TO BE PRESENTED BY:** Randy Johnson, Large Carnivore Specialist

**SUMMARY:**

Gray wolves in Wisconsin were officially delisted on January 4, 2021. Accordingly, the department initiated a series of management changes at that time including efforts to update the state wolf management plan. These efforts included collecting public input, establishing a Wolf Management Plan Committee (WMPC), a series of meetings of the WMPC, and a report containing the WMPC's input to inform the department while updating the wolf management plan.

A "Wolf Management Plan" webpage was launched in early 2021 to provide details and updates. The webpage has been regularly updated and has served as a central location for information on the process. It is available here: <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/wolfmanagementplan>

Next steps include: completion and release of the WMPC input report, drafting the updated wolf plan by the department, release of draft plan for public review (anticipated Feb. 2022), revision of draft plan, and presentation of final plan to NRB (anticipated June 2022).

**RECOMMENDATION:** Information only

**LIST OF ATTACHED MATERIALS (check all that are applicable):**

Background memo

Type name of attachment if applicable

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Approved by	Signature	Date
Eric Lobner, Bureau Director	DocuSigned by: <i>Eric Lobner</i> 49A5E090CF88465...	1/12/2022   1:09 PM CST
Keith Warnke, Division Administrator	DocuSigned by: <i>Keith Warnke</i> 8D68747CE78D4CA...	1/12/2022   2:00 PM CST
For Preston D. Cole, Secretary	DocuSigned by: <i>Sarah Barry</i> A7D70DC3770642F...	1/20/2022   4:42 PM CST

cc: Board Liaison – AD/8

DS

*WR*

by Sarah Barry

**CORRESPONDENCE/MEMORANDUM**

DATE: January 5, 2021

TO: Natural Resources Board Members

FROM: Secretary Preston D. Cole

SUBJECT: Update on Wolf Management Plan and Population Monitoring

**Summary**

The department began efforts to update the state wolf management plan approximately one year ago following the federal delisting of wolves which occurred on January 4, 2021. These efforts have included collecting public input on wolf management, establishing a Wolf Management Plan Committee (WMPC), conducting a series of four meetings of the WMPC, compiling a report containing the WMPC's input on wolf management, and drafting portions of the updating plan. This public input, together with the latest wildlife science and current state law, are being used by the department to inform the updated wolf management plan.

In addition to the efforts associated with updating the wolf management plan, department staff and volunteers are currently conducting winter carnivore track surveys as part of the department's annual wolf monitoring program which will provide important information in an updated wolf population abundance estimate which is expected in the summer of 2022.

**Updating the Wolf Management Plan**

Gray wolves in Wisconsin were officially delisted on January 4, 2021. Accordingly, the department initiated a series of management changes at that time, including efforts to update the state wolf management plan. The efforts to date are detailed below:

- Conducted an online public input questionnaire in spring 2021.
  - A public input questionnaire was launched on April 15, 2021 through the DNR website and was available for 30 days. The questionnaire was announced through a department press release, email messaging, and on the department website. This tool was not designed nor intended to be a scientific survey and therefore the results do not represent the attitudes or thoughts of Wisconsin citizens on the whole. However, the tool offered interested individuals a direct opportunity for input and engagement. Over 15,000 people completed the full questionnaire. The input was used to identify issues and concerns, and to find commonalities and points of difference in commenter opinions. The summarized results are available on the DNR website and were presented to the Wolf Management Plan Committee.
- Established of a Wolf Management Plan Committee (WMPC) in early 2021.
  - In early March 2021, the department announced the intention to create a Wolf Management Plan Committee (WMPC). The WMPC's purpose was to provide input to the department to aid in the development of an updated wolf management plan for Wisconsin. The WMPC was inclusive of a variety of interest areas regarding wolf management and membership was established through a two-step invitation and application process. Invitations were sent to the Conservation Congress, USDA Wildlife Services, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, Wisconsin County Forest Association, and all 11 federally recognized tribes in the state. Stakeholder representation was available by competitive application. Stakeholder categories were defined as hunting/trapping organizations, wolf advocacy/education organizations, and agricultural/ranching organizations, with up to six seats

available for each category. A total of 29 organizations, agencies, and tribes participated in the WMPC. The roster and complete list of applicants is available on the DNR website.

- Launched a dedicated webpage to provide information and updates throughout the process.
  - A new “Wolf Management Plan Webpage” was launched in early 2021 to serve as a central location for information and to provide transparency throughout the process. A variety of documents and presentations have been added to the webpage, including meeting slides, minutes, and video recordings for each of the WMPC meetings.
- Developed a professionally facilitated process to engage WMPC.
  - The department contracted professional facilitation services ([Credens LLC, Madison, WI](#)) to:
    1. design an approach to effectively engage the large and diverse WMPC,
    2. facilitate a series of meetings with the WMPC, and
    3. summarize the work performed and input provided by the WMPC. The WMPC process remained flexible and adapted as the WMPC’s work and input evolved.
- Completed a literature review on human dimensions of wolf management.
  - The department’s Bureau of Environmental Analysis and Sustainability conducted a scientific literature review of recent (2014-2021) research related to the human dimensions of wolf management. This work was summarized into a report made available on the DNR website, provided to the WMPC, and will be included in the updated wolf management plan.
- Convened the WMPC for 4 all-day virtual meetings in July-October 2021
  - The WMPC met virtually four times between July and October 2021. Each meeting lasted six hours and was streamed live to the public. The first two meetings were focused primarily on identifying and understanding the WMPC’s top issues and concerns, while the third and fourth meetings provided opportunities for open discussion among the WMPC on a wide variety of topics. In addition, several department staff provided informational presentations related to wolf management.
  - Completed 4 ‘pre-work’ assignments by WMPC between meetings.
    - In addition to attending meetings, the WMPC completed a series of pre-work assignments between each meeting. Completion of these pre-works allowed diverse input to be provided by each WMPC member on a wide variety of topics related to wolf management. These also allowed the WMPC to devote more time during meetings to dialogue.
- Completed a comprehensive WMPC Input Report compiling the discussions and inputs provided by the WMPC.
  - Following the final meeting of the WMPC, the facilitator’s team compiled a complete report of the WMPC’s input and an executive summary of common themes expressed by the WMPC. The WMPC Input Report is anticipated in January 2022 and will inform the development of the updated wolf management plan.
- Drafting the updated wolf management plan.
  - The public input described above, together with the latest wildlife science and current state law, are being used by the department to inform the updated wolf management plan. Staff have utilized the work completed by the previous DNR Wolf Advisory Committee during the 2012-2015 delisting period by using that draft plan as a non-binding reference point and to focus some discussions of the WMPC.
  - Initial plan writing began by department staff in November 2021 and continues to date. The focus of this effort has been to outline the plan and update the scientific and historical portions of the

plan. Upon receipt of the WMPC Input Report (expected in January 2021), focus will be turned to the policy portions of the plan. Policy items will be discussed and formulated by the department with consideration of the public and WMPC input, state law, and relevant wildlife and social science.

- A first draft of the updated wolf management plan will be released for public review once available (anticipated in February 2022). Following public review, the department will evaluate the feedback and revise the draft plan accordingly. Presentation of the final wolf management plan to the Board is anticipated by mid-2022.

### **Wolf Monitoring Update**

The department conducts snow tracking surveys across the state every winter between November and April. The data collected from these surveys is a central input to the state's scaled occupancy model used to estimate the wolf population abundance (Stauffer et al. 2021). Participation this winter includes over 60 DNR biologists, a number of federal biologists (USDA Wildlife Services, US Forest Service), tribal biologists, and approximately 55 trained volunteer trackers. A total of 375 surveys, covering over 12,000 miles, occurred across the state last winter and we expect at least that much effort this year.

GPS-collared wolves also provide critical monitoring data throughout the year. The department primarily works with USDA Wildlife Services to deploy GPS-collars on wolves throughout the state. The department also coordinates with private trappers to deploy GPS-collars on wolves captured incidentally (i.e., while coyote trapping) to supplement data collection. The number of functioning collars continually fluctuates based on a variety of factors. Currently, there are approximately 20 GPS-collared wolves providing data from packs in various areas of the state.

Winter snow track surveys conclude by April 1, and data analysis will occur in spring 2022 with a winter 2021-22 wolf population abundance estimate expected by summer 2022. Details of the annual wolf monitoring program and other wolf management efforts are compiled into an annual wolf program report and made available on the DNR website.

### **Literature Cited**

Stauffer, G.E., Roberts, N.R., MacFarland, D.M., and Van Deelen, T.R. 2021. Scaling occupancy estimates up to abundance for wolves. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 85(7) 1410-1422. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jwmg.22105>

Drafted by: Randy Johnson, Large Carnivore Specialist