

Frequently Asked Questions

2023 Draft Wisconsin Wolf Management Plan

Background on the Plan

Who wrote the draft and revised draft plans?

- The DNR's Bureau of Wildlife Management took the lead on writing the plan with assistance from staff in several other programs throughout the department.

How was the plan made/reviewed?

The department began developing this wolf management plan in early 2021. Along the way, extensive public input and discourse on the future of wolf populations and management was encouraged, received and considered. Key elements of this process included:

- Establishing a Wolf Management Plan Committee, consisting of representatives of 29 stakeholder groups, agencies and tribes, to provide diverse and inclusive input toward the new plan.
- Completing a scientific assessment of Wisconsin residents' opinions and preferences related to wolves.
- Engaging Wisconsin's Tribal Nations through invited government-to-government consultations and technical meetings with their respective natural resources staff.
- Holding a public review and comment period on the draft version of this plan. Given the amount of public interest, the DNR extended the comment period to 110 days to allow more time for comments. In total, the DNR received around 3,500 public comments and well over 10,000 views of the draft plan on the DNR website.
- Considering all public feedback received during the review period and preparing the revised draft of the plan.

What items influenced the plan's contents?

- The plan and policy recommendations contained within it were developed by the DNR in accordance with current state and federal laws and informed by principles of wildlife management, the scientific literature, interactions with wildlife professionals from other states, the public feedback provided through the processes listed above as well as other sources of public input.

Wolf Management Plan Committee Questions

Who was on the Wolf Management Plan Committee and how were they chosen?

- An application process took place in spring of 2021 for interested stakeholders to participate on the committee, and invitations were sent to government agencies and Wisconsin's tribal nations. Membership was named shortly after.
- The Wolf Management Plan Committee included representation from 29 different entities, ranging from hunting/trapping organizations, wolf advocacy/education groups,

agricultural/ranching organizations, other government agencies, several Wisconsin Tribal Nations and the Wisconsin Conservation Congress.

- [The full membership roster is available on the DNR website.](#)

What role did the Wolf Management Plan Committee play in this process?

- The Wolf Management Plan Committee was formed in 2021 to provide diverse and inclusive input toward the development of the wolf management plan. The committee met for four all-day meetings over the course of several months, and these efforts resulted in a comprehensive report containing all the collective inputs and perspectives shared by the various groups. This report was a key consideration while department staff developed the plan.

The Contents Of The Plan

What's the goal of the proposed wolf management plan?

The stated goal of the Wisconsin Wolf Management Plan is to:

*Ensure a healthy and sustainable wolf population
that fulfills the numerous ecological, cultural and recreational benefits of wolves,
while being responsive in addressing and preventing wolf-related conflicts
and recognizing the diverse values and perspectives of all residents in Wisconsin.*

Six specific objectives have been developed to focus efforts toward achieving this goal. Within each objective, the plan identifies a series of strategies and actionable products to link the objectives to on-the-ground implementation. Each objective also includes a set of metrics to be used in helping measure and evaluate progress toward the objective. The objectives, strategies, products and associated metrics are in Section 4 of the plan.

What's Changing From the Draft Plan?

- The revised draft plan continues to recommend an adaptive management framework instead of a numeric population goal. This draft more explicitly lays out what the contemporary science suggests a biologically sustainable population range might look like in the state. The revised draft plan also discusses how under this plan, natural wolf population dynamics and future wolf harvest levels are expected to **maintain statewide wolf abundance at levels comparable to recent years** (overwinter estimates of approximately **800 to 1,200 wolves**), while also allowing for fluctuations in local wolf densities as necessary to achieve management objectives.
- The revised draft plan includes revised wolf management zone boundaries that better reflect current wolf distribution and an improved understanding of both suitable habitat and conflict potential. **One boundary change** was made to **retain parts of Lincoln County in zone 2** (instead of zone 3).
- Other additions in the revised draft plan are intended to strengthen transparency and clarify misconceptions evident in the comments, including a **clearer goal statement** (referenced above), an **improved executive summary** to provide a concise description of the plan's vision and actions, and **more specific metrics** developed to help gauge the success of management actions.
- The revised draft plan clarifies the objectives within the each of the wolf management zones. Specifically, it recognizes the patchiness of habitat in zones 3 and 4 within the central part of the

state and states that wolf occupancy should not be encouraged in areas of poor-quality habitat within these zones.

- Numerous other language edits and corrections were made based upon public comments and feedback.

Does the plan include hunting and trapping of wolves?

- Wisconsin state law requires the department facilitate a regulated wolf hunting and trapping season any time wolves are not a state or federally listed species.
- With that understanding, the revised draft plan recommends and supports providing an effectively regulated wolf harvest season, including recommendations to improve the implementation of a regulated wolf hunting and trapping season.
- The revised draft plan continues to recognize a hunting season as an important element of a holistic approach to wolf management in Wisconsin. It cites results from the department's 2022 scientific public opinion survey which indicated that support for regulated hunting and trapping of wolves (46%) was higher than opposition (29%); one-quarter of Wisconsinites were undecided on their level of support. The survey also found support was higher among wolf-range residents (57%) than it was for residents outside wolf range (43%; Bradshaw et al. 2022). Finally, it cites other recent research which supports the notion that legal harvest of wolves can increase local tolerance of wolf populations (Richardson 2022), potentially reduce conflicts with humans (Hill et al. 2022) and may lead to reductions in illegal killing of wolves (Liberg et al. 2020, Olson et al. 2015, Suutarinen 2019).

How will future wolf hunting and trapping season quotas be developed?

- The DNR will collect scientific data associated with Wisconsin's wolf population annually, including an assessment of the wolf population and mortality, trends in wolf-related conflict, outcomes of previous year's harvests, and scientific population modeling. This information will be provided to the Wolf Advisory Committee for consideration.
- In years with regulated harvest, the draft plan recommends that the Wolf Advisory Committee provide input and preliminary recommendations to the department on harvest objectives and quotas.
- These recommendations should be based upon careful consideration of many scientific factors including assessment of the wolf population and mortality, trends in wolf-related conflict, outcomes of previous year's harvests, scientific population modeling and legal requirements including off-reservation treaty rights and on-reservation jurisdiction of Native American tribes. Harvest would be allocated by each management zone to achieve the individual management objectives by zone reflecting regional conditions and concerns.

Why doesn't the plan include a specific numeric population goal?

- The plan does not include a specific numeric statewide population size or goal by which to guide management actions. While such goals may be appropriate for a recovering species, static abundance goals often become ineffective and even unnecessary when considering the social, biological and legal complexities of a recovered wolf population. Instead, the plan recommends adjusting management actions and methods, such as conflict abatement and public harvest, in response to conditions observed in the field.
- This style of adaptive management ultimately strives to balance public preferences regarding population sizes and related benefits with potential and realized negative interactions with wolves. It is more scientifically defensible than a static numeric population goal in the face of

future uncertainties and, therefore, also likely to support the long-term maintenance of full management authority upon future wolf delisting.

Will a change in the legal listing status of wolves (delisting/relisting) impact this management plan?

- The plan is applicable when wolves are either listed or delisted, but management options are limited while listed.
- In response to any change in the listed status of wolves, the department will evaluate whether and to what extent the various components of this plan may be applied to ensure consistency with the listed status, the department’s authority and applicable laws.

If a depredation occurs while hunting or training hunting dogs, can someone be compensated for the depredation of their dog?

- Wisconsin Statute s. 29.888 requires that the department provide compensation payments to persons who apply for reimbursement for verified death or injury caused by wolves to hunting dogs (other than those used to hunt wolves) and pets. Current administrative rules place a \$2,500 compensation limit on each hunting dog/pet, and the revised draft plan recommends that reimbursement be continued.

Is the number of wolf depredations higher this year than previous years?

As of July 31, 2023:

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total # of Reported Complaints	66	88	107	63	50
# of Verified Complaints	37	55	56	36	37
# Verified Livestock Complaints	26	43	46	25	31
# of Individual Livestock Producers with Verified Conflicts	19	25	28	16	18
# Verified Pet Complaints	5	2	6	5	1
# Verified Hunting Dog Complaints	6	6	3	5	5
# Verified Human Health & Safety Complaints	0	4	1	1	0

How does the dog training season work?

- The revised draft plan recommends that in years when there is a harvest season, training dogs to hunt wolves would be allowed, beginning when state law authorizes the use of dogs for hunting (currently the Monday following the closure of the regular gun deer season) and ending in each zone upon closure of the zone to wolf harvest.

How do the subzones work?

- There are two types of subzones identified in the wolf management plan, identified as “A” and “B” sub-zones.
- The “A” subzones are designed to direct harvest in areas of the state where there have been historical challenges with wolf depredations. In these zones, the department may issue permits specific to the subzone to increase harvest. In years when increased harvest is not desired, the permit zone designation would include the subzone and zone 1. This may be accomplished in several ways, such as offering additional wolf harvesting licenses valid only within the subzone, allowing any valid wolf harvesting license to also be valid in a subzone or some other alternative or combination of options.
- The “B” subzones are designed to decrease the likelihood of harvesting wolves from reservation wolf packs whose territories extend beyond reservation borders by limiting the total amount of public wolf harvest in these areas. These subzones would be open to public hunting and trapping of wolves on both public and private lands by individuals with a valid wolf harvesting license but be subject to early closure (i.e., before the full zone is closed) if a certain level of harvest was met anywhere within the subzone (“subzone harvest limit”) at a time when the broader zone quota has not yet been met. Harvest in the remainder of the zone would remain open to fulfill the remaining zone quota.

What’s next?

- Now that the plan is out for public viewing, the department is inviting additional consultation with the Tribal Nations.
- We anticipate the plan will go to the Natural Resources Board for approval in October 2023.

Why is there a population management table in the revised wolf plan but not in the bear plan?

- The bear management plan and wolf management plan are similar in their intention to maintain healthy populations of wolves and bears, and they are similar in how they outline quota development for each species. The population table was added to the revised wolf management plan based on a public desire for more clarity regarding the department’s intention with Wisconsin’s wolf population, specifically in relation to the DNR’s intent to maintain the population at a healthy and sustainable level supported by scientific estimates of carrying capacity and while remaining compatible with public desires.
- There is also a heightened sensitivity and interest in wolves, compared to bear. This is evident in the amount of public feedback received for the respective plans. The bear management plan received around 300 comments while the wolf management plan received around 3,500 comments.

The Wolf Rule

What is the rule, and how is it different than the plan?

- The wolf management plan provides a comprehensive summary of wolf ecology and management in Wisconsin and provides a pragmatic vision to wolf management and stewardship in the years ahead. Within the scope of current federal and state law, it details recommended policies and actions that provide a focused and meaningful path forward toward maintaining a healthy wolf population while being responsive in addressing conflicts and assisting those negatively affected by interactions with wolves.

- An administrative rule is the legal implementation of recommendations contained in the plan. While some of the actions recommended in the plan are policies that do not require rulemaking, other actions require administrative rulemaking to implement. This rule does just that.