

Guidance to the Michigan Wolf Management Roundtable

Background and Purpose

The wolf population in Michigan has met the delisting criteria identified in both Federal and State recovery plans. Although removing the wolf from the Federal list of threatened and endangered species has proven legally and administratively difficult, the State could assume primary authority for wolf management in the near future. As the population has recovered, several issues associated with a growing wolf population have emerged. The current Michigan wolf plan focuses more on recovery rather than management and does not adequately address these emerging issues. Thus, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is revising the State wolf management plan to address these issues in the context of State-controlled management.

The public is highly polarized on wolf management, as evidenced by the tremendous amount of public input and litigation that has been associated with management decisions in the United States over the last 30 years. The DNR believes the citizens of Michigan have a significant interest and stake in the future management of wolves and should have an opportunity to deliberate on issues concerning that management. As a result, the DNR is establishing a diverse committee (Wolf Management Roundtable) and charging this group with recommending guiding principles for the DNR to follow when managing Michigan wolves and wolf-related issues once the species is removed from the Federal list of threatened and endangered species.

Overview of the Planning Process

Planning future wolf management in Michigan begins at the strategic planning level. Strategic planning is guided first by existing legal mandates (see below). Within the boundaries of legal authority and responsibility, the agency mission (see below) then provides a basis for overall management of wolves. Once an overall management goal for wolves is established, the priority issues associated with achieving and maintaining that goal must be identified. The next step is to recommend direction for managing the identified issues.

The Roundtable will be asked to review and evaluate the current wolf management goal (see below), to set priorities on management issues it believes should be addressed (see the list provided later in this document), and to recommend direction for addressing those issues. The Roundtable is not expected to recommend specific methods for achieving those goals/policies given the time constraints, but the group may decide it is important to make some recommendations at that level.

Legal and Policy Foundations

The gray wolf is listed as threatened under Michigan Law (Part 365, Endangered Species Protection, of the Natural Resource and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 451) and as endangered under the Federal Endangered Species Act (Public Law 93-205). The wolf

is afforded full protection under both acts by prohibiting the take of wolves. “Take” means to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, collect, or attempt to engage in any such conduct. The State and Federal endangered species laws limit options for managing wolves and wolf-related issues. The revised wolf management plan will be implemented when the species is no longer listed as endangered and threatened and the primary authority for managing the species is returned to the State. Following de-listing as an endangered or threatened species, the wolf will have the status of a protected non-game species under State law. State legislation would be required to change the status to “game species.” Regardless of legal status conferred by the State following de-listing, the DNR will ensure the wolf population remains viable and above a level that would require either Federal or State reclassification as a threatened or endangered species.

DNR Mission

The DNR is committed to the conservation, protection, management, use and enjoyment of the State’s natural resources for current and future generations. The DNR Wildlife Division is committed to the enhancement, restoration and conservation of wildlife resources, natural communities, and ecosystems for the benefit of Michigan citizens, visitors and future generations.

DNR Wolf Management Working Goal

The goal of the original Michigan Gray Wolf Recovery and Management Plan was to establish and maintain a population of gray wolves in the Upper Peninsula at a level that: 1) assures wolf population sustainability; 2) is consistent with available wolf habitat; and 3) is compatible with human land-use practices.

Identified Issues for Consideration by the Roundtable

The DNR has developed a list of management issues based on review of the scientific literature, input from public meetings, and results of a recent public attitude survey. The list is offered to the Roundtable as a resource to be considered. It is likely that not all issues are identified and Roundtable members are encouraged to pursue and develop guidance on any additional issues that emerge during their deliberations.

- Direction is needed for setting goals for the number of wolves and their distribution in Michigan.
 - What relative priorities should be set on biological and social carrying capacities?
 - Are there specific benefits, costs or risks that should be given priority in setting goals?
- Direction is needed to effectively address issues that emerge from the presence of wolves, including depredation on domestic animals (e.g., livestock and pets), wolf behaviors creating public concerns for safety (e.g., “fearless” wolves near human

developments), and public concerns for wolf impacts on other wildlife species.

Associated issues requiring guidance include those such as:

- the selection of intervention methods to avoid wolf problems;
 - strategies to direct the selection and use of methods to remove and/or control “problem” wolves;
 - appropriateness of “zero-tolerance” zones to exclude wolves from areas where there is a high probability of undesirable wolf–human interactions; and
 - strategies to guide responses to deer-hunter concerns that deer-hunting quality is diminished by wolves preying on deer.
- Direction is needed regarding the importance and scope of outreach efforts (public education) as a means of managing wolf-related issues.
 - Direction is needed regarding the question of whether regulated harvest of wolves should be provided as a recreational opportunity (separate from the question of its possible use as a population control method).
 - Direction is needed regarding the selection, development and application of management methods if population control is necessary to achieve population goals. Some potential management options include:
 - regulated hunting and/or trapping seasons for population control;
 - use of trained professionals to cull wolves as a means of population control; and
 - use of sterilization/fertility-control techniques.
 - Direction is needed on recommendations to guide involvement of a diversity of public interests in future wolf management questions.

Process

Roundtable members will work as a team to recommend strategies for wolf management in Michigan. Recommendations of the Roundtable are due December 15, 2006. These recommendations will be incorporated into a draft plan will be reviewed by the DNR Director and the Natural Resources Commission (NRC), and released for a 90-day public comment period. Following the comment period, the Roundtable will reconvene to address comments by the Director, NRC, and the public. A final draft will then be submitted to the Director for approval. Upon final approval, operational guidelines will be developed to implement the approved management plans.

The Roundtable is being charged with the task of working through important and contentious value differences and perspectives that exist in our society, for the purpose of providing recommendations that are supported by consensus of the Roundtable members. This can only be done if each Roundtable member is willing and able to:

- commit adequate time to help the Roundtable develop strategies for wolf management;
- find solutions and common ground during the revision process;
- speak directly for the group she/he is representing;
- propose and accept compromise;

- make an honest and sincere effort to attend all meetings or make arrangements with an appointed alternate;
- work well with those having different interests and ideas regarding the management of wolves in the State; and
- maintain a sense of humor and be cordial and respectful of other's views and interests.