

MICHIGAN WOLF FORUM  
DECEMBER 2012



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*This report was prepared for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources by:*

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**February 18, 2013**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In December 2012, the Michigan Wolf Forum convened to discuss their concerns regarding public harvest of wolves as a management tool for resolving conflicts. Members of the public in attendance were invited to submit written concerns. This discussion was held in response to the passing of Senate Bill 1350. Bill 1350 designated wolves as a game species and authorized a gray wolf hunting season. Forum members and members of the public identified twelve overarching concerns (in alphabetical order):

- 1. Data & Uncertainty*
- 2. Human-Human Conflict*
- 3. Negative Attitudes*
- 4. Poaching*
- 5. Public Engagement*
- 6. Regulations*
- 7. Resources*
- 8. Sustainability of Wolf Populations*
- 9. Use of Management Tools*
- 10. Wolf Conflicts*
- 11. Wolf Pack Dynamics*
- 12. Wolf-Deer Relationships*

Results from this document will inform public engagement activities associated with wolf management, including a survey of Michigan residents. Concerns will be presented via a survey distributed at public meetings held throughout the state during March 2013. Additional next steps include:

- A broader segment of the Michigan public will provide additional feedback on this list of concerns. As a result, these identified concerns may be incorporated into the design, implementation, and evaluation of wolf management activities, including public engagement.
- The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) will evaluate how to effectively and efficiently address these wolf hunting concerns. In some cases, the MDNR may tackle these concerns head-on and in other cases the MDNR may partner with stakeholders to implement management activities.
- The descriptions of concerns offer insight into the language, perspective, and issues most salient to individuals participating in the meeting. Some concerns were defined differently by different stakeholders.
- Education and communication about wolves and wolf management may apply this information in the design and format of wolf management-related messages.

## BACKGROUND

The 2008 Michigan Wolf Management Plan (Wolf Plan) provides strategic guidance for wolf management in Michigan. It was developed to: 1) maintain Michigan wolf population at levels that avoid classification as threatened or endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act; 2) facilitate wolf-related benefits; 3) minimize wolf-related conflicts; and 4) conduct science-based wolf management with socially acceptable methods. The Wolf Plan includes directions for establishing regular communications among agencies, tribes, the public, and other stakeholder groups. These communications will allow interested parties to monitor progress made toward full implementation of the Wolf Plan and provide opportunities for the MDNR to receive input on specific wolf management issues.

To facilitate these benefits, the Wolf Forum was created. Members of the Wolf Forum are representatives from various agencies, tribes, and stakeholder groups that represent the broad array of values and interests concerning wolves and wolf management in Michigan. The Wolf Forum convenes at a minimum once per year to discuss wolf management goals, educational opportunities, conflict resolutions, and other topics as needed; it is not a decision-making authority.

To be considered for Wolf Forum membership, an organization must:

- represent a relevant interest group;
- be acknowledged as an acceptable representative by a majority of that organization;
- have clearly identifiable and extensive interests in wolf-related issues;
- be willing to commit resources (time, travel, personnel) to participate; and
- be able to provide a suitable spokesperson that is cooperative, knowledgeable, open-minded, and dedicated.

The first Wolf Forum meeting occurred in June 2010. The group met again in June 2012 to provide the MDNR with input about priority wolf management items to consider when implementing the Wolf Plan, especially given wolves' delisting by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS). A report summarizing the June 2012 meeting can be found on the MDNR's wolf website ([www.michigan.gov/wolves](http://www.michigan.gov/wolves)) as well as Dr. Gore's website (<http://www.fw.msu.edu/~gorem>).

## DECEMBER 2012 WOLF FORUM

The goals of the December 2012 Wolf Forum were to: 1) continue implementing the Wolf Management Plan; 2) provide an update on action items from the June 2012 meeting; 3) provide an update on wolf management; and 4) identify and discuss major concerns about the potential of a public harvest in Michigan. The topic of a public wolf harvest was added to the agenda as a result of the November 2012 passing of Senate Bill 1350 (which was passed by the House and became Public Act 520 on December 28, 2012). Bill 1350 added wolves to the list of Michigan game species and authorized use of hunting as a management tool to minimize wolf conflicts ([www.legislature.mi.gov](http://www.legislature.mi.gov)). As with other Wolf Forum meetings, the general public was invited to observe.

This report represents a summary of the Wolf Forum members' responses to a possible wolf harvest through public hunting, as well as a summary of written comments submitted by the general public during the meeting.

## CONCERNS

A guiding question for wolf managers is, what are the impacts that concern different stakeholders? Concerns may be related to economic impacts, health and safety, ecological, cultural, social, and psychological. Understanding the concerns of diverse stakeholders helps managers effectively and efficiently focus management programs on the impacts that matter most to stakeholders.

## CONCERNS IDENTIFIED BY WOLF FORUM MEMBERS

Wolf Forum members were asked to detail their concerns regarding public harvest of wolves as a management tool for resolving conflicts. Members were invited to submit an unlimited number of concerns on index cards, which were then grouped by the authors thematically for organizational purposes and reviewed by the Forum as a group. Concerns are listed alphabetically below, along with the specific examples provided by Forum members. Some examples may relate to multiple concerns.

**1. Data & Uncertainty.** A concern that management decisions be based on scientific data and peer-reviewed research as much as possible.

- Base management decisions on scientific data and peer-reviewed research
- Consider the impact of hunting on research projects
- Understand the effects of hunting and impacts on management goal achievement
- Attain more certain wolf population size estimates
- Understand wolf-deer relationships

**2. Human-Human Conflict.** A concern that management decisions consider different stakeholders' values about wolves.

- Conflict among and between cultural views of wolves (e.g., Michigan tribes' spiritual values of wolves, non-tribal values other values)

**3. Negative Attitudes.** A concern that management decisions minimize negative attitudes about wolves and their management.

- Avoid negative attitudes toward wolves
- Fear of wolves and their management
- Increase acceptance of the value of wolves among the hunting public
- Consider perceptions about effects of wolves in ecosystems
- Consider perceptions about safety
- Consider public relations problems with farmers and pet owners

**4. Poaching.** A concern that wolf management programs account for the possibility that wolves may be killed illegally if there is a hunting season.

- Avoid illegal and indiscriminant control methods

**5. Public Engagement.** A concern that the interested public be sufficiently engaged in wolf management.

- Do not make management decisions too fast relative to public input
- Consider public input from people immediately impacted and living within wolf range relative to people living elsewhere who may or may not be directly impacted by wolves
- Acknowledge multiple points of view
- Allow diverse stakeholders and general public to feel they can provide public input in various ways
- Repeatedly solicit sufficiently broad, balanced, and adequate representation from the general Michigan public
- Acknowledge the role of education (for public and legislators) about wolves and wolf management

**6. Regulations.** A concern that wolf management activities are implemented to minimize the potential for lawsuits and demonstrate responsibility.

- Comply with Consent Decree
- Do not depart from conflict-based management as supported by original Wolf Roundtable
- Follow a five year plan for collecting data following delisting that shows effectiveness of the Wolf Management Plan
- Do not allow hunting on public lands to shift management from conflict to recreational management
- Implement regulations commensurate with the appropriate geographic scale and metric (e.g., local wolf abundance)
- Incrementally implement regulations at a slow pace
- Provide trapping opportunities
- Minimize potential for lawsuits similar to those that have occurred in other states (e.g., Minnesota, Wisconsin)

- Prevent the need for wolves to be relisted under the Endangered Species Act

**7. Resources.** A concern that financial resources associated with wolf management be used fairly and efficiently.

- Avoid defunding/underfunding that impacts partnerships with USDA Wildlife Services
- Recognize economic value of wolves as game species
- Generate funding for wolf research and protection
- Balance money spent on wolf management relative to other natural resource management issues

**8. Sustainability of Wolf Populations.** A concern that a sustainable wolf population in Michigan be maintained.

- Acknowledge effects of hunting on long-term sustainability of wolf populations in Michigan
- Acknowledge diseases to wolves and people associated with wolf populations
- Maintain viable wolf populations
- Consider biological and social carrying capacity over the long term

**9. Use of Management Tools.** A concern that existing management tools for reducing wolf-related conflicts continue to be used.

- Adequately leverage tools already available to MDNR to manage conflict
- Use public harvest as a management tool without requiring specific actions by livestock producers and hound hunters first
- Evaluate lethal and non-lethal control methods
- Prioritize lethal control of offending animals over other methods
- Use non-lethal control first and minimize lethal control
- Minimize number of wolves hunted or controlled lethally
- Try other options for resolution of wolf conflicts first; if those options fail, then consider public harvest as a management tool
- Address public acceptance of wolf control programs
- Use all available tools to reduce conflict
- Use tax dollars to fund nonlethal measures
- Address viability of compensation schemes

**10. Wolf Conflicts.** A concern that wolf management activities address the range of wolf conflicts, including conflicts with people, livestock, and pets.

- Address conflict with people, domestic animals and game species
- Address conflicts resulting in public relations problems with farmers and pet owners
- Understand the extent to which hunting increases conflict
- Address fears of losing hunting dogs to wolves

**11. Wolf Pack Dynamics.** A concern that management activities minimize negative impacts on wolf pack dynamics.

- Avoid changes in social dynamics of wolf packs that cause wolves to exhibit undesirable behaviors where previously none existed
- Consider impacts of lethal versus nonlethal control on wolf pack dynamics and population growth
- Maintain stability of wolf packs

**12. Wolf-Deer Relationships.** A concern that negative impacts of wolves on deer populations are minimized.

- Avoid negative impacts of wolf populations on deer populations

## CONCERNS IDENTIFIED BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

Members of the general public in attendance at the Wolf Forum meeting were invited to submit an unlimited number of written concerns regarding use of a public harvest of wolves as a management tool for resolving conflict. Eleven worksheets were submitted. Concerns are grouped thematically for organizational purposes, using the same theme names as above for clarity and convenience. General concerns and examples provided by the public in attendance are listed alphabetically below. An asterisk (\*) denotes a concern unique to the members of the public present during the Wolf Forum meeting.

**1. Data & Uncertainty.** A concern that management decisions be based on scientific data and peer-reviewed research as much as possible.

- Understand effects of hunting on wolf populations
- Base management decisions on scientific data and peer-reviewed research
- Attain more certain wolf population size estimates

**2. Human-Human Conflict.** A concern that management decisions consider different stakeholders' values about wolves.

- Group identity gets used as a proxy for group opinion; do not assume all members of one group such as tribes are against hunting\*
- Acknowledge perceptions of Michigan residents by potential tourists\*

**3. Negative Attitudes.** A concern that management decisions minimize negative attitudes about wolves and their management.

- Address perceptions about wolf impacts on safety, especially children

**4. Poaching.** A concern that wolf management programs account for the possibility that wolves may be killed illegally if there is a hunting season.

- Adequately deter, enforce, monitor, and convict poachers (e.g., fines)\*
- Do not allow an increase in poaching resulting from sale of wolf parts, hides, etc. \*
- Regulate commercial sale of wolf hides\*



**5. Public Engagement.** A concern that the interested public be sufficiently engaged in wolf management.

- Take into account conservation officers and their experiences and interactions with people affected by wolves and wolf management\*
- Consider development of volunteer networks (e.g., wolf tracking)\*
- Obtain opinions of all stakeholders (e.g., hunters, landowners, farmers)
- Seek input, consultation, and partnerships with tribal, state, federal, and local (Upper Peninsula) managers to ensure biological and ecological factors are balanced with political concerns

**6. Regulations.** A concern that wolf management activities are implemented to minimize the potential for lawsuits and demonstrate responsibility.

- Learn from Wisconsin and Minnesota wolf hunting experiences\*
- Consider hunting status of wolves in other states, which may help or hurt a hunt in Michigan\*
- Provide sufficient time before establishing potential wolf hunt
- Address negative impacts of wolf management on MDNR resources (e.g., time, money)

**7. Resources.** A concern that financial resources associated with wolf management be used fairly and efficiently.

- Consider use of the spirit wolf for tourist revenue generation for the state\*

**8. Sustainability of Wolf Populations.** A concern that a sustainable wolf population in Michigan be maintained.

- Acknowledge diseases to wolves and people associated with wolf populations

**9. Use of Management Tools.** A concern that existing management tools for reducing wolf-related conflicts continue to be used.

- Ensure humane and efficient lethal control techniques\*

**10. Wolf Conflicts.** A concern that wolf management activities address the range of wolf conflicts, including conflicts with people, livestock, and pets.

- Hunting a wolf from a pack could change wolf behaviors toward people
- Avoid creating aggressive behaviors by wolves against dogs from use of hunting with dogs
- Address whether wolves have lost their fear of humans and dogs (i.e., pets and hunting dogs)\*

**11. Wolf Pack Dynamics.** A concern that management activities minimize negative impacts on wolf pack dynamics.

- Avoid changes in social dynamics of wolf packs that cause wolves to exhibit undesirable behaviors where previously none existed
- Understand how hunting wolves could change wolf pack behaviors toward people

**12. Wolf-Deer Relationships.** A concern that negative impacts of wolves on deer populations are minimized.

- Avoid negative impacts of wolf populations on deer populations

## CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

Twelve overarching concerns were identified regarding use of a public harvest of wolves as a management tool for resolving conflict. Forum members' concerns with the most examples were public engagement, regulations and use of management tools.

Characterizing the breadth and diversity of concerns regarding public harvest of wolves as a management tool for resolving conflicts reveals a number of noteworthy points. First, the data describe and detail what Forum members think about public harvest as a wolf management tool. Additional research would strengthen the conclusion that this list of concerns represents the opinions of most Michigan residents. Concerns may be incorporated into the design, implementation, and evaluation of wolf management activities. Second, the concerns identified may be addressed through different management activities implemented by diverse stakeholders. MDNR may attend to some concerns whereas partners may address others concerns; for example, the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife and School of Criminal Justice at Michigan State University are currently involved in research exploring stakeholder attitudes associated with wolves and wolf management. Mississippi State University researchers are exploring predator-prey relationships in Michigan. Third, the description of concerns discussed in this report offer insight into the language, perspective, and issues most salient to respondents. Wolf Forum members and members of the public defined concerns differently. Outreach, education, and communication about wolves and wolf management may apply this information in the design and format of wolf management-related messages. For example, concerns described in a similar way may serve as common starting point to develop communication messages and future wolf-related discussions.

Michigan State University researchers will work with MDNR to develop a questionnaire for Michigan residents attending public meetings held during March 2013 in Gaylord, Ironwood, Marquette, Newberry, and Lansing. Residents will have an opportunity to rank relative importance of as well as detail their level of agreement with the concerns. Online surveys will be available as well. Results from this document, coupled with survey findings (ultimately available on MDNR's wolf and Dr. Gore's websites) will inform public engagement and decision making about wolves and their management.