

MINUTES

WOLF MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING

February 19, 2013

Little Bear Arena, St. Ignace, MI

Present for Wolf Management Advisory Council Meeting

Mike Thorman
Dale McNamee
Al Ettenhofer
Steve Schaub
Amy Trotter
Pete Butchko
Richard Pershinski
Merle Shepard
Gary Roloff
Linda Reider
Nancy Warren
Jimmie Mitchell
Russ Mason
Roger LaBine

Present for Staff

Adam Bump
Brian Roell

Facilitators

Meredith Gore
Michelle Lute

Introductions and Housekeeping

At 1:11 Meredith Gore called the meeting to start. She introduced herself. Members introduced themselves.

Changes to WMAC

Bump discussed the agenda and how most of the meeting will be presentations.

Bump discussed changes to the WMAC and the difference between being a "Forum" vs. an "Advisory Council."

The forum is now codified in statute and the name of the group is changing so that it matches what has been codified. Anywhere the forum is mentioned, it will now be the WMAC.

Other statutory modifications to the WMAC:

DNR representative now on WMAC (Wildlife Chief, Russ Mason),
WMAC is now subject to Open Meetings Act. A link to the Open Meetings Act will be posted on the DNR's website. (www.mi.gov/dnr/wolves)

N Warren asked how this group falls under the open meetings act if we are not a decision making body. Bump responded that statute specifically states that the WMAC is subject to the open meetings act.

WMAC will make annual non-binding recommendations on proper wolf management to the NRC and Legislature.

Wolf Management Update

Roell presented update on wolf depredations and wolf survey work.

The 2013 wolf survey is going on right now. The survey is not UP wide. Our latest estimate was in 2011 at 687wolves.

Roell's presentation will be posted on the DNR wolf site.

G Roloff asked how many wolves were collared in 2011. Roell: 35-40 wolves were collared in 2011. In 2012 there were about 30 active collars. Some collars have been lost.

M Thorman asked if they use foot-hold traps. Roell: Yes, modified foot-hold traps are used, designed to minimize the potential for injury.

N Warren asked how often the DNR monitors radio-collared wolves. Roell: In the winter but it is weather dependant. Also in the summer, during fires, sometimes the pilots pick up their activity.

J Mitchell asked what the level of confidence the DNR has in numbers and studies. Roell: Confidence limit is +/- 53 animals. A Michigan Tech project has also verified the DNR survey as effective and accurate. Roell provided further explanation on sampling technique.

Roell continued presentation on wolf depredation of livestock and wolf depredation of domestic dogs.

M Thorman asked if there have been tendencies in particular areas. Roell: Yes, there currently tend to be issues in the East UP.

L Reider asked if the department had done anything to prevent dog depredations and/or notify hunters of these problem areas. Roell: Currently no, because the area isn't easily identifiable. Not sure if it is the same pack or multiple packs. It is a risk that dog hunters have to be aware of and willing to take. The DNR will notify of wolf activity and does post depredation locations online.

Only about 6 packs are known to have depredated dogs. In 2011, only 9% of packs were known to have caused depredation.

N Warren stated that there has been a study done that shows new packs tend to impact livestock more. Roell: Not much evidence of “new” packs in Michigan in recent years. There is a potential for the range of the pack to change.

J Mitchell: Observation that one of Roell’s graphs showed the number of packs involved in depredation on livestock and dogs, but it doesn’t show the actual population of wolves. It doesn’t show that as wolves increase, so do depredation events. Roell: Analysis of wolf population information shows that with roughly every additional 100 wolves, there will likely be an additional 6 livestock depredation events. In addition if the one farm with the most depredations was removed, the relationship between wolf numbers and the number of depredation events was actually stronger.

M Thorman: Where did the \$100,000 come from? Roell: Comes from multiple sources, including from Wildlife Division. R Mason: Funds are coming out of the general fund (tax dollars) as of fiscal year 2013.

N Warren: How do you expect that new law to affect funding for missing livestock? Roell: Payments may go up because missing animals will be covered in some circumstances due to the new bill (PA 487 of 2012).

Roell continued presentation.

R. Pershinski: Are permit holders’ information available to the public? Roell: No.

M. Thorman: What is the protocol if a hunter shoots a wolf that attacked their dog? Roell: You would have to notify the DNR within 12 hours. There are other steps but the most important is to notify and the DNR will let you know what else to do.

L. Reider: You haven’t had a situation where someone has shot a wolf in the ACT of killing their dog? Roell: No.

R. Pershinski: How do you tell if actions are needed to prevent human safety concerns? Roell: A good example is Ironwood. DNR was receiving an increased number of complaints, wolves were just hanging around town, and just becoming way too habituated. DNR implemented non-lethal techniques first then progressed to lethal techniques. There is a system so that if you or your neighbor are having issues, call Brian Roell every time so he can keep track.

L. Reider: What types of non-lethal methods have you attempted? Roell: Fladry, flashing lights, rubber buck shot, harassment, etc. L. Reider: What have you done about people feeding deer? Roell: Worked with local units of government, there is potential to ban feeding within city limits there.

N. Warren: Would the DNR allow a more extensive deer season in the county/city to decrease the deer population? T. Minzey: Historically, it is good deer habitat. There are efforts to limit the number of deer in the town. The city didn’t like the idea of shooting more deer in the city. The DNR is not allowed to make that demand but they are suggesting it.

L. Reider: Has any thought been given to planting hemlock outside of the town? Roell: It is not necessarily an answer. They are slow to grow and they probably won’t even get a chance to grow because the deer will eat it too quick.

T. Demboski: What are wolves afraid of? Roell: People. Generally if you see one, it is running away from you.

Roell stated that he will be sitting in the back for the rest of the meeting so if anyone has questions, ask.

Concerns from December Meeting

Bump discussed concerns regarding the potential use of hunting as a wolf management tool to reduce conflicts from the December WMAC meeting, providing the DNR's initial response to these concerns. Concerns were lumped into 12 categories by M. Gore. Powerpoint presentation summarized the DNR reaction to the concerns.

Bump then went around the room to allow council members to ask questions.

M. Thorman: If there are strong pack dynamics and there is a pack that is acting badly, we should just destroy that pack's dynamics and break up the pack? Bump: What we are saying is that we do not have the information to tell if that would be effective or not. There is no information out there that says we need to take out the whole pack to solve the problem.

A. Trotter: Support the DNR's direction and response and appreciate the directness of Bump's responses. Is there any amount of money that would help to accomplish wolf conflict mitigation and prevention work? Bump: There is no definite number but it would probably be somewhere between \$40,000-\$100,000 to fund USDA Wildlife Services work in 2013. Full funding was not included in the 2013 budget.

D. Pershinski: I have an issue with negative attitudes. For over 12 years, I have been dealing with people who are anxious to be able to do something to wolves on their own. He has been telling his people to sit still and tell them, it is being handled. The negative attitude is going to be dependent on whether or not a wolf hunt occurs. Has there actually been a survey done to get an attitude assessment of locals? M. Gore: In 2010, there was a short survey that was done that addressed wolves in the UP. This survey is weighted according to census data. D. Pershinski: The idea that a public harvest could serve to decrease negative attitudes is exactly how he feels.

M. Shepard: Safari Club has put a lot of money into wolf research. The data is required to understand what we're going to do. Need to understand the effect the wolves have on the deer herd. Need to move forward with the public harvest, one reason to simply decrease negative attitudes.

G. Roloff: DNR responses to WMAC concerns were very consistent to what is in the wolf management plan. Delighted that these decisions are based on sound science, but he recognizes that some information will be missing and we do not know everything. He supports the plan and the idea of using the "best available science."

L. Reider: Concerned about the availability for funding of non-lethal approaches. Concerned that a large amount of the federal funding went unused and that funding is still available. Using non-lethal approaches were to be considered first, prior to a public harvest. Also concerned with the lack of positive education regarding wolves coming out of the DNR. Concerned with the broad survey and

believes there needs to be more public input, possibly via email. There is a great concern from the folks involved with the animal welfare –movement.

N. Warren: Would like to hear from DNR on exactly what the plan for public harvest would be. According to the plan, public harvest should be the LAST resort, after non-lethal techniques. The conversations are beginning to sound like it will be a recreational hunt rather than a conflict-resolution-hunt. Are we looking at 3 zones? 8 zones? We need to hear how you envision this happening.

Bump: The first idea behind the public meetings is to get an idea of what people think. A Wildlife Division recommendation wouldn't be UP wide, it would be by zone. DNR has been looking at a season to resolve more case-by-case situations not looking at broader scales. The Management Plan doesn't say public harvest can only happen when non-lethal techniques have failed, rather they should be attempted first. Even the Roundtable's report states that a public harvest may have recreational benefits, even if the hunt is for conflict-resolution. Agree that the DNR concept of a minimal harvest might be broader than that of N. Warrens.

J. Mitchell: Who are the peer reviewers your science is being reviewed by?

Bump: Peer-reviewed means it has been reviewed by professionals, and/or published.

J. Mitchell: What if pack dynamics are affected? Bump: That is why we use adaptive management. If it doesn't work, we can change how we are managing them.

R. Mason: We have a nationally-known wolf plan that was put together by various stakeholders. We should be proud of where we are. We should follow the wolf plan and stick to it, as the DNR plans to do.

R. LaBine: What would the WMAC be addressing/discussing if it was not for public act 520? Bump: The structure in statute for the WMAC does not say whether we should or should not have a public harvest. We are interested in this now because public act 520 exists. We have enough information to decide if the tool should be implemented or not.

R. LaBine: What education efforts have been offered? He does believe that there are a lot of negative attitudes. No matter how much information is out there, some people will not change their perceptions based on the education the DNR is putting out there. He followed the passage of 520, the testimony and other things and doesn't like how it came to be. Just because of 520, doesn't mean we should rush into a hunt. We need to take our time.

Information and discussion on Upcoming Public Meetings

Bump presented meeting schedule for upcoming public meetings and tentative agenda for the meetings..

Presentation and Discussion on WMAC Recommendation Development Process

M. Gore outlined role of WMAC, how to be successful and recommended process for the Paril meeting where the WMAC recommendation on wolf management would be developed.

Gore asked for input on the meeting structure, etc. WMAC members provided suggestions on meeting times, request for information to aid in development of recommendations, and asked about the process for the meeting in April.

Natural Resources Commission member John Madigan addressed the WMAC and let members know that the NRC appreciates the time the WMAC is putting into this issue. The NRC understands the WMAC has passion and commitment and looks forward to the recommendation given by the WMAC to the NRC. He challenged the WMAC to bring forward some good recommendations so that the NRC can make the best decisions possible to make. He will report back what he heard today the NRC.

MSU Survey

H. Triezenberg: Overview of an MSU survey on stakeholder engagement, handed out survey to WMAC.