

Wisconsin's Green Fire: Voices for Conservation

December 14, 2017

For Immediate Release

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Proposed legislation limits Wisconsin DNR's management of wolves.

The Wisconsin legislature is considering bills that will prohibit Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) from providing essential functions to monitor and manage wolf populations. Wisconsin's Green Fire, a nonpartisan organization of natural resource professionals, has evaluated both Senate Bill 602 (SB 602) and its companion Assembly Bill 712 (AB 712) in order to provide an analysis of the potential science and resource management impacts of these bills.

Currently gray wolves are listed as an endangered species in Wisconsin. The recovery of gray wolves across the upper Midwest is a conservation success story supported by the efforts of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan to encourage and establish sustainable populations. Science-based state wolf management plans and skilled conservation staff are currently in place to ensure and support healthy and sustainable wolf populations while going forward in providing compensation and other assistance for cases of depredation. SB 602 and AB 712 propose to remove Wisconsin DNR's authority to manage and monitor wolf populations, leaving in place only their ability to provide financial compensation for cases of depredation.

Wisconsin DNR has been working hard to cost effectively monitor and track wolf populations in order to better inform decision making. Accurate population estimates are at the core. They allow Wisconsin DNR to assess how wolf population levels relate to number of depredations (livestock, pets, etc.) and deer population trends. Current and continuous data on individual wolves is also critical to understanding the impacts and efficacy of management actions such as establishment of wolf harvest seasons and depredation removals, and serves to guide future management decisions. Since 1995, the DNR has trained and used data from volunteer carnivore trackers. Wisconsin has also initiated Project SnapShot to make use of trail cameras in order to track wildlife species occurrence and abundance in our state. Wolf images captured in this effort provide information on annual reproduction and geographic distribution of wolves. Wolf data from these programs would no longer be analyzed and recorded by DNR if SB 602 and AB 712 were to become law.

DNR also uses enforcement to responsibly manage wolves in cooperation with other jurisdictions. Language in the proposed bills would put law enforcement staff on notice not to respond in certain circumstances, even though they are sworn officers of the law. In other circumstances DNR officers would be called upon to interpret vague language such as what might legally constitute "knowingly" enforcing or "attempting" to enforce the law. The proposed legislation as it is written creates a number of loopholes for violators and effectively removes WDNR's legal authority to respond.

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Tom Hauge, Wisconsin Green Fire's Fish and Wildlife Workgroup Co-chair, stated, "If DNR is to be successful in overall management of wildlife including wolves, they will need to collect the scientific data that supports wolf management plans. That data includes regional and local wolf population monitoring information, depredation data, and potential wolf harvest data. Prohibiting wolf population monitoring and removing DNR's authority to enforce laws to prevent illegal killing of wolves would derail Wisconsin's wolf recovery efforts."

Wisconsin Green Fire formed to help government officials, nonprofit organizations, media, decision makers and citizens get the scientific information they need to address local and regional conservation issues. Wisconsin's Green Fire is a nonpartisan and independent organization formed in April 2017. Members have extensive experience in natural resource management, environmental law and policy, scientific research, and education. For more information or to view Wisconsin Green Fire's full analysis of proposed SB 602 and AB 712 wolf management restrictions visit www.wigreenfire.org or email us at info@wigreenfire.org.

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