

**COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries
North Pine Government Center
1602 Highway 23 North, Sandstone, MN 55072**

Testimony regarding:

**“How Many Wolves Are Enough? Examining the Need to Delist the Gray Wolf”
Friday, May 3, 2024; 10:00 a.m. (CT)**

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Mr. Chairman, Members:

- I'd like to share some thoughts about wolf recovery in Michigan. I'm here today representing 50,000 members of Safari Club International, and Safari Club Foundation, a 501(c)3 organization that annually spends over four million dollars to promote science-based wildlife conservation worldwide.
- By any measure, wolves in the Great Lakes States of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan have recovered.
- Recovery of gray wolves as described by both federal and state recovery plans has been met and exceeded in Michigan since 1994.
- When the Endangered Species Act was signed in 1973, few, if any of us, would have given wolf recovery in this region much of a chance to succeed. However, we were wrong. Due to the legal protections provided by the Endangered Species Act and the will of the people of the Midwest, gray wolves have now occupied most of the range suitable for the species. I'm here to speak about my experience with wolves in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, an area of roughly 16,500 square miles.
- In the most recent 10 years, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan mid-winter wolf population has been documented to be 620-700 animals. This has been a leveling off of wolf numbers since its rapid increase from just three known animals in 1988. Each year with the birth of pups, this population easily doubles. However, because of high mortality, especially among pups, and natural mortality and dispersal of adults, the Michigan population returns to mid-winter numbers that have recently been recorded.

- Michigan wolves' primary diet is whitetail deer. Studies have indicated deer represent roughly one-half of their annual food intake. The remainder of their diet is beaver, snowshoe hare, moose, and other small mammals. Wolves are opportunistic predators and normally will consume any food source available to them. In Michigan, as in many other states, wolves exist in the proximity to agriculture. Livestock are often preyed upon. Currently, livestock producers are compensated for losses that can be verified. Ninety verified cattle depredation events have occurred in the past 10 years in Michigan (2014-2023). In our state many of us believe wolves may also be responsible for some unverified livestock disappearance.
- Wolves are territorial predators, with packs that vigorously defend a home range, an area that averages about 80 square miles in Michigan. Nearly all of Michigan's Upper Peninsula land base is now within the bounds of a defended territory. Our current average pack size is about five wolves. However, there are packs with as many as a dozen wolves in Michigan. Wolves are particularly sensitive to other canids within their territories. For example, coyotes that share territories with wolves are in constant danger.
- A special category of loss due to wolf depredation is the killing and injuries of pets, particularly dogs. In Michigan, 111 dogs have been verified to have been killed by wolves and 49 dogs have been injured by wolves. These numbers should be viewed as minimums, since many dogs in wolf range have disappeared and injuries often are not reported. No owner compensation is offered for the loss of dogs. These animals are in so many ways "family members". When pets are killed by wolves, wolves themselves, and the people standing in the way of practical solutions to these depredations, quickly gain new enemies from which there is no recovery.
- The societal culture of Michigan's Upper Peninsula values whitetail deer highly. Our people are second and third generation descendants of western European and Scandinavian immigrants. Our "second homes", typically, are camps, used for many outdoor pursuits, but primarily for deer hunting. The plummeting of deer numbers since the mid-1990's has negatively affected this important cultural value. Most of the blame for deer declines can be explained by habitat deficiencies. However, wolves are being singled out as "the" factor draining the deer population. This has led to increasing non-support for wolves and an increase in illegal killing of wolves. Today, 60% of radio collared wolves die at the hands of man.
- There's an aspect of our current situation that particularly concerns me. Since their re-establishment, wolves have not been subject to any regulated and widespread removals by man. As an apex predator, wolves typically exhibit fearlessness. Wolves have no natural "enemies". Nothing kills wolves, except man. This has been a period of protection offered by the Endangered Species Act, and generally in absence of human persecution. I believe this has led to an increase in the number of bold wolf incidents; that is, close encounters between humans and wolves. Nothing good can come of these interactions. Eventually if a person is injured or worse by wolves, all of the protections and values that wolves bring to the Northwoods may be threatened. All of the efforts to re-establish wolves may be lost. The success story of recovery may be replaced by old prejudice and a public will to exterminate wolves.

- To many people in Michigan, the promises of the Endangered Species Act have been broken, and a breach of trust has occurred. The legislation appears to be an effective listing mechanism, but a failure at de-listing. Recovery goals, long since exceeded, are inadequate to prevent litigation that keeps wolves listed and does not allow State's natural resources agencies to protect and manage wolves.
- All state agencies are committed to sustainable wildlife management, including predators. It is ironic that the law intended to recover endangered wildlife (Endangered Species Act) is now setting the stage for the public to turn against this iconic species. The failure of Endangered Species Act to delist wolves is not because of a failure of the public to embrace wolves, or because of some negative aspect of the wolves themselves. This is a failure of clear intent of the legislation and the continued allowance of glaring misinterpretation of intent by the justice system.
- I offer the following as a partial solution to the dilemma that we find ourselves in:
 - The Endangered Species Act needs to be recrafted and "hardened" against language that has been successful at exploiting and reinterpreting original Legislative intent for the recovery of a species.
 - The Endangered Species Act needs to more effectively address and provide flexibility in cases of dangerous human-wolf conflict (i.e., bold wolves). This conflict was not foreseen when the Act was initiated.
 - State management of wildlife resources in North America has been a resounding success for nearly 100 years. As a wildlife biologist that has been involved in wolf recovery efforts, I believe that sustainability of the gray wolf population in all of the United States should be the authority of state wildlife agencies.
 - Where current criteria have been met for delisting, management of wolves should immediately be a state function, subject to oversight by the US Fish and Wildlife Service for a determined period of time.
 - Thank you.