

May 3, 2024

Representative Cliff Bentz
2nd District, Oregon
Chairman
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chairman Bentz,

The Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan Farm Bureaus, collectively representing over 290,000 members, want to thank the House Committee on Natural Resources subcommittee for holding a field hearing on wolf populations. The three states are home to an estimated 4,200 wolves and request federal delisting of the Great Lakes Wolf and returning management to the states.

The Great Lakes wolf should be the definitive conservation success story. After federal protections were established, the wolf population in Minnesota began to increase and expand its range. Recently, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Wolf Population Update conducted in 2023 estimated that the 2022-2023 mid-winter wolf population was 2,919 wolves. In the mid to late 1970s, this expansion led to wolves naturally recolonizing northwest Wisconsin and the first breeding pack was confirmed in Douglas County in 1978.

While initial population growth was slow, by the mid-1990s, Wisconsin's wolf population began to increase and expand steadily. Wolves in the Western Great Lakes region surpassed federal recovery goals in the winter of 1999-2000, when Wisconsin and Michigan had a combined total of 100 wolves for five consecutive years, and the population in Minnesota continued to grow. This growth has now expanded past the minimum levels determined for a healthy wolf population, and in particular in Minnesota, where a healthy population is determined to be at 1,600 wolves statewide. Michigan's population has also surpassed the initial goal of 200 animals for five consecutive years as initially outlined in the state's management plan. Surveying from 2022 reported a minimum estimated population of 631 wolves, with the highest densities in the Western Upper Peninsula.

Wolves in each state would not have been able to thrive if it weren't for the support of the residents and farmers in each state. A survey by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources found that over 60% of those living in wolf habitat support wolf populations on the landscape but also support state management.

Unfortunately, wolf management has become a difficult situation because of judicial rulings that often take place thousands of miles from the affected landscape. The end result has left farmers unable to protect their herds beyond installing non-lethal conflict mitigation measures that merely push the problem wolves to the next farm down the road. This leaves farmers feeling helpless to protect their livelihood and less likely to support the continuation of predators on the landscape and non-lethal mitigation efforts.

The Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan Farm Bureaus support returning wolf management to the states. It's time to celebrate wolves for the conservation success story they are and end the judicial back and forth. Each state has proven the ability to appropriately manage wolves and we hope Congress will finally act to ensure farmers can defend their herds.

Sincerely,

Brad Olson
President, Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation

Dan Glessing
President, Minnesota Farm Bureau

Carl Bednarski
President, Michigan Farm Bureau