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# CHANZ GREEN

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 74<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023

## Testimony on Assembly Bill 137

### Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage

Thank you, Chairman Pronschinske and other Assembly committee members, for having a hearing on Assembly Bill 137, which would establish a statewide wolf population goal.

Every successful management plan has a set goal, and even though the Wisconsin DNR has worked with the public in establishing their current wolf management plan, it does not have a set population goal. I have talked to a lot of constituents up north about wolf management, and they want to see a population number put in place.

Other states, like Idaho and Wyoming, have a set population goal when it comes to gray wolves; why shouldn't Wisconsin? Idaho's wolf management plan states, "The Plan identifies goals and strategies to reduce wolf numbers and to manage Idaho's wolf population to fluctuate around 500 animals." Wyoming's plan states the "minimum population requirement of greater than or equal to 150 wolves and greater than or equal to 15 breeding pairs."

This bill would require the DNR to establish a wolf population goal. This bill does not change the existing framework concerning the wolf harvest season. It merely requires the DNR to have a population goal in its wolf management plan. How the DNR manages the population to get to that goal is already in their management plan and is not impacted by this bill.

I am grateful for the opportunity to work on this bill with my colleague from the Senate, Senator Stafsholt. Thank you for your time today, and thank you for your consideration of this bill.



# ROB STAFSHOLT

STATE SENATOR • 10<sup>th</sup> SENATE DISTRICT

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P.O. Box 7882  
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**DATE:** November 8, 2023  
**RE:** Testimony on Assembly Bill 137  
**TO:** Members of the Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage  
**FROM:** Senator Rob Stafsholt

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Thank you Chairman Pronschinske and members of the Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage for hearing Assembly Bill 137 relating to establishing a statewide wolf population goal.

This is a very simple bill that requires the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to include an exact number for the wolf population goal in their wolf management plan. This bill does not change existing framework concerning a wolf harvest season, and it does not dictate a specific number. It merely requires the DNR to have a population goal in its wolf management plan. How the DNR manages the population to get to that goal is already in their management plan, and is not impacted by this bill. This bill simply requires the plan to use a population goal number in Wisconsin.

Again, thank you for allowing me to testify on Assembly Bill 137. I would appreciate your support on this piece of legislation.



## Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage

### *Assembly Bill 137* *Establishing a Statewide Wolf Population Goal.* *November 8, 2023*

Good morning, Chair Pronschinske, and members of the Committee. My name is Randy Johnson, and I serve as the Large Carnivore Specialist for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. With me today to help answer questions is Eric Lobner, Director of the Wildlife Management Program. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to Assembly Bill 137, relating to establishing a statewide wolf population goal.

Since early 2021, the department has been working hard to develop an updated state wolf management plan. This process has included extensive public input and engagement, detailed reviews of relevant wildlife and social science, and ongoing conversations with Wisconsin's Tribal Nations. We've gone to great lengths to listen to the public's diverse perspectives regarding wolf management and develop a plan that strikes a balance among these diverse interests. We presented the resulting plan to the Natural Resources Board at their October 25<sup>th</sup> meeting for their review and consideration. After considerable public testimony and discussion, the Board voted unanimously to approve the plan with an amendment to the sub-zone harvest limit for subzones 1B.

The approved wolf management plan recognizes the biologically recovered status of gray wolves in Wisconsin and turns attention from wolf recovery to long-term sustainable management of wolves in the state. It demonstrates the state's dual commitments of maintaining a sustainable and ecologically functional wolf population while also being responsive in addressing wolf-related conflicts and concerns.

Notably, the plan does not include a targeted statewide population size or goal by which to guide management actions. While such numeric population goals may be appropriate for a recovering species, having static abundance goals often becomes ineffective and even unnecessary when considering the social, biological, and legal complexities of a recovered wolf population. In addition, there are some significant challenges with determining what is the 'appropriate' population number that reflects the broad range of social preferences among the Wisconsin public and the biological considerations of a dynamic wildlife population. Further, a single statewide numeric population goal may fail to consider the geographic distribution of wolves in the state and varying levels across the state as biological and social carrying capacities change over time in one location to the next.

Instead, the plan recommends adjusting management actions, such as conflict abatement and public harvest, in response to real-world conditions observed on the ground. This style of adaptive management ultimately strives to find ongoing balance among the public's preferences regarding the benefits of wolves and negative interactions with wolves. It is more scientifically defensible than a static numeric population goal and, therefore, also more likely to support the long-term maintenance of full management authority upon future wolf delisting.

Utilizing the adaptive management approach identified in the management plan, changes in wolf population abundance and distribution would be the result of varying levels of regulated public harvest of wolves, when legally allowed, as well as natural wolf population dynamics. Based on state statute, an annual regulated wolf harvest season would occur when wolves are not listed on the federal or state endangered species list, with management and harvest actions informed by this plan and designed to help balance the objectives identified in the plan.

This approach is expected to generally maintain statewide wolf abundance and distribution at levels comparable to recent years, while explicitly allowing for fluctuations in local wolf densities, including population reductions as warranted.

In response to public feedback and to provide additional transparency in expected statewide population sizes under this plan, a table with various statewide population sizes and likely statewide population management outcomes was added to the revised version of the plan. The intent of this table is to provide guidelines only and does not establish any population size as a management goal. The information in this table was developed based upon the prevailing wildlife science and a full suite of biological and social factors, including recognition that the Wisconsin wolf population has biologically recovered.

Any future wolf harvest recommendations should consider not only these guidelines, but also the objectives and metrics of the management plan, legal requirements, any scientific developments, and other relevant biological and social factors. The department's wolf advisory committee should play a key role in this process to ensure inclusion of all perspectives during these discussions.

This plan provides a practical vision for wolf management and stewardship in the years ahead. If fully implemented, this plan would support the perpetuation of a healthy wolf population in Wisconsin to fulfill its numerous roles and benefits, while also being responsive in effectively addressing wolf-related conflicts and concerns, particularly for those who are most affected by living or recreating among wolves in Wisconsin.

On behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, we would like to thank you for your time today. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Testimony on Assembly Bill 137

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Committee Members, for this hearing today and for the opportunity to comment on Assembly Bill 137.

The Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation (WFBF) is the state's largest general agriculture organization with over 47,000 members. WFBF represents farms of different sizes, commodities and management styles. WFBF appreciates Senator Rob Stafsholt and Representative Rob Swearingen for introducing legislation to establish a state wolf population goal.

WFBF supports many of the goals and objectives in the Wolf Management Draft Plan and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) ongoing efforts to maintain a healthy wolf population. While the 2023 Wolf Management Plan doesn't define a healthy wolf population, the previous wolf management plan used the latest science and computer simulations to estimate a wolf population of 300-500 wolves has a high probability of persisting for 100 years. The 1999 plan established a state-delisting goal of 250 wolves and a management goal of 350 wolves. WFBF supports returning to 1999 management goal for a healthy wolf population.

Wisconsin Farm Bureau has concerns associated with the Wolf Management Plan. Our principal concern, and one we advocated for as a member of the Wolf Management Plan Committee, is the lack of a numeric population goal. The updated 2007 plan has a numeric population goal of 350 wolves. The plan instead favors an adaptive management approach in which a set of ambiguous objectives are set. The lack of a set numeric goal makes setting consistent zone harvest quotas virtually impossible as these objectives are broadly stated and easily redefined by the department.

In response to overwhelming public comments, the department was forced to add guidance with management goals based on population sizes. During the discussion of the Wolf Management Plan Committee, 10 members of the committee supported returning to a numeric population model. Unfortunately, the department has stated the population management goals added to the plan are simply guidance, not to be used to inform management decisions.

Throughout the process DNR has ignored rural Wisconsin and instead chosen a process that allows out of state special interests to drown out rural voices. WFBF, along with other rural stakeholders, have advocated for an in person public hearing on the wolf management plan. DNR has instead held online comment periods that have not differentiated Wisconsin residents from out of state special interests. DNR's process weighs a resident of California's opinion the same as Wisconsin, this is just wrong and a disservice to rural Wisconsin residents who live every day with the threat of wolf-related conflict.

While WFBF supports the intent of Assembly Bill 137, we would recommend a slight change in language. On line 8, WFBF recommends inserting the word "numeric" between statewide and wolf and "of 350 wolves" at the end. Line 8 would then read "that establishes a statewide numeric wolf population goal of 350 wolves."

In conclusion, Wisconsin Farm Bureau supports the intent of Assembly Bill 137. WFBF would ask the authors to amend the language to clarify the intent of the authors to the department. Again, thank you to Senator Rob Stafsholt and Representative Rob Swearingen for authoring Assembly Bill 137.

Tyler Wenzlaff  
Director of National Affairs  
Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation

**Wednesday, November 8, 2023**

## **Comments on AB 137, Establishing a Statewide Wolf Population Goal**

### **Wisconsin's Green Fire.**

Chair Pronschinski and members of the Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage,

My name is Adrian Wydeven, I am representing Wisconsin's Green Fire, a statewide organization dedicated to science in natural resource conservation.

I was a wildlife biologist for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources from 1982-2015, and I headed up the team that developed the 1999 wolf plan, that established a 350 management goal for the state wolf population. I currently am the co-chair of the wildlife committee in WGF and continue to be active in wolf conservation work and wolf population monitoring.

**Wisconsin Green Fire opposes the establishment of a statewide wolf population goal for the state wolf population.** As with bears, deer, turkeys, and many other wildlife, a statewide goal is not necessary for managing the state wolf population. A numeric goal makes it more difficult for the Department to maintain flexible adaptive management and being able to rely on the latest science for sound wolf conservation. An arbitrary numeric management goal will not be helpful for getting wolves delisted and achieving more flexible state management authority on the wolf population. Wisconsin's Green Fire has recently produced a report to explain why the old management goal of 350 wolves is no longer suitable for managing wolves in the state, [WGF -350-Wolf-Goal-for-WI ConsBulletin 17Jul23-FINAL.pdf \(wigreenfire.org\)](#)

The recently passed wolf plan (October 25, 2023), focuses on ecological benefits and reducing wolf conflicts by 6 zones across the state that better addresses management needs to localized areas. The current population is about 1000 wolves, and the Department hopes to manage the population between about 800-1200. The plan includes subzones with high levels of livestock depredation, where harvest can be focused to reduce wolf numbers in areas of high conflict, without the need to reduce wolves across areas of suitable habitat where few conflicts exist.

In 2019 the Department developed a new bear plan for Wisconsin that did not include the previous goal of 11,300 bears. The current population is about 25,400 bears in Wisconsin, more than twice the last population goal, yet there is no outcry to establish and bear population goal.

The reasons given for establishing a low population goal for wolves, would apply more to bears.

- **Bears cause more agricultural damage than wolves;** in 2022 bears caused \$148,743 in agricultural damage, while wolves caused \$60,873, or less than half of the damage caused by bears.

- **Bears cause more nuisance complaints than wolves;** in 2022, 143 bears were relocated because of nuisance and property damage, and another 437 bears were relocated because of agricultural damage, while only 3 wolves caused human safety/nuisance complaints.
- **Bears kill more deer than wolves;** bears kill about 1 1/2 fawns per bear, and wolves kill about 20 deer per wolf, thus a population of 25,400 bears would kill about 38,000 deer compared to 1000 wolves killing about 20,000 deer, so nearly twice as many by bears.
- **Bears are more of a threat to human safety** and more likely to attack people; since 1900 there have been 79 people killed by black bears in North America, compared to 4 by wolves, of which two were people bitten by wolves with rabies.
- **Bears likely attack and kill more dogs** than wolves, as reported by many hound hunters, and based on reports by northern veterinarians.

All these reasons would argue for more reasons to establish numeric goals for bears. As with bears, we feel wolf goals should be based on ecological, cultural, recreational, and other benefits, while reducing conflicts. Numeric goals alone do not serve well for either species.

Numeric population goals are not useful for attaining or maintaining delisting status for wolves in Wisconsin. Neither Minnesota nor Michigan have numeric goals. A low numeric goal for Wisconsin wolves, would likely incentivize lawsuits to keep wolves on the endangered species list. Low numeric goals that would require drastic reduction in state wolf numbers and wolf range, would discourage the federal government, congress or citizens from supporting wolf delisting in our area, and likely encourage lawsuits.

Wisconsin farmers, hunters, trappers, and other citizens are best served by a wolf management plan that focuses on sound science, ecological benefits and flexible state management to reduce conflicts, instead of relying on a low numeric goal that stymies sound management.

**Wisconsin's Green Fire urges the Sporting Heritage Committee to reject attempts to create an arbitrary population goal for Wisconsin's wolves, and support the Wolf Plan passed by the Natural Resource Board on October 25, 2023.**

Thank you,

Adrian Wydeven, Co-Chair, Wildlife Group, Wisconsin's Green Fire,

Cable, WI

[adrianwydeven@cheqnet.net](mailto:adrianwydeven@cheqnet.net)



# WISCONSIN WILDLIFE FEDERATION

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On behalf of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Assembly Bill 137. The Federation is the state's largest conservation organization with over 200 affiliate organizations with the great majority being local rod and gun clubs across the state. Hundreds of members of our organization and our affiliates live in parts of the state having a substantial number of wolves. A major part of the Mission of the Federation is advocating for sound conservation policies in Wisconsin and the country with an emphasis of fish, wildlife and their habitats. The Federation has been and remains a strong supporter of sound and professional natural resource management.

The Federation has long been involved with the issue of wolf management in the state. The Federation has been a very active supporter of protecting and recovering endangered species in the state including the recovery of wolves in the Upper Midwest. The Federation was significantly involved in the development of the 1999 and the 2006 wolf management plans and has been very active in the process to develop the new DNR Wolf Management Plan. The Federation has been on every DNR Wolf Stakeholder Advisory Committee ever established and recently WWF hosted three public hearings in Northern Wisconsin in which many farmers, other landowners and sportsmen and women detailed the adverse effect that wolves have had on them and their families.

The Federation agrees with the concept of AB 137 that the Department of Natural Resources Wolf Management Plan should be required to contain a statewide population goal. We do however believe that the Committee should consider amendments to the bill better defining and clarifying what the population goal should entail.

1. We recommend that the Committee specify that the new Wolf Management Plan continue the practice of the 1999 and 2006 plans in establishing a specific numerical statewide population goal for wolves. A plan that would include a non-numerical, narrative type statewide wolf population goal will lead to the real potential of highly subjective interpretations and disagreements on when the wolf population is above, below or at the goal. Wolf management is and is likely to continue as a controversial issue in the state and it is important that the Wolf Management Plan goal contain an objective numerical standard for management purposes.
2. We also recommend that the Committee should specify that the numerical wolf population goal reflect the need to significantly reduce the adverse effects of wolf predation on farmers, other landowners and sportsmen and women. Sound natural resource management needs to reflect not only the biological carrying capacity of a species but also the social carrying capacity which gives substantial weight to the impacts on local individuals adversely affected by wolves.
3. Lastly, we recommend that the Committee should establish a realistic timeline for the Department to bring the state's wolf population to be at or near a numerical population goal. There is ongoing significant adverse impact from wolf predation on farmers, other landowners and sportsmen and women and it is critically important



that the wolf population in the state be managed in a timely manner to reduce the harm to those that are being significantly harm by the wolf population. However, the pace of the reduction of the wolf population to a proper numerical goal reflecting the social carrying capacity needs to be done in a careful and possibly phased manner.

Once again, the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation thanks you for the opportunity to share our position on this very important matter.

Submitted by George Meyer on behalf of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation  
November 7, 2023



# Wisconsin Bear Hunters' Association, Inc.

To: Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage  
From: Wisconsin Bear Hunters' Association  
Date: Wednesday, November 8, 2023  
RE: AB 137

The Wisconsin Bear Hunters Association (WBHA) supports SB 139. Wisconsin hunters, and other stakeholders, deserve to have certainty regarding the state's plan to manage wolves.

WBHA is in support of developing a useful wolf management plan. We were integrally involved in the creation of a statutory wolf harvest season and have been frustrated by the continued court challenges to the delisting of wolves by animal rights extremists.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has made sure the wolf population in our state is healthy enough to merit delisting. Historically, they have done an excellent job of managing wolf harvest seasons, despite most recently resisting to have a season altogether.

However, the recently approved wolf management plan comes short of our expectations. WBHA and many other sporting organizations, farm groups, and local governments have long supported an over winter population goal of 350 wolves. We support the management tools in place to achieve this goal.

Although the plan has outlined some population numbers, the plan does not tie any particular management practices to those numbers. This leaves the citizens of Wisconsin in the dark regarding management practices, and gives the DNR total control of the plan implementation without any accountability.

Additionally, the plan does not address the significant shortfall in the DNR's efforts to accurately account for all the wolves in the state. The plan seems to ask for more road closures on public lands – which will prevent hunters and other citizens from accessing our taxpayer funded lands. In particular, the plan seems biased against hunters and hound hunters.

Additionally, the wolf plan contains buffer zones around tribal lands which will leave farms unprotected and hunters with less opportunities to harvest wolves or to protect their hunting dogs from depredation.

**We support AB 137 as a great step towards creating a more responsive and workable wolf management plan.**



**Testimony to the Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage  
in opposition to Assembly Bill 137**

**November 8, 2023**

On behalf of the Humane Society of the United States and our supporters, I am writing in opposition to Assembly Bill 137. The best available science supports the DNR's decision to remove an outdated and unscientific numeric population goal from the wolf management plan. As written, this bill would force the DNR to manage wolves based on politics, not sound science.

Numerical population goals are outdated thinking. Most wildlife management plans have goals related to land and habitat conservation, not numeric limits. In fact, the current black bear management plan includes an objective to eliminate the numeric population goals that were defined in state statute, an action that was accomplished in 2020. Likewise, Wisconsin does not have a statewide deer population goal either. In speaking with the DNR, the few remaining plans that do include numerical population goals are considered older plans in need of updating or plans for species not yet well established in the state.

Additionally, the majority of Wisconsinites value wolves. According to the 2022 survey conducted by the Wisconsin DNR, 66% of Wisconsin residents want the same number or more wolves in the state, compared to just 19% who want fewer wolves.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, compared to a similar 2014 survey, higher proportions of both residents who live in areas with wolves and those who don't would like about the same number or more wolves.<sup>2</sup> In other words, support for a wolf population at the current level or higher is growing, even among residents who share the landscape with wolves. Furthermore, a 2021 survey conducted by Remington Research Group found that 60% of Wisconsinites oppose the trophy hunting and trapping of wolves, compared to just 24% who support such seasons.<sup>3</sup>

For years this species, beloved by Wisconsinites and tourists, has been persecuted and politicized. No other species in Wisconsin has had its fate determined by lawmakers.

Finally, wolf populations do not need to be "managed" to specific numbers through human intervention.<sup>4</sup> Scientific studies show that wolf populations are generally limited by prey availability, as well as disease, human densities, terrain, and their own territorial and social nature.<sup>5</sup> Wolves do not need to be "controlled" to an arbitrary numerical goal, but rather the goal should be for Wisconsin to have a self-sustaining, self-regulating, and genetically diverse population that maintains connectivity with wolf populations in neighboring states and fulfills its



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES**

ecological role. Killing even one wolf may destabilize a wolf pack leading to unintended consequences for Wisconsin's farmers.<sup>6</sup> It's time to move to new peer-reviewed science about wolf management—where we prioritize co-existence over random, wanton killing.

For all of these reasons, I respectfully ask that you vote no on Assembly Bill 137.

Sincerely,

Megan Nicholson  
Wisconsin State Director  
The Humane Society of the United States  
[mnicholson@humanesociety.org](mailto:mnicholson@humanesociety.org)

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<sup>1</sup> Bradshaw, L., Beardmore, B., Henry, M., Scott, A., & Holsman, R. (2022). Public opinions regarding wolves and wolf management in Wisconsin: A technical report to the Bureau of Wildlife Management from the Analysis Services Section, Bureau of Environmental Analysis & Sustainability, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Remington Research Group. (June 2021). Wisconsin public opinion. <https://www.humanesociety.org/sites/default/files/docs/WI%20Statewide%20Public%20Opinion%20Survey%20060821.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., Wallach, A. D., Izhaki, I., Toms, J. D., Ripple, W. J., & Shanas, U. (2015). What is an apex predator?. *Oikos*, 124(11), 1453-1461.

<sup>5</sup> Cariappa, C. A., Oakleaf, J., Ballard, W., and Breck, S. 2011. A reappraisal of the evidence for regulation of wolf populations. *J. Wildlife Management* 75:3 (726-730). <https://pubag.nal.usda.gov/pubag/downloadPDF.xhtml?id=49624&content=PDF>; Rich LN, Mitchell M S, Gude JA, Sime CA. 2012. Anthropogenic Mortality, Intraspecific Competition, and Prey Availability Influence Territory Sizes of Wolves in Montana. *Journal of Mammalogy* 93(3):722. DOI:10.1644/11-MAMM-A-079.2; Hatton, I.A., McCann, K.S., Fryxell, J.M., Davies, T.J., Smerlak, M., A. R. E. Sinclair, and M. Loreau. 2015. The predator-prey power law: Biomass scaling across terrestrial and aquatic biomes. *Science* 349: doi: <http://0-dx.doi.org/libraries.colorado.edu/10.1126/science.aac6284>; Lake, B.C., Caikoski, J.R., and Bertram, M.R. 2015. Wolf (*Canis lupus*) Winter Density and Territory Size in a Low Biomass Moose (*Alces alces*) System. *Arctic* 68: 62-68.

<sup>6</sup> Elbroch and Trevis (2023) Perspective: Why might removing carnivores maintain or increase risks for domestic animals?