



Limited wolf season possible in 2012

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Minnesota wildlife officials have begun to plan for a limited gray wolf hunting and trapping season in late 2012.

This action follows last month's announcement that wolves will return to state management Jan. 27 following roughly 35 years of federal protection.

Tom Landwehr, commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), said the agency is taking a "deliberate and science-based" approach to implementing initial wolf hunting and trapping seasons.

"Our job, as a natural resource agency, is to implement the state's Wolf Management Plan, which includes provisions for public taking of wolves," said Landwehr. "That means we will be taking actions to ensure the long-term survival of the species while also addressing conflicts between wolves and humans."

Landwehr said the wolf's recovery in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Upper Michigan is a national success story. The Minnesota DNR, he said, is committed to continuing that success.

Last July, the Minnesota Legislature eliminated a five-year waiting period for a wolf season following delisting of the animal from federal protection. In the weeks ahead, DNR biologists will begin to identify wolf management harvest units and develop other criteria specific to a Minnesota season. Components of the proposed season framework must still be approved by the Legislature, and a chance for public comment will be provided later this year.

"Without a history of regulated wolf seasons, we don't know what kind of hunter and trapper interest and success rate to expect," said Dan Stark, DNR large carnivore specialist. For these reasons, he said, it is necessary to be conservative during initial seasons.

Stark said the DNR proposal would manage wolves as a prized and high-value fur species by setting the season when pelts are prime, limiting the take through a lottery and requiring animals be registered.

This approach, he said, is different than simply allowing hunters to shoot a wolf as an "incidental take" while primarily pursuing another species such as deer. "Minnesota is different than other areas where wolf hunting is offered, in part, because we have much higher hunter densities and a more compressed big-game hunting season," Stark said.

"Our proposal is a separate season that takes into account when pelts are prime and have their highest value," Stark said. "This approach will provide hunters and trappers the opportunity to specifically target wolves while minimizing conflicts with other hunting seasons."

Minnesota has an estimated 3,000 wolves. Wolf numbers and their distribution have remained stable for the past 10 years.

Stark said the DNR presented its wolf hunting proposal to lawmakers earlier this week during a legislative hearing. The agency will be seeking additional authorization from the Legislature this session to offer a wolf license and implement management strategies. It will also take public comment prior to finalizing and implementing a wolf season.

"The wolf population has been fully recovered in Minnesota for many years," said Stark. "Our hunting and trapping season approach will be designed to keep it that way. No one wants to see this species needing federal protection again."