

The Great Lakes



COURTESY SENEY NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

A gray wolf explores in Michigan's Seney National Wildlife Refuge.

Gray wolf recovery in the Great Lakes region after near-extirpation has been notably successful. In the 1960s, only a remnant population of 300 to 1,000 wolves limited to northeastern Minnesota remained. In 1978, wolves in Minnesota were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), extending protections that allowed the population to expand naturally. Today, wolves are thriving in northern Minnesota and into northern and central Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula. According to the latest counts, gray wolves now total nearly 3,000 in Minnesota, 815 in Wisconsin and 696 in Michigan (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2012).

The Potential

With the exception of an isolated population on Isle Royale off Michigan, wolf populations in the Great Lakes states are well-connected with one another and with populations in Canada. Individual wolves continue to disperse into areas with suitable habitat (see map on back), with recent sightings in northern lower Michigan.

The Challenges

In January 2012, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) removed federal ESA protections for Great Lakes wolves. Although FWS will continue to monitor wolves for five years after delisting, Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin are now responsible for the

management of their respective wolf populations.

As the states implement and revise their wolf-management plans, it is imperative that they take a careful and conservative approach to ensure continued viability into the future and to prevent backsliding on the significant achievement of wolf recovery. This approach should also be applied to the regulated public harvests initiated when the states took over wolf management. In addition, state agencies should maintain policies and provide funding that help reduce human-wolf conflicts through the use of proactive, nonlethal methods.

Sound management, public education to increase tolerance, promotion of nonlethal methods to reduce conflicts with livestock and control of illegal poaching will assure a lasting future of recovery for Great Lakes wolves.

Wolf Range in the Great Lakes



Defenders advocates the conservation of gray wolf populations throughout their range in the Great Lakes at densities sufficient to ensure the long-term survival of wolves and maintenance of the critical role they play in the ecosystem.

References

Michigan Department of Natural Resources: www.michigan.gov/wolves

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources: www.dnr.state.mn.us/mammals/wolves/

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2012. "Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*) Current Population in the United States." Accessed 1/23/13 www.fws.gov/midwest/wolf/aboutwolves/WolfPopUS.htm

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Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources: <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/wolf/>

