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Gray wolf

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## Wisconsin Tribes Struggle to Save Their Brothers the Wolves From Sanctioned Hunt

MARY ANNETTE

August 14, 2012

"Is nothing sacred anymore?" asked Mike Wiggins, chairman of the Bad River Ojibwe Tribe in Wisconsin, in reaction to the proposed wolf hunt in the state.

His question was somewhat rhetorical because he already knew the answer. Wisconsin's state legislature passed a law in April allowing for the hunting and trapping of wolves. Since the opening of the permit application process, which runs from August 1–31, more than 3,000 people have applied. The season is scheduled to begin October 15 and run through February 2013.

The wolf, Ma'iingan, is considered sacred by the Ojibwe and figures highly in their creation stories. Tribal member Essie Leoso noted that according to tradition, Ma'iingan walked with first man.

"Killing a wolf is like killing a brother," she said.

The wolf hunting application fee is \$10. Permits will be given to hunters by the Department of Natural Resources through a lottery-style drawing and will be awarded at a cost of \$100 per permit to 2,010 hunters, according to a recent Associated Press report from Madison. Each permit-carrying hunter will be allowed to take one wolf until the state limit of 201 wolves is reached.

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Since the grey wolf or timber wolf was removed from the list of endangered animals last December, Wisconsin passed Act 169 allowing for the hunting and trapping of the animals. Minnesota has enacted a similar law and will hold its inaugural wolf-hunting season during approximately the same time period.

The decision by the state to allow wolf hunting does not sit well with the tribes in Wisconsin, who were not consulted regarding the rules and limitations of the law before it was enacted. The law allows hunters to shoot or trap wolves during the day or night, and allows the use of bait to attract the animals as well as the use of dogs. According to a recent story in the Wisconsin State Journal, Wisconsin will be the only state that allows the use of dogs in the hunting of wolves.

A coalition of groups opposing the hunt is suing the DNR, according to an August 8 story in the Milwaukee-Wisconsin Journal-Sentinel. Plaintiffs include the Wisconsin Federated Humane Societies, Dane County Humane Society, Wisconsin Humane Society, Fox Valley Humane Association, Northland Alliance, National Wolfwatcher Coalition as well as individual citizens. The lawsuit claims that the hunt will violate the state's animal cruelty act, citing the proposed use of dogs in hunting wolves.

There is considerable disagreement regarding the number of wolves living in Wisconsin as well as the capacity of the land to support the population. Kurt Thiede, Land Administrator for the DNR, told The DePaulia of DePaul University that the state's wolf population count was 850 in spring 2012 and that the maximum capacity for Wisconsin land to support is 500 wolves. Organizations such as the Timber Wolf Alliance argue that the land's carrying capacity is around 800. The Timber Alliance is an organization founded to promote the recovery of the wolf population.

Via radio telemetry, the Bad River Ojibwe Natural Resources Department estimates that there are between 14–18 wolves on the 125,000 plus-acre reservation, according to Wiggins.

"I have never seen a wolf in the woods in all my years hunting," he noted in a recent interview. While driving the back roads of the reservation, he has seen wolves only twice.

If the wolf population were as high as the DNR estimates, Wiggins observed, there would be no need for the Department's extensive efforts to manage the burgeoning deer population in the state. The growing interest in hunting wolves is largely driven by Hollywood style hype, Wiggins feels.

"Films like *The Grey* are all about fear mongering and depicting wolves as human predators. The facts, however, don't support this view," Wiggins said.

He said that despite the presence of wolves in the woods, he and his fellow Ojibwe hunters are still able to fill their freezers with venison.

"The presence of wolves in the woods is sacred and tangible. They are a gift," he said. "From an ecological management perspective, they have a place, and they're not doing any harm."

The push to hunt the wolf is largely driven by trophy-hungry sportsmen, according to Wiggins.

"There is no subsistence factor in wolf hunting," he said. "The political realm is driving this harvest."

The Wisconsin Bear Hunters Association and other such groups played a lead role in drafting the legislation permitting the hunt, according to a story in the Milwaukee Journal.

The six Wisconsin Ojibwe tribes appear to be united in their decision not to hunt wolves. This decision, however, begs an important question.

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