

Choosing the right rifle, the right caliber, and the right bullet is critical to a successful wolf hunt, and ensures you can cleanly and ethically put down a wolf with a single shot. Selecting the best rifle for hunting wolves or the best rifle caliber for hunting wolves depends on several factors. Things to consider before you decide what rifle to bring on your wolf hunt include:

- The region you will be hunting
- The distance you are comfortable shooting
- The type of bullets available
- Whether or not you care about the hide

What rifle calibers work best for shooting wolves?

Keep in mind that the following list is not the end all be all for choosing a rifle for hunting wolves, but we believe it is a good guideline for someone who has never shot a wolf before. This list is by no means exhaustive. Don't worry if you don't see your favorite caliber; hopefully we've included something similar to what you plan on using.

Calibers & cartridges not recommended for wolf hunting

Under no circumstance do we recommend using these calibers for hunting wolves. These cartridges are simply not powerful enough to reliably kill wolves. In some regions where wolves are classified as big-game species it may even be illegal to use some of these cartridges.

- Any rimfire cartridge (.22 LR, 17HMR, .22 Mag)
- Any caliber less than .22" (17 Remington, .204 Ruger)
- Small capacity .22 center fire cartridges (.22 hornet, .218 Bee)
- Medium capacity .22 center fire cartridges with varmint bullets (.223, 22/250)

Calibers effective for shooting wolves at shorter ranges (<200 yards)

We tentatively recommend the following cartridges under the condition that quality hunting bullets are used. With light, varmint bullets these cartridges are not sufficient for hunting wolves.

- [.223 Remington \(200 yards is absolute maximum recommended range\)](#)
- [.22/250](#)
- **30/30**

Ideal Calibers for wolves at medium range (200-400 yards)

These cartridges include many popular rounds for deer and antelope, and have enough power and velocity to shoot wolves at medium ranges, while doing minimal damage to the hide. If you already have a rifle chambered in one of these cartridges, or something similar, it will work great for hunting wolves in most conditions.

- .220 Swift (with heavy, solid core bullets)

- .243 and other short action 6mms
- 7mm/08
- **.308**
- **.270 Winchester**

Ideal calibers for shooting wolves at long range (>400 Yards)

If you plan on hunting wolves in Southern Idaho or the frozen tundra of Alaska where wide open spaces are prevalent and long shots are to be expected, you need a powerful cartridge that has good bullet selection and high velocity. Be aware that at shorter ranges these cartridges may leave large exit holes that can damage the hide of a wolf.

- 25/06 and other long action .25” cartridges
- **30/06**
- **7mm Magnum**
- **Any of the big .300 Magnum rounds (.300 Win Ultra Mag, 300RUM, .338)**
 - **–Note these will definitely tear up a wolves hide at close range**

Bullet Selection for Shooting Wolves

If you have elected to use your deer or elk rifle to go wolf hunting, bullet selection is not critical. Any round you have used successfully for deer or elk will be sufficient for hunting wolves. If anything, you may want to choose the lightest commercial available round for your rifle to obtain greater velocity, and therefore greater range.

However, if you have elected to use a smaller caliber rifle such as a .223 or 22/250, it is absolutely critical that you select high quality hunting rounds to ensure clean, ethical kills when hunting wolves.

Recommended Bullets for Hunting Wolves

Bullets we recommend for hunting wolves with are quality hunting bullets that expand and mushroom, while retain most of their mass and creating a large wound channel. These bullets include:

- Nosler Partitions
- Federal Fusions
- Any other bullet advertised as effective for deer or medium-sized game

Bullets Not Recommended for Hunting Wolves

Any bullet advertised as a “varmint” bullet it is not recommended for hunting wolves.

While these bullets work great for “varmints” like prairie dogs or rabbits, and will certainly kill foxes and coyotes with great success, they are simply not sufficient for killing wolves. These

bullets are designed to fragment explosively on impact and have very poor penetration. If they happen to miss bones, and heavy muscle mass, they may kill a wolf but will blow enormous holes in the hide on exit that can ruin the fur.

These include:

- Hornady V-Max
- Nosler Ballistic Tips
- Barnes Varmint Grenades
- Any bullet with deep hollow points that advertises high fragmentation

Other bullets that should be avoided are bullets designed for military purposes, such as full metal jacket (FMJ) bullets that are commonly found for the .223/5.56mm cartridge.

FMJs maintain form on impact and pass completely through wolves. They punch a tiny hole and leave an extremely small wound channel. These will only wound a wolf unless you have a perfect shot to the heart or lungs, and are not recommended ever.

Other bullets that should be avoided are match bullets for target shooting. They may be very accurate, but generally have poor terminal performance when compared to good hunting bullets.

Final Things to Consider

A lot of people start hunting wolves with their coyote rifle. The problem is the average coyote only weighs 40-55lbs. ***Wolves are 2-3 times that size!*** The average weight of a gray wolf is between 80-100lbs, and it is not uncommon for a wolf to weigh 120-150lbs. The biggest of wolves can even tip the scales at **175lbs**. That's closer to the size of a white tail deer than a coyote. If you wouldn't feel comfortable shooting a deer with a rifle, you probably shouldn't be using that rifle for wolves.

- In many regions you may be able to harvest more than one wolf. This makes semi-auto rifles like AR15s a good option because you can quickly get off another shot and take 2 or more wolves.
- If you have a choice between a coyote rifle and a deer rifle, go with the deer rifle
- If you only have a smaller caliber rifle like a .223, don't rush out and buy a new gun, but be aware that you need quality bullets and your range will be limited
- Check with your local game management agency to make sure there are no caliber restrictions in the region you are hunting and confirm how many wolves you can harvest in a day or in a season.