



The History of Wolves in Wisconsin

The gray or timber wolf has existed in Wisconsin from the time the glaciers melted, about 10,000 years ago. Wolves followed herds of muskox and caribou that moved in after the ice melted. Native Americans also followed the wolves and grazing mammals, and have coexisted with these large mammals since the glacier left. The wolf was highly respected for its hunting skills, and became an important symbol in the culture of many Native American tribes.

Europeans began settling Wisconsin in the early 1800's, and at the time as many as 3,000 to 5,000 wolves may have existed in the area. Europeans often had more negative attitudes toward wolves, and soon began programs to eliminate wolves. A state bounty was placed on wolves in Wisconsin in 1865, and lasted until 1957. By 1950, less than 50 wolves remained in extreme northern Wisconsin. In 1957 wolves were listed as a protected species, but by 1960 it was considered extinct or extirpated.

In 1967 and 1974 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designated the eastern timber wolf a federally endangered species. In 1975, wolves were listed as a state endangered species as they began to recolonize along the Minnesota border. **Wolves were not reintroduced into Wisconsin, but moved in on their own!**

Intense monitoring of wolves in Wisconsin by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) began in 1979. Attempts were made to capture, attach radio collars, and radio-track wolves from most packs in the state. Additional surveys were done by snow-tracking wolf packs in the winter, and by howl surveys in the summer. In 1980, 25 wolves in 5 packs occurred in the state, but dropped to 14 in 1985 when parvovirus reduced pup survival and killed adults. The Wisconsin DNR completed a wolf recovery plan in 1989. The recovery plan set a state goal for reclassifying wolves as threatened once the population remained at or above 80 for three years. Recovery efforts were based on education, legal protection, habitat protection, and providing compensation for problem wolves.

In the 1990's the wolf population grew rapidly, despite an outbreak of mange between 1992 -1995. The Wisconsin DNR completed a new management plan in 1999. This management plan set a delisting goal of 250 wolves in late winter outside of Indian reservations, and a management goal of 350 wolves outside of Indian reservations. In 1999 wolves were reclassified to state threatened status with 205 wolves in the state. In 2004 wolves were removed from the state threatened species list and were reclassified as a **protected wild animal** with 373 wolves in the state.

Wolves were federally reclassified to threatened on April 1, 2003, but on January 31, 2005 wolves were relisted as endangered due to a lawsuit. Wolves were delisted from the federal list in Wisconsin and the remainder of the Western Great Lakes Distinct Population Segment on March 12, 2007 (also included MI, MN, and portions of ND, SD, IA, IL, IN & OH). Wolves were federally relisted on September 29, 2008, federally delisted on May 4, 2009, and relisted on July 1, 2009. A new federal delisting process began on May 5, 2011; with intent to again delist wolves by the end of 2011. The count in winter 2011 was about 782-824 wolves, with 202-203 packs, 19+ loners, and 31 wolves on Indian reservations in the state.

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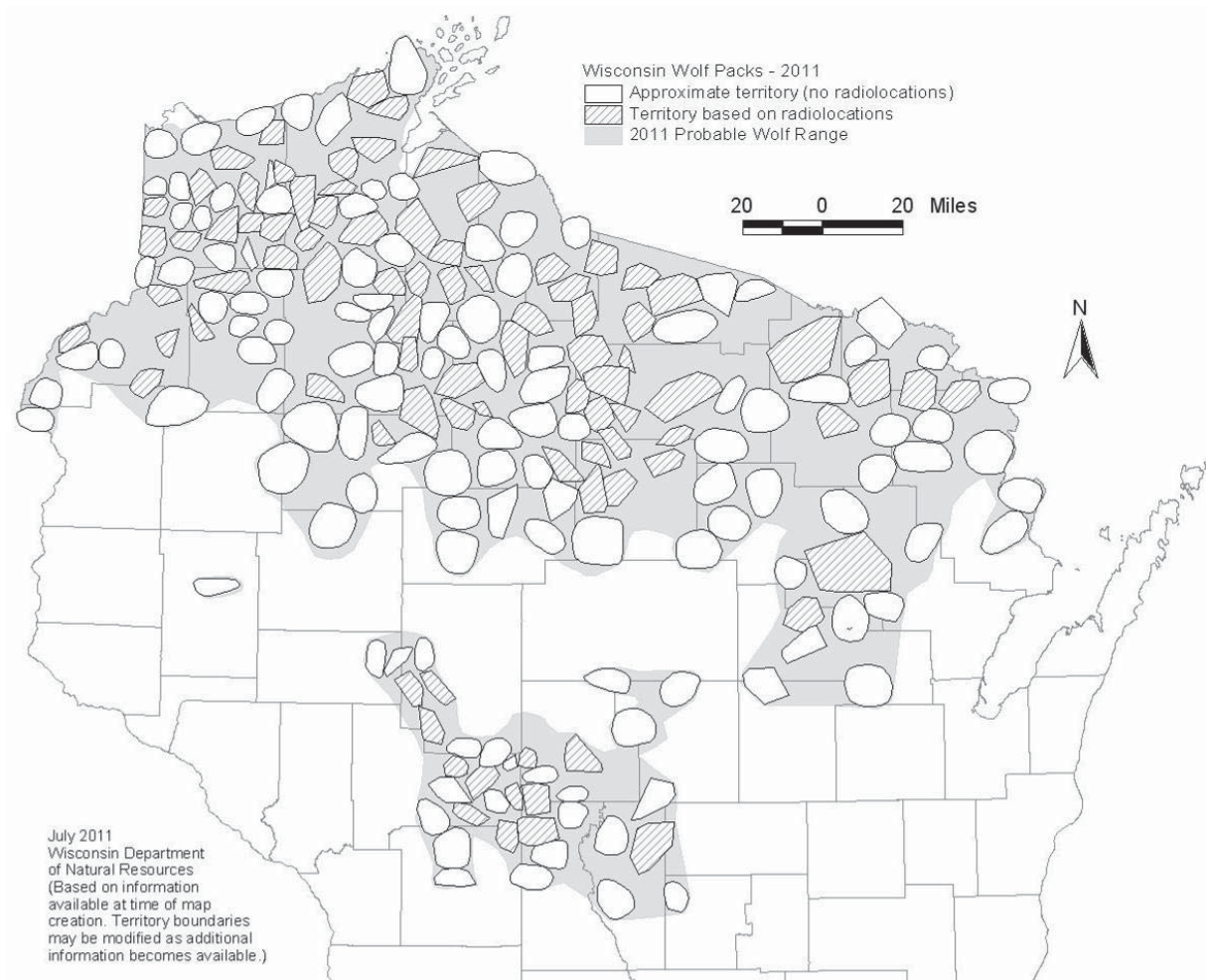


Figure 1. Gray Wolf Distribution in Wisconsin: Winter 2010-2011

Figure 2. Changes in Wisconsin Gray Wolf Population: 1980-2011

