

# Gray wolf confirmed in northern Lower Peninsula

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It took a year and a half, but there's now no doubt: The animal spotted on a trail camera in Emmet County in the northwestern Lower Peninsula was indeed a gray wolf - only the second one confirmed in the Lower Peninsula since 1910.

The [wolf](#) was confirmed on the reservation land of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians. After spotting wolf-like tracks and seeing what appeared to be a wolf on a trail camera in March 2014, tribal biologists were able to collect scat and send it to Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario, for analysis. The results came back last week and confirmed a gray wolf. They also show it is not likely an escaped captive wolf, as its genetic information closely matches that of wolves in northeast Ontario.

Tracks found on reservation land indicate there could be two wolves, said Kevin Swanson, the state Department of Natural Resources' bear and wolf specialist based in Marquette.

The DNR has regularly conducted wolf track surveys in the northern Lower Peninsula since 2003, anticipating the possibility of a southern migration of wolves as numbers rebounded in the Upper Peninsula. The most recent winter wolf survey by the DNR in 2014 showed 636 wolves in the U.P.

"It was predictable that this would eventually happen," Swanson said.

"Wolves are natural dispersers. Anytime an ice bridge forms between the Upper and Lower peninsula, it's possible wolves are going to move from the upper to the lower, partially in search for food, as well as in an effort to create new packs."

It is exciting news for the Little Traverse Bay Bands' 4,500 members, said Doug Craven, director of the tribe's Natural Resources Division.

"This is absolutely something our members have been reporting for a number of years," he said. "There is cultural significance to Ma'iingan, the gray wolf. It's part of our creation story."

In the Anishinaabe - or Ojibwa First People - creation story, when Gzhemnidoo, the Creator, put Nanaboozhoo, the original man, on Earth, he asked for a companion. So the Creator gave him Ma'iingan, the gray wolf. The pair were tasked with naming all the plants and creatures and places of the Earth. When their task was finished, Gzhemnidoo directed that they would travel separate paths but remain linked.

"It's our tradition, our history," Craven said.

The tribe has prepared for the possible return of wolves in recent years, developing a wolf management plan with the help of a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant that was approved in 2009, he said. And Swanson said the DNR's wolf management plan won't require any revision with the arrival of wolves to the Lower Peninsula.

In 2004, a [gray wolf](#) that had been previously captured and collared in the U.P.'s Mackinac County was caught and accidentally killed by a coyote trapper in Presque Isle County in the Lower Peninsula. This marked the first verified wolf report from the Lower Peninsula since 1910, DNR officials said. In 2010, animals that appeared to be wolves were trapped and collared in Cheboygan County. Later, DNA analysis

confirmed the animals were coywolves - coyotes with some wolf DNA from cross-breeding.

Michigan held its controversial first, firearm-only wolf hunt in November and December 2013, with hunters killing 23 wolves in designated areas of the U.P. Future hunts were stalled when a federal judge in December 2014 restored the wolf's status as endangered in Midwestern states, including Michigan.

"Our hands are really tied right now," Swanson said. "We don't agree with that federal ruling. We have a viable wolf population and great scientists who are capable of managing them sustainably."

There's no evidence of a breeding pair of wolves in the Lower Peninsula yet. But the Little Traverse Bay Bands tribe has worked with Central Michigan University on evaluating and mapping potential wolf habitat.

"We definitely feel there is some habitat in the Northern Lower Peninsula to support wolves," Craven said. "So if there were to be a pack or a breeding pair of [wolves](#) in the Northern Lower Peninsula, that would not surprise us."

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