

Scientists to feds: Great Lakes wolves not endangered

November 20 2015, by Keith Matheny, Detroit Free Press

Gray wolf populations in Michigan and other Great Lakes states have recovered to the point they no longer should be considered an endangered species. That message came Wednesday not from hunting groups but from 26 scientists - many having advocated for the wolves' protection in years past.

The wolf population in Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin stands at more than 3,700 [wolves](#), the scientists noted. The most recent winter wolf survey by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources in 2014 showed 636 wolves in the Upper Peninsula.

Michigan held its controversial first, firearm-only wolf hunt in November and December 2013, with hunters killing 23 wolves in designated areas of the Upper Peninsula. Future hunts were stalled when a federal judge in December 2014 restored the wolf's status as endangered in Midwestern states, including Michigan. It was the third time wolves had been removed from the endangered species list and put back on, said David Mech, an adjunct professor in the University of Minnesota's Department of Fisheries, Wildlife and Conservation Biology.

"The integrity and effectiveness of the ESA (Endangered Species Act) is undercut if delisting does not happen once science-based recovery has been achieved," the scientists wrote in a letter sent Wednesday to U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe. The U.S. and Canadian wolf scientists

signing the letter included Michigan State University associate professor Gary Roloff and Northern Michigan University professors John Bruggink and Pat Brown.

"The signatories are all scientists," Mech said. "When the wolf population was low and needed protection, they were pushing for that. But the population has reached its recovery level - actually, many years ago."

The designation matters, Mech said, because it directs resources and attention of wildlife management agencies.

"Obviously, there's only so much funding and effort that can go around," he said. "The more that's put into wolves, now that they have recovered, that's less that can be spent on species that are truly endangered."

The nonprofit National Wildlife Federation supports the scientists' position.

"Professional state wildlife managers have been instrumental in helping the wolf recover in the upper Great Lakes states and need to be given authority to make the most effective management decisions," said Jason Dinsmore, regional representative for the federation.

But Jill Fritz, Michigan director of the nonprofit Humane Society of the United States, opposes the delisting. The group organized two ballot referenda passed by Michigan voters to protect wolves and limit the ability to hunt them last November, but the measures were overturned by a state law passed by the Legislature and signed by Republican Gov. Rick Snyder last year.

Fritz noted that other biologists - and more of them - twice earlier this year appealed to Congress not to remove [endangered species](#) protections

for gray wolves.

The Humane Society of the United States supports "down-listing" the Great Lakes gray wolves to a threatened species, which would allow farmers and wildlife managers to use lethal methods if necessary to deal with problem wolves.

"If they were removed from federal protection and once again placed under state management, what would stop the states from once again initiating hunting, trapping, snaring and hounding seasons on wolves in the Great Lakes?" Fritz asked. "They want their [wolf](#) hunt and clearly will go to any length to get it."

©2015 Detroit Free Press

Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: Scientists to feds: Great Lakes wolves not endangered (2015, November 20) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-11-scientists-feds-great-lakes-wolves.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--