

## Video of wolf killing northern Minnesota deer becomes political fodder

February 14 2024, by Greg Stanley, Star Tribune

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Credit: CC0 Public Domain

A lone gray wolf bolted past a logger last week, on the edge of a clear cut forest in northern St. Louis County. The wolf ran past a giant industrial saw and leaped over felled trees in pursuit of what was either a

young doe or an antlerless buck. Seconds later, the wolf killed the deer on the other side of a neatly stacked pile of freshly cut logs, oblivious to the logger, who captured the chase on video.

U.S. Rep. Pete Stauber, R-Minn., posted the video on several social media sites along with a warning.

"As you can see, wolves lost any fear of humans and are increasingly dangerous to livestock and pets and decimating our deer here," Stauber wrote.

The video was seized by deer hunters and their political allies seeking to remove Minnesota's wolves from the Endangered Species list. In a letter last week, Stauber asked House leaders to make removing the animals a priority in any spending bill passed this year. He and some grass-roots organizations have held crowded public meetings across Minnesota over the past several months to raise support for reducing the wolf population.

"All the science tells us that they have recovered and we should celebrate that," Stauber said.

He said he was taken aback in watching the video by how close the wolf got to a person while chasing down the deer.

"Years ago wolves wouldn't come near a human being," he said.

Minnesota is the only state in the Lower 48 that did not kill all of its wolves. They were poisoned, shot and trapped out of the rest of the continental United States by the early 1900s, but a few hundred survived in northern Minnesota. After wolves were put on the Endangered Species list in the 1970s, their population here spread and grew over the next 20 years. By 1998, wolves had returned to about half of the state and the population reached around 3,000.

It hasn't changed much since then.

Stauber is correct in that scientists believe wolves in Minnesota have recovered. The state has nearly as many of the predators as the rest of the Lower 48 combined. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources says packs have moved into every part of the state that can handle them. But the population has not significantly grown in more than 25 years. Reports of wolf attacks on livestock and pets haven't risen much either.

Wolves are one of the most intensively monitored and longest studied animals in Minnesota: Consistent records and population counts go back to the 1970s. Several federal and state agencies, universities and tribal governments have tracked dozens of wolves every year with trail cameras and radio and GPS collars.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture keeps a running list of all complaints of wolves injuring pets or livestock. Scientists with the Voyageurs Wolf Project trek thousands of miles every summer in the woods to document everything their collared wolves eat. The state conducts aerial surveys of wolf packs each winter to estimate pack sizes and territory. Records are kept of every dead wolf found.

All evidence shows that roughly the same number of wolves have been living in Minnesota, eating roughly the same number of animals, since the late 1990s.

In 2022, there were 139 reports from ranchers and pet owners of a wolf killing at least one of their animals. The Department of Agriculture was able to confirm that wolves killed 77 animals—cattle, sheep and dogs—in the state that year. That was below the 10-year average of 82 confirmed losses to wolves.

"If there was any big expansion in wolf range or significant increase in population or conflicts or mortalities, that would be identified by the methods we use," said Dan Stark, a wolf expert for the Minnesota DNR. "But it's not the case."

Stauber is not alone in his push to return [wolf](#) management to the state. Four presidential administrations representing both parties—Trump, Obama, Bush and Clinton—tried to declare wolves in Minnesota recovered. Lawmakers from both parties have supported bills that would do the same. Each attempt was overturned by the courts, which ruled that either federal agencies did not follow proper protocol, did not consider how removing protections in Minnesota would affect wolves nationwide or that wolves have not recovered in enough of their historical range outside of Minnesota to return management to the state.

Stauber said that the only way to get around these court setbacks would be through congressional action.

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Citation: Video of wolf killing northern Minnesota deer becomes political fodder (2024, February 14) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-02-video-wolf-northern-minnesota-deer.html>

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