

Trophy Hunters Kill 216 Wolves in Wisconsin Bloodbath

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A no-holds-barred carnage of wolves in Wisconsin last week, which ended with trophy hunters killing nearly twice the sanctioned quota of animals in just under 60 hours, offers a terrible glimpse into just what lies ahead for these beloved native American carnivores unless the Biden administration moves swiftly to restore their federal protections.

Wisconsin’s wolf hunt was, from start to finish, an example of the worst wildlife management practices. The state was not prepared for a February hunt and was forced by a court ruling to rush into one without a clear, updated, scientific plan.

A whopping 2,380 wolf hunting permits — twice as many as are typically issued for hunts in the state — were made available for a quota of 119 wolves over what was supposed to be a week-long season. Little if any input was sought from Wisconsinites and tribal nations, which have opposed the hunts, or from the scientific community. The hunt also occurred during the breeding season for wolves, putting pregnant females in the crosshairs.

In less than 60 hours, 216 wolves had been slaughtered and all of the hunting zones had to be closed. We now know that nearly half the wolves killed were females. Entire wolf families were likely destroyed. And worst of all, nearly 85 percent of the animals killed were hunted down by packs of dogs — an extremely cruel and unsporting practice that no other state allows for wolf hunting.

“The swift pace of the wolf kills, mostly by hunters using trailing hounds, took the DNR by surprise. And the overage was made worse by a state statute that requires 24-hour, rather than immediate, notice of the season closure,” Paul A. Smith, the [Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel’s outdoors editor, wrote](#) in an article critical of the hunt.

We have issued many warnings predicting exactly such a horrific scenario since the federal delisting of wolves last year by the Trump administration. In Wisconsin, where some state officials and lawmakers had begun plotting a wolf hunt even before the federal delisting was finalized, we led a strong campaign to stop a February hunt, convincing the state’s Natural Resources Board and Gov. Tony Evers, [in a letter](#), that an early hunt would be unscientific and illegal, with disastrous consequences for the wolves. Shortly after receiving our letter,

the DNR announced they would not open a trophy hunt until November 2021 and committed to transparency and broad public engagement before doing so. Soon after, [we helped thwart another attempt](#) by some lawmakers to open a February hunt.

Unfortunately, an out-of-state trophy hunting group sued the state to open season earlier this month—[a request the court granted](#), opening the door to a bloodbath.

In amicus briefs we filed with the court, we argued this hunt was not only scientifically unjustifiable but illegal under the state's own law. The consequences of the court's misguided decision underscores the importance of our fight — in [federal court](#) and elsewhere — to return Endangered Species Act protections to wolves.

We already know that Wisconsin is planning to open another hunt in the fall. And it is not the only one. In the Northern Rocky Mountains, where wolves had already lost their federal protections prior to the January national delisting, states are trying drastically to expand their trophy hunting seasons. Some lawmakers in [Montana](#), for instance, are pushing forward numerous bills that would radically increase the number of wolves killed by trophy hunters and trappers. Wolves also continue to face grave threats in Idaho and Wyoming.

Wildlife agencies in other Great Lakes states, like Minnesota and Michigan, have committed to working to update their state wolf management plans and consult with scientists and tribes prior to considering a trophy hunting or trapping season. But in Minnesota some state lawmakers are trying to force a hunt, and bills were recently introduced that would require a season for wolves. However, another bill that would prohibit such a season was recently introduced as well. And in Michigan, the Senate Natural Resources Committee recently passed a resolution to urge the Natural Resources Commission to hold a wolf hunt even prior to updating their state management plan.

We have even seen a bill introduced in the 117th Congress by Rep. Thomas Tiffany, R-Wisc., that would remove gray wolves in Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota and Wyoming from the Endangered Species Act indefinitely. The bill seeks to preempt any litigation that could potentially lead to federal protections being restored to wolves.

If you live in one of these states, it is crucial that you keep a watchful eye on decision-makers and continue to speak up for wolves. With trophy hunters raring to go after America's wolves, and given the clout they have, in many cases, with state DNR officials and some lawmakers, this is a tough fight. But we have the majority of Americans, who are opposed to wolf trophy hunting, on our side and we are working to stop this cruel pastime on several fronts.

We are now suing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service over the delisting decision to remove gray wolves in the lower 48 states from the Endangered Species Act, and we will continue to press the Biden administration's Department of the Interior to restore federal protections for this species. We will also continue to fight state plans to open and expand wolf trophy hunts. Wolves need all of our help, and yours. These gorgeous animals today occupy only 15 percent of their historic range in this country: they are far from recovered, and in no state to withstand more carnage, in Wisconsin or anywhere else they call home.

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Featured image: A whopping 2,380 wolf hunting permits — twice as many as are typically issued for hunts in the state — were made available for a quota of 119 wolves over what was supposed to be a week-long season. Photo by JAMcGraw/iStock.com

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