



October 15, 2020

VIA EMAIL ONLY

Congressman Tom Tiffany
1714 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Support for H.R. 8180 – Delisting the Gray Wolf

Dear Congressman Tiffany:

On behalf of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, the Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association, the Wisconsin Corn Growers Association, the Wisconsin Farmers Union, the Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association, the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association, the Wisconsin Association of Professional Agricultural Consultants and the Wisconsin Pork Association, **we write to express strong support for H.R. 8180, which would remove the gray wolf in Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota and Wyoming from the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife.**

Wisconsin has far exceeded our goal for a sustainable and recovered wolf population. As a result, we are seeing devastating effects on Wisconsin farmers. When the DNR analyzed what a sustainable wolf population would be for Wisconsin, they wrote in Wisconsin's 1999 Wolf Management Plan that they sought a population recovery goal of **350** animals.¹

However, according to the Wisconsin DNR's *Wisconsin Gray Wolf Monitoring Report 15 April 2019 Through 14 April 2020*, "In April 2020 the statewide **minimum** wolf population count was 1034-1057 wolves, a 13.1% increase from the previous year..."² The report continues, "...the 2019 – 2020 overwintering period was 1195 wolves, and the credible interval with the highest probability density was 957 – 1573, which includes the statewide minimum count..." "Overwinter population" refers to counts that occur during the winter when wolf populations are at their lowest. We understand that populations essentially double once new pups arrive in the spring and uncounted wolves are factored in.

Wolves were federally delisted in January 2012. In April 2012, Wisconsin authorized a wolf hunting and trapping season. Six zones were created within the state, each with individual harvest quotas based on various factors. Three hunting seasons occurred before the wolf was relisted as endangered in December 2014. There was a total of 528 wolves harvested during the hunting seasons over those three years and a population reduction of less than 9%. During that time period, we saw livestock depredation damage payments significantly decrease (\$60,000-\$75,000 per year) in the three years that a wolf hunting and trapping season was in place. However, since the *relisting* of the wolf in December of 2014, Wisconsin's wolf population has grown from 660 animals to over 1500 and total depredation damage payments exceeded \$189,000 in 2019.³

¹ Wisconsin Wolf Management Plan, October 27, 1999 (<https://dnr.wi.gov/files/PDF/pubs/ER/ER0099.pdf>).

² See Wisconsin DNR Webpage, Tab *Wolves in Wisconsin*, <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/sites/default/files/topic/WildlifeHabitat/wolfreport2020.pdf>.

³ Wisconsin Annual Wolf Damage Payment Summary <https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/wolf/documents/wolfdamagepayments.pdf>

Under the umbrella of the Endangered Species Act, the gray wolf's federal status has undergone extensive changes over the last 20 years. This is not due to the biological or scientific evidence that population numbers have met and exceeded their recovery goals, but rather is due to flaws in the Act that make these decisions prone to politics and legal battles based on procedural technicalities. While the recovery status of the gray wolf in the Western Great Lakes region continues to be fought in courtrooms and determined by Federal Judges in Washington, D.C., Wisconsin farmers continue to have their hands tied when it comes to defending their livestock and livelihoods. It is illegal for farmers in the Western Great Lakes region to protect their livestock from depredating wolves and there is no effective mechanism to manage the population. Not only do acts of depredation increase stress to farmers and their families, but they also consume valuable time and negatively impact a farmer's bottom line. Depredations are quantifiable and measurable factors that can be charted, trended, and accurately determined. But wolf damage includes unquantifiable factors that cattle and other livestock experience from stress due to increased predatory pressures.

Some examples of these livestock stressors include loss of pregnancy; reduced pregnancy rates; decreased rate-of-gain; changes in calving/birthing procedures due to the unsafe nature of leaving pregnant livestock to give birth in pastures; increased mowing of tall grasses around pastures; upgrading fencing and other wolf deterrent practices. All of these factors are costly. They can be difficult to measure but are directly related to the increase in the wolf population and interactions wolves are having with livestock in Wisconsin. Wolf populations have increased more than 300% in Wisconsin since 2002 and the pressures for food and territory have forced lone wolves and packs to travel farther south to find new habitat. This has led to an increase in livestock depredations and damage payments, as noted above.

Wisconsin farmers are committed to the responsible management of our wolf population, but that goal cannot be achieved while the gray wolf remains on the federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife. Accordingly, we support H.R. 8180 and urge Congress to pass this legislation this fall.

Sincerely,

Joe Bragger, President, Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation
Doug Rebout, President, Wisconsin Corn Growers Association
Matt Ludlow, President, Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association
Darin Von Ruden, President, Wisconsin Farmers Union
Tom Lochner, Executive Director, Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association
Tamas Houlihan, Executive Director, Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association
Eric Birschbach, Wisconsin Association of Professional Agricultural Consultants
Keri Retallick, Executive Vice President, Wisconsin Pork Association
