UP residents want the option to choose outcome of wolf hunt

130827

Marcy Misner/Mike

Wolves—FEATURE—

( )

A recent incident where a pack of beagles was killed by wolves in the Eastern Upper Peninsula fuels the debate over wolf hunting. With only 3% of Michigan’s population living in a third of the state’s overall landmass, Northern Michigan residents may have little say in determining their own future when it comes to having a large predator in their midst if the issue were decided by a referendum. And then residents and visitors to the UP would have to live with the consequences that others have decided for them. Marcy Misner reports.

Jim McGuire travels from Ohio to the Rudyard area several times a year for the past 20 years to train his beagles how to run rabbits. He was out in the swamps with them and with a group of men from Ohio and West Virginia August 6 when several dogs belonging to the group were killed by wolves.

(2:22 – 2:50)

**We’ve never had any problems. We spend between 20 to 25 days a year training in the UP and never ever had a problem. I’d heard stories of other people that had had problems, but I guess until you experience it you don’t realize how serious or bad the problem is. (:21)**

McGuire is not the only hunter ever to lose dogs to wolves. There are other documented cases. McGuire said many people have since contacted him for advice on whether he thinks it’s safe to take any dogs to the Upper Peninsula.

(2:56 – 4:16)

**The loss of the dogs was very upsetting … but the biggest thing to me was just the loss of the UP. I could never in good conscience turn a beagle loose again in the Upper Peninsula. There’s just no way I could take a risk of that happening to my dogs or any dogs again. There’s always this risk and you have to make a decision for yourself. (:22)**

Wolves were taken off the endangered species list last year, and the DNR estimates there are at least 658 wolves, according to a 2013 winter survey. That’s down from two years ago.

The state's Natural Resources Commission added the gray wolf to the game species list and scheduled a hunt for Nov. 15 through Dec. 31. The move followed changes in state law. The commission said up to 43 wolves in seven Upper Peninsula counties could be killed.

Foes of the plan to allow wolf hunting want Michigan voters to weigh in on the issue, but the majority of people eligible to decide live downstate. Three percent of Michigan’s population lives in a third of the state’s overall landmass. People in the Upper Peninsula just don’t have the political clout to weigh in on their own future.

If pro-wolf groups have their way, 97% of voters will determine the fate of the other 3%.

Upper Peninsula residents don’t necessarily want the wolf eradicated, just have their numbers managed wisely. Jeff Peterman is a physician in Sault Ste. Marie who knows this well. He has hunted and fished his entire life. I talked to him one evening as he was cutting wood to build a garage.

FADE IN PLANER?

**I think that the problem lies affected in the people in here, in the UP throughout the UP where we do live with wolves on a regular basis. If there’s not some way of being able to manage that, it’s inevitable that there will be continued incidents like this. And the people who will decide whether we have to do that or not are not living where the wolves are. At least the people affected by the day to day aspect of a large carnivore being here would have a say-so as to whether we want that or not. (:32)**

It’s not just hunters affected. The DNR reports about 8 percent of farms lost 549 farm animals to wolves from 1996-2012. In the same timeframe, 52 dogs were killed with 20 injured. 69 percent of those were hounds. In the first-ever serious-injury documented attack, a 15-year-old Minnesota boy was attacked by a wolf Saturday. It’s not trophy hunting these people are interested in – it’s managing the numbers of wolves so humans can live in harmony with them, Peterman says.

PA 21, which was signed into law by Governor Rick Snyder in May, grants the Natural Resources Commission authority to designate game species that cannot be challenged by referendum. Peterman responds to that.

**I’m not necessarily a large fan of the NRC. I would be the first one to say that I’ve always thought the DNR should have, as it is in other states, the DNR should be responsible to the governor. The governor is electable and if the DNR is not doing the job it’s doing you can always elect another governor. However, in this case, I think the DNR’s stance is the fact that they realize that a decision’s going to be made about a resource in a place that the people who will vote about it do not have a knowledge of what the problem is. And don’t get the information to make a very well-judged decision. (:37)**

And will Jim McGuire come back to the Upper Peninsula if the wolf population isn’t managed? Probably not, he says.

(9:48 – 10:10)

**The Hiawatha National Forest is a beautiful place, but it’s not even safe to turn a dog loose up there anymore. It doesn’t matter if you’re a hunter or not. If you turn your dog loose, it’s at risk. And so yeah, I feel very frustrated that I can’t even go to this place ever again that I love so much. (:18)**

Jeff Peterman 253-9374

Jim McGuire (740)412-7907

Include if there’s time?

There are encounters with wolves that do not end so badly. There at least two federal law enforcement border patrol agents who were tracked by wolves on separate occasions after dark in the Hiawatha forest, possibly by members of the same pack. Both agents, who preferred not to have their names released, walked back to their vehicles without being attacked. There was a forestry worker treed by three wolves two years ago in the Escanaba area. The wolves eventually lost interest and left the area.

Animal rights groups say the NRC takes away the will of the people by removing the opportunity to vote, but what about the will of the people who live in the UP and have to live with the consequences of a no-hunting vote?