



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY**  
OF THE UNITED STATES

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September 10, 2019

The Michigan House of Representatives  
PO Box 30036  
Lansing, MI 48909

**Re: Opposition to HR 87**

Dear Members of the Michigan House Committee on Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation:

On behalf of the Humane Society of the United States and our Michigan supporters, we are writing to inform the Michigan State House of Representatives of our opposition to Rep. Markkanen's resolution, HR 87, a resolution to urge the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to remove the Michigan gray wolf from the federal endangered and threatened species list. This request is a misguided attempt to urge the FWS to prematurely remove the federal protections afforded to gray wolves by the Endangered Species Act. Such a resolution is not supported by the best available science and subverts the will of Michigan voters.

In 2011, former Sen. Casperson, passed a resolution similar to the one Rep. Markkanen has proposed, urging Congress to delist wolves. Sen. Casperson's resolution included a false story about wolves at a daycare center<sup>1</sup> for which he had to later publicly apologize.<sup>2</sup> He then authored the two wolf-hunting bills that were overturned by a public ballot referendum in 2014. When the first of those two bills was drafted in 2012, a Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) official advised Senator Casperson to remove the word "scientific" from the bill language when referring to a wolf hunt because, as the official said, the science will be debatable. This proved true, as some of the world's preeminent wolf scientists issued scathing reports and testimony debunking attempts to paint a wolf trophy hunt in Michigan as a valid management tool, calling it "remarkably inefficient and ineffective" and not scientifically sound.<sup>3</sup>

The same unscientific language made its way into a rehashed version of the bill that was used in a pro-wolf hunting ballot initiative conducted by trophy hunting lobby groups in 2014. That initiative was later overturned as unconstitutional in November 2016.<sup>4</sup> Then, less than a month later, virtually that same bill was rammed through the lame-duck session as Public Act 382 of 2016. This time, to avoid increasing public or media scrutiny or any possible opposition to the bill, the bill skipped right over the Senate Natural Resources Committee and was snuck quietly through another on its fast track to the chamber floor.

PA 382 was hidden from public view because it is clear that Michigan citizens do not support the trophy hunting, trapping, or lethal predator control of their wolves. Even before that was confirmed by a wide margin in the 2014 general election



referendum ballot vote, an MSU poll had stated, “Michiganders do not support consumptive uses of wolves.”<sup>5</sup> An analysis of another MSU survey noted, “Most residents, including hunters, Northern Lower Peninsula (NLP) residents and minorities, highly value wolves, are not interested in hunting them and support the role of science in making decisions.”<sup>6</sup> And a virtual flood of scientific studies in the past few years have made it abundantly clear: there is no justification for killing wolves simply for trophies, out of hatred, to ostensibly protect livestock, or in a misguided attempt to boost prey species for hunters. The claim put forth in the proposed resolution, that “Going forward, Michigan is well prepared to manage gray wolves in the best interest of its residents,” is laughable.

Heeding the 2012 advice of that DNR official, HR 87 doesn’t use the word “science” at all—*nor does it back up any of its statements with sound science*. Conversely, in July 2017 more than 80 of the world’s top scientists, including Dr. Jane Goodall and several scientists from Michigan Tech, the University of Michigan, and Michigan State University, co-signed a letter urging Congress NOT to delist wolves.

HR 87 is full of misinformation. For example, the requested language references that the combined population of wolves in Michigan and Wisconsin has exceeded the 200 required in the Great Lakes Distinct Population Segment recovery plan. But this threshold is outdated—it was first approved in 1978 and last updated in 1992. Furthermore, it was based on an understanding of wolf biology and ecology that does not exist today. The plan was also dependent on several factors which do not hold true today. Thus, the proposed language is citing the plan very selectively, ignoring that the plan is completely outdated, not reflective of our current understanding of wolves, and assumed a management approach that the states are not prepared to adhere to. The proposed resolution also states, “The gray wolf is an apex predator with no natural enemies. Without management, its population could reach numbers that will be detrimental to other species.” Each part of this statement is easily debunked using scientific studies and Michigan DNR data, as evidenced in the sections that follow.

### **Gray wolves benefit their ecosystems, including their prey**

A recent Michigan DNR study confirmed that winter weather is the driving factor in determining deer numbers, not wolves.<sup>7</sup> And just over the border, the Wisconsin DNR’s website agrees by saying, “... studies have shown that wolves have minimal negative impact on deer populations, since they feed primarily on weak, sick, or disabled individuals.”<sup>8</sup>

The Michigan DNR predicts that deer habitat areas of the U.P. have begun to recover well from previous harsh winters, and experts have predicted an increase in the 2019 deer harvest, including in the U.P.<sup>9</sup> *Note that this is concurrent with a slight increase in the Michigan wolf population estimate for 2018.* Earlier this year,



in wolf country in northern Wisconsin, the Wisconsin DNR reported a 30 percent increase in antlered and 20 percent increase in antlerless deer harvest in its Northern Forest Zone—where the wolves are.<sup>10</sup>

It is an established scientific fact that apex carnivores like wolves provide vital, essential ecosystem services by removing the sick, weak, and injured from prey herds, thus strengthening their populations. A recent Michigan DNR/University of Notre Dame study found that wolves even benefit the timber industry by regulating deer browse and helping foxes, hares, and other species survive in the U.P. and northern Wisconsin.<sup>11</sup>

The scientific literature shows that ungulates are ultimately limited more by their food resources and other habitat factors (“bottom-up” limitations), rather than by their predators (“top down” regulators).<sup>12</sup> However, when herds lose their predators, they suffer poorer health and body condition, as well as more degraded habitats. With a healthy assemblage of native carnivores including wolves, ecosystems enjoy the benefits from top-down regulation, which increases the health of ungulate herds with which they are integrally coevolved.

Finally, in July 2017 Professor John Vucetich, Ph.D. of Michigan Technological University School of Forest Resources and Environmental Science, and a world-renowned wolf expert, testified against wolf delisting legislation to the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. About wolves and deer, he said, “...in Michigan, deer kill eight humans and injure another 1300 in deer-vehicle collisions each year. Deer ruin private property through more than 100 deer-vehicle collisions each day. Deer also cause significant damage to two important sectors of agriculture---crop production and forestry. There are also rising concerns about chronic wasting disease in deer. Whatever effect wolves might have on deer would be an overall benefit.”<sup>13</sup>

#### **Health problems, weather, and birthing complications are far greater threats to livestock than native carnivores**

The Michigan DNR’s regular wolf population estimates had steadily decreased in recent years, from approximately 687 in 2011 to just 618 in 2016, with a slight increase in the most recent population estimate to 662. But wolf conflicts with livestock in the U.P. are at historically low levels. Confirmed cases of U.P. wolf/livestock conflicts have always been low. When one farm showed an unusual amount of depredations about five years ago, an investigation found that the farmer had been neglecting his own livestock and the guard animals given to him to protect them, and was baiting wolves to his farm with parts of dead livestock and deer.<sup>14</sup> This farmer later pled no contest to animal cruelty charges.<sup>15</sup>



Since then, wolf conflicts with livestock have decreased sharply. In 2017, the Michigan DNR confirmed that only four farms—out of 900 working farms in the U.P.—experienced wolf conflicts involving only five (5) animals in this past year. This is consistent with—actually lower than—USDA statistics that show wolves are responsible for less than 1 percent of cattle/calf losses in Michigan, while respiratory, digestive and calving problems, weather, disease, lameness and injury, theft and other nonpredator-related maladies are responsible for over 98 percent of losses.<sup>16</sup>

In 2018, even with the slight increase in the most recent wolf population estimate, the Michigan DNR has reported that out of 900 working farms, only four had issues with wolves. Furthermore, the Michigan DNR provides U.P. ranchers with highly effective livestock protection resources. Michigan livestock owners are also compensated for the very few confirmed and even *suspected* missing animals taken by wolves.

Scientific studies have amply demonstrated that indiscriminate killing of wolves by trophy hunting, trapping, or lethal predator control is not only ineffective at mitigating livestock conflicts, but could even make those few problems worse by dispersing stable packs, sending inexperienced juvenile wolves out on their own.<sup>17</sup>

#### **Wild, healthy wolves are terrified of humans and avoid them at all costs**

Merely sighting a wolf does not constitute a threat. In his testimony before Congress in July 17, 2017 as cited above, Vucetich stated, “Wolves are not a threat to human safety. This fact is robustly supported by experts and scientists from academia, federal government, and state governments. The false impression that wolves are a threat to human safety is fostered by those who fabricate or exaggerate the threat that wolves represent and thereby exploit a public that is easily and overly impressed by certain kinds of fear.”<sup>18</sup>

#### **Bear hounds are sent into known wolf territory**

The Michigan DNR reported one wolf conflict with a hunting hound in 2017. It is important to understand that in most of these cases, bear hunters are sending their hunting hounds into known wolf territory at a time of the year when wolves are teaching their young to hunt, and the wolves will defend their territory from the dogs to protect their families. Wolves will also be attracted by bear bait that is set in those areas and may defend it.<sup>19</sup> In 2016, two wolf conflicts were reported with hunting hounds, as well as one unconfirmed conflict with a pet dog (unconfirmed because the dog was cremated before the DNR could investigate the cause). In 2015, the DNR confirmed four wolf conflicts with hunting hounds.



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With all of this in mind, we urge the Michigan House Committee on Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation to reject HR 87. Thank you.

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The Humane Society of the United States  
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<sup>1</sup> "The Michigan myth: How lawmakers turned this true wolf story in to fiction," John Barnes, *MLive*, November 3, 2013

[http://www.mlive.com/news/index.ssf/2013/11/the\\_michigan\\_myth\\_read\\_the\\_tru.html](http://www.mlive.com/news/index.ssf/2013/11/the_michigan_myth_read_the_tru.html)

<sup>2</sup> "Michigan Senator apologizes for fictional wolf story in resolution: 'I am accountable, and I am sorry'," Jonathan Oosting, *MLive*, November 7, 2013

[http://www.mlive.com/news/index.ssf/2013/11/michigan\\_senator\\_apologizes\\_fo.html](http://www.mlive.com/news/index.ssf/2013/11/michigan_senator_apologizes_fo.html)

<sup>3</sup> "Evaluating the scientific soundness of plans for harvesting wolves to manage depredations in Michigan," by John Vucetich, Jeremy Bruskotter, Rolf Peterson, Adrian Treves, Timothy Van Deelen, and Ari Cornman, August, 2013 <http://action.keepwolvesprotected.com/page/-/Vucetich%20et%20al%208-30-2013.pdf?nocdn=1>

<sup>4</sup> "Michigan court rules 2014 wolf hunting law unconstitutional," The Humane Society of the United States, November 23, 2016 [http://www.humanesociety.org/news/news\\_briefs/2016/11/michigan-court-rules-2014.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/news/news_briefs/2016/11/michigan-court-rules-2014.html)

<sup>5</sup> Mertig, A. G., "Attitudes about wolves in Michigan, 2002. Final report to Michigan Department of Natural Resources," Michigan State University, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Lute, M., Nelson, M., Gore, M., Vucetich, J., "Toward Improving the Effectiveness of Wolf Management Approaches in Michigan: insights from a 2010 statewide survey," Michigan State University, February 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Predator-Prey Study: Wolves not threat to deer you may think," *MLive*, January 31, 2016

[http://www.mlive.com/outdoors/index.ssf/2016/01/predator-prey\\_study\\_wolves\\_not.html](http://www.mlive.com/outdoors/index.ssf/2016/01/predator-prey_study_wolves_not.html)

<sup>8</sup> "Gray wolf factsheet," the Wisconsin DNR <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/wolf/facts.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://upnorthlive.com/news/local/michigan-department-of-natural-resources-predicts-good-2019-hunting-season>

<sup>10</sup> "Wisconsin's annual nine-day gun deer hunt sees increase in statewide buck harvest; opportunities for antlerless deer hunting continue through January," the Wisconsin DNR, November 29, 2016

<http://dnr.wi.gov/news/releases/article/?id=4134>

<sup>11</sup> "How wolves are helping nature thrive," by Brandi Klingerman, *Notre Dame Research*, February 17, 2017 <https://research.nd.edu/news/how-wolves-are-helping-nature-thrive/>

<sup>12</sup> See: e.g., Bergstrom; Lennox et al.

<sup>13</sup> "Testimony of Professor John A. Vucetich, Ph.D. before the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works on The H.E.L.P. for Wildlife Act," July 17, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> "Michigan's wolf hunt: How half truths, falsehoods and one farmer distorted reasons for the historic hunt," *MLive*, December 9, 2013

[https://www.mlive.com/news/index.ssf/2013/11/michigans\\_wolf\\_hunt\\_how\\_half\\_t.html](https://www.mlive.com/news/index.ssf/2013/11/michigans_wolf_hunt_how_half_t.html)

<sup>15</sup> "No jail for wolf figure, almost \$1,900 in fines ordered against farmer accused of leaving cattle vulnerable," *MLive*, July 14, 2014

[https://www.mlive.com/news/index.ssf/2014/05/no\\_jail\\_for\\_wolf\\_figure\\_almost.html](https://www.mlive.com/news/index.ssf/2014/05/no_jail_for_wolf_figure_almost.html)

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture-Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service-Veterinary Services, "Death Loss in U.S. Cattle and Calves Due to Predator and Nonpredator Causes, 2015,"

[https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal\\_health/nahms/general/downloads/cattle\\_calves\\_deathloss\\_2015](https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/nahms/general/downloads/cattle_calves_deathloss_2015)



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pdf. See also: <https://www.humanesociety.org/sites/default/files/docs/HSUS-Wolf-Livestock-6.Mar.19Final.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Wielgus, R. B. & Peebles, K. A. "Effects of wolf mortality on livestock depredations," PLOS One 9(12), 2014; Santiago-Avila, F. J., Cornman, A. M., & Treves, A. "Killing wolves to prevent predation on livestock may protect one farm but harm neighbors," PLOS One 13(1), 2018.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0189729>

<sup>18</sup> "Testimony of Professor John A. Vucetich, Ph.D. before the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works on The H.E.L.P. for Wildlife Act," July 17, 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Bump JK, Murawski CM, Kartano LM, Beyer DE Jr, Roell BJ (2013) Bear-Baiting May Exacerbate Wolf-Hunting Dog Conflict. PLoS ONE 8(4): e61708. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0061708