



January 27, 2022

Honorable Representative & Chair Gary Howell
Honorable Representative & Vice Chair Gregory Markkanen
Honorable Representative & Vice Chair William Sowerby
Honorable Representative Beau LaFave
Honorable Representative Gary Eisen
Honorable Representative Rodney Wakeman
Honorable Representative David Martin
Honorable Representative Sara Cambensy
Honorable Representative Abraham Aiyash

Michigan House of Representatives
Lansing, Michigan

Dear Chair Howell and Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Committee:

I am here today representing the 22 branches and thousands of National Deer Association members in Michigan in support of House and Senate resolutions to urge the DNR and Natural Resources Commission to organize a scientifically based and managed wolf hunting and trapping season in 2022.

I love wolves, they are beautiful and iconic animals that embody the wilderness. I have been fortunate to hear wolves howl while shivering in a deer stand, glassing Montana and Idaho valleys, and canoeing northern lakes. Seeing fresh tracks or the remains of a kill will take you back to experiences shared with our ancestors in prehistory. If you love wolves as I do you, you should love the idea of applying scientific management, with hunting as a tool, to manage these magnificent animals as the next step in their recovery. To illustrate why, I thought I would share a few of many examples of animals that have come back from the brink due to scientific management using hunting as a tool.

The Giant Canada Goose was thought to be extinct for 30 years. Fortunately, a small flock was discovered in Rochester, Minnesota in 1962. Hunters funded the habitat restoration, restocking, regulations and research needed to bring back these birds from the brink. I was born in 1960 and my grandparents lived in Rochester. I remember as a very young child being taken by my grandparents to see these endangered birds at Silver lake. I was in awe, but it was also a bit scary, they were as tall as I was and aggressive to small children like me who got too close. Flash forward to 2021 and it is mind boggling for this 61-year-old to see giant canada geese no longer on the brink of extinction, but now so common they can be a pest in some areas with their population

estimated to be as high as 4 million birds. These magnificent and iconic birds now comprise approximately 70% of the hunter goose harvest in the Mississippi flyway. Clearly scientific management with hunting as a management tool and funding source has exceeded anyone's expectations in 1962.

Like wolves, black bears are a large predator that was eliminated from most of its range by settlers, ranchers and uncontrolled hunting and trapping. Unlike wolves, black bears have been scientifically managed and hunted in Michigan for many years. Black bears have healthy population levels and have been extending their range throughout the U.S. and in Michigan. For anyone paying attention to black bear conservation in Michigan it is abundantly clear that black bears have passionate advocates in Michigan bear hunters. They have been effective in working with the legislature, DNR, and Natural Resources Commission to advocate for bears and bear management. It is quite common for the bear hunters to advocate for lower harvest goals in units where they think the goals may have been set too high or increases where they feel population densities warrant a larger harvest to keep bears thriving. Wolves could benefit from both scientific management to keep wolf populations and their prey at healthy levels, and from passionate hunter advocates just like black bears currently have.

Whitetail deer, my favorite game animal, are another of many other examples. Due to uncontrolled killing to supply growing urban markets and feed settlers, whitetail deer were eliminated from most of their former range and populations are estimated to have hit a low of approximately 500,000 deer in the 1880's. Deer hunters realized that they could lose these animals entirely if they did not organize to stop the killing. Market killing was stopped and the first hunting regulations put in place. Hunters worked to reintroduce deer back into their former range and to purchase and restore deer habitat. Much was learned, and the science of deer management and deer hunting has become far more advanced. Today, it is estimated that there are now 20 - 25 million deer in North America, more than when the pilgrims arrived. There are 11 million deer hunters in the U.S., and 588,000 in Michigan, who are passionate advocates for deer, deer habitat and deer hunting. In Michigan, whitetail deer face big challenges with Chronic Wasting Disease, Bovine Tuberculosis, habitat loss, and low densities in the U.P.. Fortunately, Michigan hunters are advocating and working for whitetail deer through groups including the National Deer Association, U.P. Whitetails, Let em Go Let em Grow, Michigan Bowhunters, and the many MUCC sportsperson clubs and deer cooperatives throughout Michigan.

Wildlife populations are most healthy and productive when they are managed below their maximum carrying capacity. This means they have plenty of food to eat, their preferred foods are thriving, pups and fawns are recruited at high rates, and disease impacts are minimized. Unless controlled, wildlife populations will grow until they eat most of their preferred food sources, suffer from starvation, suffer social conflict (war with other packs in the case of wolves), their pups and fawns die from starvation and disease, conflicts with humans increase, and diseases increase. When food sources are reduced by high population levels, carrying capacity can be substantially reduced with disastrous and long-lasting consequences for them, the

animals and plants that they eat, their habitats, and the humans they may come in conflict with as a result.

The Michigan Wolf Management Plan updated in 2015 states "Estimates of biological carrying capacity for the Upper Peninsula are imprecise and range from 600 to 1350 (Mladenoff et al. 1997, Miller et al. 2002, Potvin 2003, Van Deelen 2009)". The plan also states that whitetail deer are the primary prey of wolves in Wisconsin and Michigan. At the time the studies were done, the Upper Peninsula had higher deer populations, and thus a higher carrying capacity for wolves, than it has today. Deer population levels have plunged in recent years, and their failure to recover, is a strong indicator that carrying capacity for wolves is now much lower than it was when those studies were done in 1997 through 2009. In addition, based upon DNR estimates, wolf numbers appear to have flattened out at around 700 since 2011, another indicator that maximum carrying capacity for wolves may have been reached or even exceeded. All of this supports the idea of setting an initial population target higher than the initial minimum sustainable population target of 200 and lower than the current population estimates. As more is learned about current wolf carrying capacity, and deer populations are monitored to ensure they are recovering, that number should be open to further adjustment up or down to keep both wolves and deer thriving.

No conservationist, no lover of wolves, or deer, wants the animals they love to suffer from malnutrition, starvation, for their young to die at high rates, for them to suffer the ravages of disease, or see their populations collapse. Instead, it is our obligation to manage their populations to ensure that they are sustained at levels where they and the animals and plants they consume are healthy and thriving. If you love wolves, you should love the idea of having them follow the path of the Giant Canada Goose, Black Bear, Whitetail deer, elk, wild turkey and many other iconic North American animals, enabling hunting and hunters to be a part of the scientific management of these magnificent animals, ensuring thriving populations, and working to keep them in a healthy balance with their habitats.

My membership also urge that all groups concerned with wolves, and the legislature, work with the responsible state and Federal agencies to ensure that deer have more of the high-quality wintering habitat they need to support the recovery of a healthy deer herd, healthy wolves, and happy deer hunters in the Upper Peninsula.

Regards,



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