



Testimony before  
Committee on Environment & Public Works  
United States Senate

**The Gray Wolf: Modernization of the Endangered  
Species Act**

February 15, 2017  
Washington, D.C.

*Offered by*  
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*On Behalf of*  
**Wisconsin Farm Bureau**

1. Wisconsin Wolf Management Plan, October 27, 1999. P. 15
2. Wisconsin Gray Wolf Monitoring Report, 15 April 2015 Through 14 April 2016
3. Wisconsin Wolf Harvest Zone Map
4. Wisconsin Wolf Season Reports 2012, 2013, 2014
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6. Testimony of Ryan Klussendorf from the Great Lakes Wolf Summit, September 15, 2016
7. Cow 2042 & Cow 2042 (2) Photos
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Good morning Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Carper and members of the committee. My name is Jim Holte and I am a beef and grain farmer from Elk Mound, Wisconsin. I also serve as President of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation and as a member of the American Farm Bureau Board of Directors. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about the Endangered Species Act and specifically, one of the listed species that impacts many farmers throughout the state of Wisconsin, the gray wolf. I have heard many personal stories from farmers about the loss of livestock and how it has impacted their farms, lives and their families. These stories are powerful, emotional and very real. Today, I will share one farmer's story as well as some facts, figures, concerns and updates to our efforts dealing with gray wolves in Wisconsin.

I'd like to start with some Wisconsin-specific wolf statistics. Wisconsin's Wolf Management Plan has a population recovery goal of 350 animals<sup>1</sup>. As of April 2016, the state's overwinter wolf population minimum was 866-897 animals.<sup>2</sup> (p.3) That is an increase of 16.1% from the previous year (746 wolves). Overwinter population means that counts occur during the winter when wolf populations are at their lowest and 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<sup>3</sup>, 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<sup>4</sup> wolves harvested during the hunting seasons over those three years and a population reduction of less than 9%. We saw livestock depredation damage payments significantly decrease (\$60,000-\$75,000 per year<sup>5</sup>) in the three years that a wolf hunting and trapping season was in place. Since the relisting of the wolf in December of 2014, Wisconsin's wolf population has grown from 660 animals to 897 and depredation damage payments exceeded \$200,000 for 2016.

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Under the umbrella of the Endangered Species Act, the gray wolf's federal status has undergone extensive changes over the last 15 years. This is not due to the biological or scientific evidence that population numbers for the species have met and exceeded their recovery goals, but 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 mechanism to manage the population.

Farmers' livestock are their livelihoods. Not only do acts of depredation increase stress to farmers and their families, they 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 2000<sup>2</sup> (p.14) 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 payment from \$18,630 in 2000 to more than \$200,000 in 2016.<sup>5</sup>

I'd like to share with you a story of one of our young farm families from Medford, Wisconsin who has experienced devastating wolf depredation on their farm.

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*Ryan and Cheri Klussendorf are fourth generation farmers who own and operate a 100-cow rotational grazing dairy farm. Their nightmare began in June of 2010 when they moved a group of young calves out to the pasture for the summer. In early July, they received a call in the middle of the night from the local County Sherriff that a large group of young cattle were on the roadway not far from their farm. They promptly recovered the agitated and sweat-covered calves and returned them to their pasture. Several more times that month and in early August they received middle of the night visits from passing motorists because once again, the cattle were found agitated and out of the pasture or on the road. In late August, another middle of the night visit from the local Sherriff's office resulted in a citation for having animals at-large. At this time, the Klussendorfs thought the cattle were being chased by coyotes. All fences were well maintained and more than adequate to contain their livestock.*

*Each time cows get on the road, there is a real possibility one could get hit. Cattle are the most valuable investment and sole income generators on their farm. Not to mention, what if there was an accident and a person was injured or killed?*

*Ryan was able to start farming at the age of 21 because he was able to keep costs low by grazing cattle. Now, the liability he faced every night while his cattle were on pasture was a serious public safety hazard with potentially devastating impacts to his life. They asked the local District Attorney and Sherriff's office for help but were told "there is nothing we can do for you, buy a gun."*

*They changed some of their farming practices, to keep younger cattle closer to the barns, but nothing helped. On the morning of November 7, 2010, a day that Ryan will never forget, the family got up and started doing chores. Some of the cows were already in the barnyard ready to be milked. This was very unusual because normally they are brought in from the pasture. As Ryan headed to the pasture to bring in the rest of the cows he found what was left of cow 2042.<sup>7</sup> The gruesome scene told the story of the deadly attack on this three-year-old cow. She was bitten in the back leg until all the tendons and ligaments were severed. She was drug down from behind after she could no longer stand and the pack of wolves started eating her alive. She eventually succumbed to her lethal injuries. The pasture was a blood bath and her corpse was unidentifiable other than the tags from her ears that were found 100 feet from her corpse.*

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*Four days later all charges for animals at-large were dismissed and an apology issued from the local Sheriff's office. This was the worst summer of Ryan's life. His stomach sinks every time the phone rings late at night, he sleeps with the window open, no matter the time of year so he can listen to the traffic on the road and he springs out of bed at night thinking there is a knock at their door, when it's only the icemaker in the kitchen. This happened more than six years ago and yet the events during the summer of 2010 impact every decision they make for their cattle and farm management practices. All of Ryan and Cheri's cows are within 200 feet of their farmyard at night. Calves are no longer put on pasture. The costs have been burdensome due to building maintenance, feed management and manure hauling but the emotional costs of increased stress and trauma for the family and animals has been tremendous. Ryan is a husband, father and farmer. Right now, he cannot protect his cows and his family's livelihood without the risk of being prosecuted.<sup>6</sup>*

Ryan and Cheri Klussendorf are not the only farmers who have been impacted, which is why the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation continues to support the decision, made in 2011 by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), to delist the gray wolf in the Western Great Lakes region and allow the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to implement the Wisconsin Wolf Management Plan. The latest population estimates of gray wolves in Wisconsin is the highest on record at almost 900 animals and far exceeds the targeted management goal of 350 wolves specified in the plan. Since implementation of the first gray wolf hunting and trapping season in Wisconsin in 2012, the DNR's management plan has been conservative, science-based and designed to maintain the prescribed wolf population while managing it to minimize conflicts with Wisconsin farmers and others.

Not only have wolves increased their depredations on domestic livestock such as calves, cattle, sheep, horses, guard animals, pigs, goats, domestic fowl and domestic deer, but depredations to pets and hunting dogs have also risen.<sup>8</sup> In 2016, 22 hound dogs and six pet dogs were reported for damage payments. The threats that these predators pose to rural residents is evident in the Wisconsin DNR's 2015-2016 Wolf Monitoring Report that states, "One wolf was euthanized by USDA-WS in response to a verified human health

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and safety threat during the monitoring period<sup>2</sup>.” (p. 4-5) These predators are smart, and easily learn new behaviors. As their numbers continue to increase without restrictions, we dread the day this “threat” becomes a human mortality.

As wolf populations continue to increase, interactions between farmers, their livestock, rural residents and wolves continue to escalate without a remedy in sight. Congressional action needs to occur and our farmers continue to lobby Congress for this change. Currently, two pieces of legislation sit in various stages of procedure that would delist the gray wolf in the Western Great Lakes region and Wyoming. S. 164, and H.R. 424 would reinstate the USFWS 2011 decision to delist the gray wolf and that decision would not be subject to judicial review. The gray wolf is a great example of the Endangered Species Act functioning positively and negatively. It has been successful for the purpose of species recovery but it has failed due to unsuccessful removal of the species once the population adequately recovered and no longer required the support provided by the law. Congress intended for the ESA to protect species from extinction. However, the law fails to accomplish this, instead it prioritizes species listings over actual recovery and habitat conservation. The ESA was enacted in 1973 and has more than 1,600 species currently listed. Less than 2% of these species have been removed from the list during the 44-year life of the law. The law fails to provide adequate incentives for working lands species conservation and it imposes far-reaching regulatory burdens on agriculture. Farmers and ranchers consider it their personal responsibility to be stewards of the land, however the ESA creates many challenges for them to balance agriculture production with wildlife habitat. Reform of the ESA should include a focus on species recovery and habitat conservation that respects landowners and prioritizes basic human needs over those of endangered species. Coordination with state wildlife agencies to leverage private, incentive-based conservation efforts can better achieve long-term conservation goals.

I appreciate the efforts by this committee to address the needed reforms to the Endangered Species Act and the serious nature of the gray wolf situation in Wisconsin. There is a legitimate need for states to have more control of wildlife management while still maintaining some level of federal oversight. Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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