



Talking Points: Baldwin's [Bill](#) to Delist Gray Wolves in the Upper Midwest

Bill overview: The “Northern Great Lakes Wolf Recovery Act” introduced by Senator Tammy Baldwin would direct USFWS to create an “Advisory Committee” to update the Post-Delisting Monitoring Plan (2008) for the Western Great Lakes region and subsequently delist wolves in the region.

- **Baldwin’s legislation is a prime example of the real problem we have with wolves: that both public agencies and politicians consistently cater to narrow, special interest groups bent on decreasing protections for wolves and allowing recreational killing as political favors, despite Tribes and the broad public overwhelmingly supporting protections for wolves, especially from recreational killing.**
- **Baldwin’s proposal dismisses broad public support of wolves and their protection throughout the Midwest.** Both Tribes and the broad public support wolves and their protection, which has been extensively evidenced within the [peer-reviewed scientific literature](#) and by state agencies, both inside and outside of wolf range.
 - In Wisconsin, a recent [WDNR survey](#) documented the public’s: views that wolves are special animals that deserve our admiration (75%) and are culturally important (77%), opposition to specific methods of harvest like hounds (64%) or traps (70%), and feelings that hunting wolves is unnecessary (62%) or culturally offensive to Native American tribes (57%). Accordingly, 92% of the comments submitted by Tribes and the public on the recent WDNR Draft ‘Wolf Management Plan’ heavily criticized the plan’s focus on lethal management, and were supportive of wolves and stronger protections for them.
 - In Minnesota, public opinion is also on wolves’ side: [86% of Minnesota residents said they would like to see the same number or more wolves in their state, and over two-thirds believe protecting individual wolves is important.](#)
 - In Michigan, citizens and the Tribal community strongly oppose the trophy hunting and trapping of wolves and in 2014 [overturned two laws](#) by a wide margin that would have allowed these practices.
- **Tribes are not represented within the groups supporting the proposal, or adequately considered within the proposed ‘Advisory Committee’.** Sen. Baldwin neither contacted nor consulted with regional Native American Tribes or Tribal organizations about her bill despite their usufruct treaty rights in the region, and in clear disregard for their perspective of gray wolves as persons, relatives, and the intertwined histories of dismissal and oppression. Tribal inclusion in the bill amounts to lip service because they will not have an equitable voice within the proposed ‘Committee’, which in

practice means there will be no adequate consideration of their views or even Treaty rights.

- The ongoing [experiences of the Tribes with Wisconsin wolf 'management'](#) provide great examples of what typically results from 'Tribal inclusion' in such wildlife committees. Tribes in WI have repeatedly supported protections for wolves and opposed recreational killing. Yet, Tribes have been habitually shut out of the process or their views ignored when included in committees, by both the WDNR and the Natural Resources Board (NRB). Some NRB members have explicitly called for the violation of Tribal usufruct rights by denying Tribes their rights to half of all hunting permits given the latter's interest in protecting wolves from recreational killing. In the new WDNR management plan, Tribal views are 'included' through statements by Tribes detailing their views of wolves as persons and relatives that should not be managed, only to be dismissed by the same Plan that includes recreational killing of their relatives as a primary management strategy.
- "The tribes believe their treaty right includes protection for wolves, so that wolves can fulfill their cultural and ecological purposes. Tribes maintain that Ma'iingan [wolves] should determine their own population levels, in order to provide ecological and cultural benefits. A respectful and appreciative relationship with Ma'iingan should be maintained so that the future well-being of both Ma'iingan and the Ojibwe will be assured." ([Gilbert et al. 2022](#)) (see also the Global Indigenous Council's [Wolf Treaty](#))
- Additionally, the suggested 'Advisory Committee' is inherently limited and biased in its consideration of public views, best-available science and its own advice by being held to the predetermined outcome of wolf delisting.
- **Baldwin's proposal dismisses the best-available scientific evidence, which (1) supports stronger protections for wolves to reduce conflicts and mitigate harms to both wolves and domesticated animals, and (2) challenges states' adequacy of regulatory mechanisms to protect wolves.** Baldwin's bill proposes the forceful delisting of wolves in the Great Lakes through an act of Congress, as Northern Rocky Mountain wolves previously experienced, rather than through the process established in the ESA, which requires such determinations to be made "solely on the basis of the best scientific and commercial data available", and following an analysis of various factors, including the adequacy of regulatory mechanisms proposed or implemented by states to safeguard wolves.
 - The current state of wolves and wolf policy in the Northern Rockies is a vivid precedent of what this bill would catalyze in the Great Lakes. At the service of ranchers and hunters, Montana, Idaho and Wyoming are currently in the process of decimating their wolf populations through wolf bounties and allowing methods like snaring, use of hounds, night vision equipment and the killing of pups, undoing decades of recovery. In Wisconsin, the recent delisting period in 2021 triggered the recreational killing of over 30% of Wisconsin wolves in a matter of days, many of them succumbing to hounds.

- Studies of various US wolf populations, [including Wisconsin's](#), have associated decreased protections for wolves with increases in both conflicts and unreported illegal killings. Additionally, [killing wolves in response to conflicts has been repeatedly described as ineffective, variable and even counterproductive \(leading to increased conflicts\)](#), yet remains a main state agency tool for handling conflicts. Additionally, [a recent peer-review study](#) suggests Wisconsin's method for estimating wolf abundance is unreliable given it "shows significant departures from best practices in scientific measurement."
- **The ESA has done a fabulous job of stopping wolves from going extinct, but because of lawmakers and agencies catering to narrow interests promoting indiscriminate killing, it hasn't been successful in maintaining wolves [in their role as apex predators with functional ecological densities](#) without continued federal protections.** Recovery for most species requires protective policies far beyond the bare minimum back-stop the ESA provides, but currently the ESA is the only tool we have. Predators, especially large carnivores, have critical habitats that are constantly changing with effects of climate change, the encroachment of agriculture and development, and extreme trophy hunting practices. We need democratically inclusive plans by the states and the USFWS to reflect the interests of the broad public who want species protected while also working with the very small number of citizens who have conflicts.
- **Baldwin has introduced this bill at the behest of narrow interest groups.** The bill's sponsors are limited to [five 'Big Ag' and canned hunting groups](#) which have contributed to many of the harms to wildlife and ecosystems in Wisconsin, such as: the decimation of our predators and degradation of our ecosystems by overherbivory; increases in and deregulation of confined animal feeding operations, leading to increasing soil, water and air pollution (including climate change); and wildlife diseases like Chronic Wasting Disease running rampant through our ecosystems, harming not only wildlife but all Midwesterners.
- **Baldwin is advancing the false rhetoric of wolves threatening the ranching industry, to the detriment of sound wildlife and environmental policy.** Wolf predation on domesticated animals is minimal (in 2022, [there were less than 30 confirmed or probable wolf predation incidents](#) in Wisconsin, out of 3.4 million cows and sheep in the state), and producers have access to both effective non-lethal methods and compensation (in Wisconsin, compensation is even available for hunting dogs, which are willingly put in danger of clashes with wolves).