



## The Quest for Common Ground...

*It's easier today than ever to get locked into an opinion based on the way we choose to filter information... we tend to "hear what we want to hear"! The Quest for Common Ground is a series of interviews with people close to important issues in our region with varied perspectives on the issue. Understanding different perspectives is the first step in averting conflict and finding solutions.*



**Mark Jacobs**  
Retired Aitkin County Land Commissioner

*This segment explores perspectives on Wolves, Deer, and Humans in Minnesota. The following questions were posed to:*

**THOMAS GABLE**, Project Leader/Biologist – Voyageurs Wolf Project

**JARED MAZUREK** - Executive Director, Minnesota Deer Hunters Association

**MIKE SCHRAGE**, Wildlife Program Manager for the Fond du Lac Band of Ojibwe - Resource Management Division

- Timber wolf populations were decimated more than a half century ago and ultimately listed as "threatened" on the federal endangered species list. Their population in Minnesota has rebounded to a point where they could be delisted. What impact would delisting have on MN timber wolf populations?

- Minnesota's white tailed deer population has declined from two decades ago. How much has the increased timber wolf population contributed to that decline?

- Do you have hope that wolves, deer, and humans can peacefully co-exist in the forested region of Minnesota?



## Perspective from Jared Mazurek - Executive Director, Minnesota Deer Hunters Association

Timber wolf populations were decimated more than a half century ago and ultimately listed as “threatened” on the federal endangered species list. Their population in Minnesota has rebounded to a point where they could be delisted. What impact would delisting have on MN timber wolf populations?

At the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association, we believe delisting the Gray Wolf from protections under the Endangered Species Act would not mean eliminating wolves or allowing their populations to collapse again. Instead, it would return management authority to the state of Minnesota and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

Minnesota currently has the largest wolf population in the lower 48 states, and the species has exceeded federal recovery goals for many years. Delisting would allow the state to manage wolves using science-based tools similar to how other wildlife species are managed. That could include regulated harvest seasons, targeted population management in areas with high conflicts, and continued monitoring of population health.

In our view, delisting would likely stabilize the wolf population at sustainable levels rather than dramatically reducing it. The goal would be balance; maintaining a healthy wolf population while also considering impacts on prey species, livestock producers, and rural communities.

Minnesota’s white tailed deer population has declined from two decades ago. How much has the increased timber wolf population contributed to that decline?

The Minnesota Deer Hunters Association recognizes that this change is the result of multiple factors, not a single cause. Severe winters; habitat changes and forest maturation; hunting regulations designed to reduce herd size in previous decades; and predation from multiple predators, including wolves, bears, and coyotes all play a role in white-tailed deer population dynamics.

Wolves are certainly a big piece of that equation, particularly in northeastern Minnesota where wolf densities are high and deer habitat can be more limited. In those regions, predation can have a very measurable impact on local deer numbers, especially when combined with harsh winters. However, statewide deer trends cannot be attributed to wolves alone.

MDHA believes wildlife management decisions should consider the combined effect of habitat, weather, predators, and human harvest rather than focusing on a single factor. However, predators are one of the factors that we can help to control once the Gray Wolf is delisted and management returns to the state. We believe in using every tool at our disposal to scientifically manage all species for the betterment of all species.

Do you have hope that wolves, deer, and humans can peacefully coexist in the forested region of Minnesota?

Absolutely, MDHA believes we can coexist, but coexistence requires active, science-based wildlife management. We strongly believe Minnesota can sustain healthy populations of wolves, deer, and people who rely on the land. Achieving that balance requires maintaining strong deer habitat, monitoring wolf populations carefully, allowing the state flexibility to manage wolves when populations exceed recovery goals, and addressing conflicts with livestock producers and rural communities.

Minnesota has a long history of successful wildlife management. With responsible stewardship and sound policy, wolves will remain part of the ecosystem while ensuring deer populations remain healthy enough to support hunting traditions, ecological balance, and rural economies.

Coexistence is possible, but it works best when wildlife populations are actively managed rather than locked into one-size-fits-all federal protections.

## Perspective from Thomas Gable, Project Leader/Biologist – Voyageurs Wolf Project

Timber wolf populations were decimated more than a half century ago and ultimately listed as “threatened” on the federal endangered species list. Their population in Minnesota has rebounded to a point where they could be delisted. What impact would delisting have on MN timber wolf populations?

Delisting would likely have little impact on the gray wolf population in Minnesota given how the Department of Natural Resources has said they will manage wolf populations should they be delisted. Specifically, the Minnesota Wolf Management Plan, which our project had no involvement in, states that one of the goals of wolf management in the state will be to “maintain a population comparable to recent estimates...and distributed across the majority of current wolf range” should wolves be delisted.

Minnesota’s white tailed deer population has declined from two decades ago. How much has the increased timber wolf population contributed to that decline?

There is little evidence to support the notion that wolves have contributed in a significant way to the decline in deer populations in Minnesota. However, there are clear and convincing data showing that the decline in deer populations (and deer hunter success) over the past two decades is a result of changes in winter severity.

Further, there is good reason to believe that the abundance of high-quality habitat for deer during winter in northern Minnesota has decreased due to forest management practices—specifically shorter rotations that have reduced the amount of conifer cover, which are critical deer habitat during winters, on the landscape. Most of northern Minnesota is dominated by young aspen forests and these simply are not good habitats for deer during winter.

For anyone who wants to learn more about the effects of wolves, winters, and habitat on deer in northern Minnesota, I encourage them to check out an in-depth webinar I recently gave that is free to watch here <https://youtu.be/sonGNfk90kQ>.

Do you have hope that wolves, deer, and humans can peacefully coexist in the forested region of Minnesota?

I truly wish I could say yes. However, the realistic side of me struggles to see a future where wolves are not controversial and are widely accepted by all Minnesotans. The issue with wolves is that wolves are more than just an animal to many. They ultimately have become a political symbol highlighting the fractures in our polarized society (urban vs. rural divide, Republicans vs. Democrats, etc). I struggle to see that changing anytime soon but I hope it does.

That said, I think the bigger question is can people peacefully coexist with one another? Can people learn to be kind to, empathetic toward, and love people who think about wolves, wolf management, or many aspects of the world very differently than they do? That to me is the more important question.



## Perspective from Mike Schrage, Wildlife Program Manager for the Fond du Lac Band of Ojibwe - Resource Management Division

Wolves have an important role in the Ojibwe creation story. The Creator put the original man and the original wolf together and sent them out to walk the earth and give names to all the plants and animals. Afterwards the Creator put them on separate paths but said their fates would always be linked – what happened to one would happen to the other. Today many Ojibwe see a common thread between their own history and the wolf’s. A history of vilification and persecution, leading to the loss of lands and population, followed in more recent times by greater respect and appreciation and the reclamation of lands, culture and numbers. Wolves are not seen as competitors by many Ojibwe, rather instead deserving respect as another hunter and being in the Ojibwe world. For these reasons, many Ojibwe across the upper Midwest oppose the killing of wolves, sometimes even equating killing a wolf with killing a brother or sister.

Other Ojibwe would agree the killing of a wolf can be necessary at times, such as in instances where human safety is a concern or in cases of pet and livestock depredations. Others argue for reducing wolf numbers to increase deer and moose numbers as both moose and deer still play an important part in the diets of many Ojibwe. Still others would like the opportunity to hunt or trap wolves for their own needs, including selling the pelts to fur buyers. Many Ojibwe would probably agree killing a wolf is okay if done respectfully and for the right reasons. Killing wolves simply for “sport” or because of a general dislike of wolves, I believe would be widely condemned by Ojibwe communities.

When wolves were delisted in Minnesota from 2012 – 2014, the Fond du Lac Band did not authorize any tribal seasons for wolf hunting or trapping, nor did the Band allow state-licensed hunters to take wolves on their tribal lands. If in the future wolves are removed from the Federal Endangered Species List again, the Band will make another determination whether to authorize a tribal wolf season for Fond du Lac members and whether to open tribal lands for anyone else to hunt or trap wolves. In Minnesota’s Treaty Areas of 1854 and 1857 where the Band retains usufructuary rights, the Band will also expect to work closely with the Minnesota DNR on issues of any proposed state season for wolf harvest.



“Killing wolves simply for ‘sport’ or because of a general dislike of wolves, I believe would be widely condemned by Ojibwe communities.”

**MIKE SCHRAGE**

### **WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST:**

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