

## **DNR – What happened behind closed doors?**

*Minnesota Government Data Practices Act Request filed by Wolf Advocate Group*

MINNEAPOLIS, MN (July 30, 2012) – The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is being asked to answer questions about how and why the Gray Wolf is being targeted for an open sport trapping and shooting season immediately after it was removed from protection under the federal Endangered Species Act. A Minnesota Government Data Practices Act was formally submitted to the DNR to understand how and why the State of Minnesota DNR breached its legal commitments to: (1) wait five years before considering proposing a wolf shooting and trapping season; and (2) that any shooting and trapping season would only be one option for “population management measures”, **not** just for sport. (Currently, lightened state laws already allow for more wolf killing if they are considered threatening to people, livestock, domestic animals, or pets.)

The Government Data Practices Act request also seeks answers to why the public was removed from the decision making process. The DNR is entrusted with our public resources and this includes wildlife which exists both for its own sake and for everyone’s enrichment.

The Government Data Practices Act request names specific interest groups because documents show that the DNR may have been unduly influenced by one or more of those groups.

In an email dated April 23, 2012, obtained by an earlier Government Data Practices Act request, Dennis E. Simon, (Chief Wildlife Management) of the DNR writes “... we owe it to our primary clients, hunters and trappers, and to livestock producers as secondary clients, to do what we can to establish a legitimate harvest opportunity now that the wolf is under our management authority.”

In January 2012, wolves were removed from protection under the federal Endangered Species Act, which then allowed the wolf to be protected under a plan managed by the Minnesota DNR, i.e. the “Minnesota Wolf Management Plan.” Here in Minnesota, home to the only original wolf population in the lower 48-states, the DNR violated its own legal plan.

In 2001, the Minnesota Wolf Management Plan was signed into law and clearly states on page 21:

*“Population management measures, including public taking (i.e., hunting and trapping seasons) or other options, will be **considered** by DNR in the future but **not sooner than 5 years** after Federal delisting by USFWS. If, in the future, public taking is proposed by DNR, there will be opportunity for **full public comment**. Decisions on public taking will be based on sound biological data, including comprehensive population surveys.”*

The DNR used an “expedited emergency game and fish rule-making process” which avoided full public comment and a public hearing and only asked for comments via an online survey. The DNR is ram-rodging a wolf shooting and trapping season on a formerly endangered species, avoiding a thorough public process.

Of 7,351 responders including hunters, an overwhelming 79% opposed the hunt.

So, what happened?

“The Minnesota DNR is trading political favors on the backs of wolves,” says Maureen Hackett, M.D. of Howling for Wolves, a Minnesota action group dedicated to raising awareness of the plight of the Gray Wolf. “The public deserves to know what went on behind closed doors and why the DNR violated its own plan. We want to know what role special interest groups played in pushing forward an immediate wolf trapping and shooting season. “

Hackett adds, “This is one of many steps we are taking to educate the public about the reckless handling of a species that nearly went extinct. Even the DNR’s wolf population estimates by their own admission are just estimates and those have not been done since 2008. “

While livestock producers have wolf conflict problems, those events are low and they do not tell how many wolves we have. In 2011, the USDA reported 88 incidences of wolf kills of livestock in Minnesota.

The DNR is rushing to kill random wolves in a public sport season even though problem wolves can already be killed under state law. In fact, relaxed state laws allow for problem wolves to be killed by the public if they are considered threatening to people, livestock, domestic animals, or pets

Howling for Wolves is working to offer preventative non-lethal predator control measures, to willing farmers including specially trained dogs and other animal husbandry techniques.

The DNR estimates there are 3,000 wolves in Minnesota though there hasn’t been a population estimate since 2008. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service shows between 1965 and 1974, Minnesota had a wolf population estimated at 350 to 700 animals. The state’s control program and open season continued until May 1974 when the gray wolf gained protection under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).

### **About Howling For Wolves:**

**Howling for Wolves** was created to be a voice for wild wolves. We aim to educate the public about our wolf population and let people know how they can take action to keep wild wolves in a self-sustaining existence. Our current efforts focus on the Minnesota Gray wolf. Minnesota is the only lower 48 state that has its original wolf population. In January 2012, after 40 years on the Endangered Species List, the Minnesota wolf was de-listed. Now an immediate wolf trapping and shooting season is set to start in the fall of 2012. It is our mission to educate and motivate the public to speak up and even howl for the Minnesota gray wolf.

**Maureen Hackett, M.D.**, the founder of Howling for Wolves, is a physician and triple board certified forensics psychiatrist. Hackett is a former United State Air Force officer with rank of Major and ran or Congress in the third congressional district in 2010. In 2003, Hackett was instrumental in the passage of Minnesota law providing for tobacco-free state hospital grounds.

For more information and resources: [www.howlingforwolves.org](http://www.howlingforwolves.org)

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