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The Vermont Legislative Research Shop

Introduction of Wolves to Vermont

What are Other States Doing?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that it planned to study potential wolf restoration in the Northeast's Great North Woods. As a result of this, New Hampshire introduced a bill much like the one proposed in Vermont's House by Representative Helm. The introduction study was to be done in Maine and New York since they contain the core of potential wolf habitats (ENN News Monday, May 10). The Bill was passed on June 01, 1999 in New Hampshire (HB 240) that said that it was fine for wolves to naturally return to New Hampshire, but they should not be introduced (New Hampshire House Bill 240).

How Would Wolves Impact Vermont and Vermonters?

Since wolves are second only to humans in ability to adapt to climates, and since they are able to survive anywhere there is sufficient food and human tolerance to allow them to exist, they would be able to thrive in Vermont. Wolves in the Great Lakes region kill an average of 15 to 19 deer each every year in addition to beaver, moose, and other prey. Although this is a large amount, the wolves would not compete with hunters for deer. The gray wolves have been proven to kill and eat those deer that are elderly, sick, injured, young, starving or fat deprived since hunting and killing can be dangerous for the wolves. It is also true that they will not deplete the deer population because the health of the wolf population is dependent on the health of its prey base (Fish and Wildlife Service 1999).

Wild wolves kill many animals, but they do not generally harm people because they are scared of humans so they avoid them whenever possible. In contrast to wild wolves, domestic dogs, pet wolves, and wolf-dog hybrids kill several humans every year in North America. Although wolves rarely harm humans, they occasionally harm domestic animals. In Michigan, from 1991 to 1998, wolves killed 4 calves and one dog. In Wisconsin, from 1991 to 1998, wolves killed 29 calves, 9 sheep, 140 turkeys, 2 chickens, and 19 dogs. In Minnesota, from 1991 to 1997, wolves killed 467 cattle, 6 horses, 3 pigs, 177 sheep, 4 goats, 7 geese, 2 ducks, 30 chickens, 4,479 turkeys, and 59 dogs. In Northwest Montana, from 1987 through 1998, wolves killed 55 cattle, 42 sheep, and 5 dogs. In Idaho from 1995 to 1998, there were 5 cattle, 53 sheep, and 4 dogs killed. In the Yellowstone area from 1995 to 1998, wolves killed 6 cattle, 80 sheep, and 4 dogs, and in Arizona in 1998, 1 dog was killed (Fish and Wildlife Service 1999).

What Legally Can be Done?

People do not enjoy it when their livestock are being killed, so due to the federal management laws, landowners are allowed to kill wolves if they find them in the act of wounding or killing livestock. Additionally, if wolves have attacked domestic animals and pets on private land two times in one year, they will be moved. Wolves can also be moved if they are negatively impacting the big game populations (Fish and Wildlife Service December 18, 1997).

Wolves Effects on the Economy

In a recent study conducted by the Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center in Minnesota, they found that the reintroduction of wolves could promote more tourism adding approximately \$3 million annually to the state's economy. However, maintaining wolf populations also incur costs. Examining one proposed plan by Minnesota Wolf Management Round Table, it was estimated that as the wolf population expands it will need to be controlled by hunting or by management by the state. They estimate that by 2005, the wolf population will have to be cut by 28-53% per year. There are other possible costs such as agricultural damages, and damages to livestock. They estimated that each wolf would cost about \$146 by the year 2005 (Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center 1999).

References

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