



FAIR GAME?

For decades, wolves were protected under the Endangered Species Act. Now, it's open season again.

by MICHAEL SHARP

In a misty rain, Nancy Warren walked down a dirt road, following wolf tracks through the heart of Ottawa National Forest on Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Hearing something in the brush, she paused, expecting to see a deer.

Instead, some 15 feet away, out walked a gray wolf. He hadn't seen her. He hadn't heard her. And so, face to face, here they were. "[He] looked at me. I looked at him. And then he looked over his shoulder."

A second wolf emerged.

Warren glanced down the quarter mile of road to where she'd parked. "My only regret," she remembers thinking, "is no one's going to believe me because my camera is in the car." So she just stood there, talking to the pair: "You are just so beautiful. Look at you. You're so beautiful."

The two wolves stared back. Curious. Studying. And then, just like that, they walked away into the woods. "I just felt a connection," says Warren, who's been involved with wolf education in Michigan for more than 20 years. "It's still a thrill every single time I see one.

Every time I see a wolf, I just stare in awe."

Few animals in the United States evoke such strong emotions—their magic and mystique fueling a wolf-watching industry that annually generates tens of millions of dollars in and around Yellowstone National Park. Native American tribes still hold the animal sacred.

But gray wolves, once again, are under fire.

After Congress stripped them of Endangered Species Act protections in Montana and Idaho in April 2011, those states immediately established hunts. The decision was slipped into the federal government's spending package that year, as legislators scrambled to avoid a government shutdown, and it marked the first time Congress has ever legislatively removed an animal from the endangered species list.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service then followed in 2012 by delisting wolves in Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. The latter three have established hunts as well.

More than 1,000 wolves have since been killed, and in a stunning turnabout for an animal that had been protected since 1974, states like Wisconsin have already moved to allow such cruel practices as hound hunting and steel-jawed leghold traps (see chart). In Yellowstone, the wolf known as 832F was perhaps the most celebrated in the country, the alpha female of the Lamar Canyon pack. "She was an amazing mother," Marc Cooke, of the advocacy group Wolves of the Rockies, told *The New York Times*. "She's my favorite

“IT’S SHOOT FIRST, ASK QUESTIONS LATER. AND WE THINK THAT’S THE WRONG WAY TO GO. WOLVES BELONG TO ALL OF US.”

— WOLF ADVOCATE NANCY WARREN

wolf of all-time,” David Hornoff, founder of wolf-watcher.org, said last year. In December, in one of the rare times she ranged outside the park, 832F was shot dead.

“It just makes me sick. I don’t know how else to describe it,” says Warren, referring to government policies and procedures she believes are based on “so much misinformation and hatred.”

Warren has joined the cause to protect wolves in her home state of Michigan, where the legislature in December designated the state’s estimated 687 wolves as game animals, opening the door for a hunt to be established there as well. The HSUS responded swiftly, joining a coalition of groups aiming to fight the law with a ballot referendum. Staffers hustled to galvanize supporters, hosting kickoff events and organizing signature-gathering outings. More than 2,000 citizens volunteered to help. Says Jill Fritz, HSUS Michigan state director: “It’s really astounding and incredibly encouraging to see how many people have gotten involved.”

Opposite: A gray wolf crosses a stream in the Superior National Forest, Minnesota, one of five states that have recently opened hunting seasons on the species. Below: Wolves form tight bonds, with pack members pitching in to care for pups.

In late March, the coalition hit its goal and then some, delivering more than 250,000 signatures to Michigan’s secretary of state, who has 60 days to now verify that 161,305 of those are

valid. That would officially postpone the prospect of a hunt until Michigan’s November 2014 election—when voters, finally, would get their say in the matter.

The HSUS has also filed two recent lawsuits aiming to restore federal protections for wolves in Wyoming and the western Great Lakes region. (Congress, when delisting wolves in Idaho and Montana, blocked any judicial review of that legislation.) “It’s appalling,” Fritz says, “to see this vital, iconic species, still in its fragile recovery period, being hunted and killed in painful steel-jawed leghold traps and neck snares.”

Ranching interests who complain of livestock deaths—along with hunters who view the wolves as competition for deer—have largely driven the push for renewed hunting. But the state Department of Natural Resources’ own statistics show that in 2010, 2011, and 2012, a single farm accounted for 57, 51, and 38 percent of all livestock depredation events in Michigan. Advocates contend that the DNR should follow its policy of addressing such events on a case-by-case basis—possibly with nonlethal solutions like guard animals or electronic fencing—before holding a statewide hunt.

John Vucetich, who leads the research of wolves and moose at Michigan’s Isle Royale National Park, sees no reason to hunt wolves in the state. He notes that, between 2001 and 2010, wolves killed an average of 11 head of cattle each year, and that both hunters and malnutrition annually kill more than twice as many deer as wolves do. If, he says, it’s just a hatred of the animal that’s fueling this: “In terms of who we are as human beings, that’s a step backwards.” ■

➔ **TO LEARN MORE** about the Michigan campaign, visit keepwolvesprotected.com.

WORST PRACTICES

New states have not just opened hunting seasons on wolves recently removed from federal protection, but also allowed cruel and unsportsmanlike killing methods. Here’s a look at just how prevalent these practices have already become.



● **TRAPPING:** Wolves can be caught in steel-jawed leghold traps and neck snares, left to suffer for hours or even days.

▲ **BAITING:** Hunters can use piles of bait to lure wolves, then shoot the animals while they’re eating.

■ **HOUNDING:** Hunters can use packs of dogs to chase down and kill or corner wolves.

★ **TBD:** Michigan has passed a bill classifying wolves as a game animal, but The HSUS and other groups are seeking to fight the ruling with a ballot referendum.

