

Wisconsin Wolf Season Report 2014-15

David MacFarland and Jane Wiedenhoef

Abstract

Wisconsin wolf hunters and trappers harvested 154 wolves during the 2014-15 season. This was a 60% decrease from the 2013-14 harvest of 257 wolves. The 2014-15 harvest was comprised of 87 males and 67 females.

Background

Wisconsin requires state-licensed hunters and trappers to obtain a wolf permit to harvest a wolf. Permits are issued through a 2 stage process. The first 50% of permits are issued through a random lottery in which all applicants are entered. The second 50% of permits are issued based upon the cumulative preference points of applicants which give unsuccessful applicants from prior years a greater chance to obtain a permit. Each permit allows the harvest of one wolf by any legal method. Legal methods include trapping with foothold traps and cable restraints, hunting with the use of electronic calls, bait and the aid of dogs.

Wisconsin's wolf season opens on October 15th of each year. Trapping with foothold traps and hunting with the aid of bait and calls are legal throughout the season. Trapping with cable restraints and hunting with the aid of dogs become legal methods on the Monday following the gun deer season, in 2014 these became legal methods on December 1st. The state is divided into 6 wolf management zones (Figure 1). Wolf permits authorize hunting and trapping in any open zone. The Department has the authority to close wolf zones as zone specific quotas are reached. If quotas are not met the season closes on February 28th.

Methods

Wisconsin requires state-licensed wolf hunters and trappers to register their wolf using a 2 stage registration process. Within 24 hours of harvest, permit holders are required to inform the Department by phone of the harvest location, sex and method used. This information is used to track harvest by unit and make unit closure decisions. By the 5th day of the month following harvest, hunters and trappers are required to present the pelt and skinned carcass to the department for final registration and tagging of the animal. The department collects a pre-molar for aging purposes, a genetic sample, and a reproductive tract from females.

Results

Wolf season

Of 9,334 permit applicants, 1,500 (16.1%) received authorization to purchase a wolf permit. An additional 5,005 individuals applied for a preference point bringing the total number of applicants to 14,339 (table 1). The state-wide wolf quota was set at 156 with 150 available to state license holders, the total wolf harvest in the 2014-15 season was 154 representing a 23.8% harvest rate (table 2) compared to 257 and 32.4% in the 2013-14 season. Males comprised 56.5% (87) and females 43.5% (67) of the total harvest. Wolf harvest was distributed across the 6 management units according to unit specific quotas (table 2, figure 2).

Of the 154 wolves harvested, trapping with foothold traps accounted for 124 (80.5%), and 30 (19.5%) wolves were harvested by hunters. Of the 30 wolves harvested by hunters, 6 (3.8%) were hunted with the aid of dogs. Three wolves were harvested with archery equipment; firearm was the method of harvest for all other animals (table 3). No wolves were harvested with the use of cable restraints.

All zones opened to wolf harvest on October 15th. The first zone closure (zone 2) occurred on October, 18th, the final zones (zones 3 and 6) closed on December 5th (table 2). The rate of harvest in the 2014-15 season was faster than experienced in the previous 2 seasons (figure 3).

Biological Sample Collection

Successful license holders are required to submit wolf carcasses to the Department. The primary objective in carcass collection is to obtain biological samples. A genetic sample and a tooth for aging was collected from every carcass received. A reproductive tract was collected from every female. Data analysis will be completed by summer 2015.

In response to concerns over the use of dogs in wolf hunting, the Natural Resources Board directed the DNR to establish a voluntary program to evaluate wolf carcasses at the time of pelt removal. The purpose of this program was to provide additional information on the prevalence of bite related injuries in harvested animals. Successful hunters and trappers were asked if they would like to participate during the call in registration process. Personnel from USDA-Wildlife Services traveled to the participant and collected information as the pelt was removed from the animal. Eight evaluations were conducted with no bite related injuries observed. All 8 animals were harvested with the use of foothold traps.

Law Enforcement Activities

Department law enforcement personnel conducted a total of 19 wolf hunting/trapping related investigations and issued 6 citations during the 2014-15 wolf season (table 4).

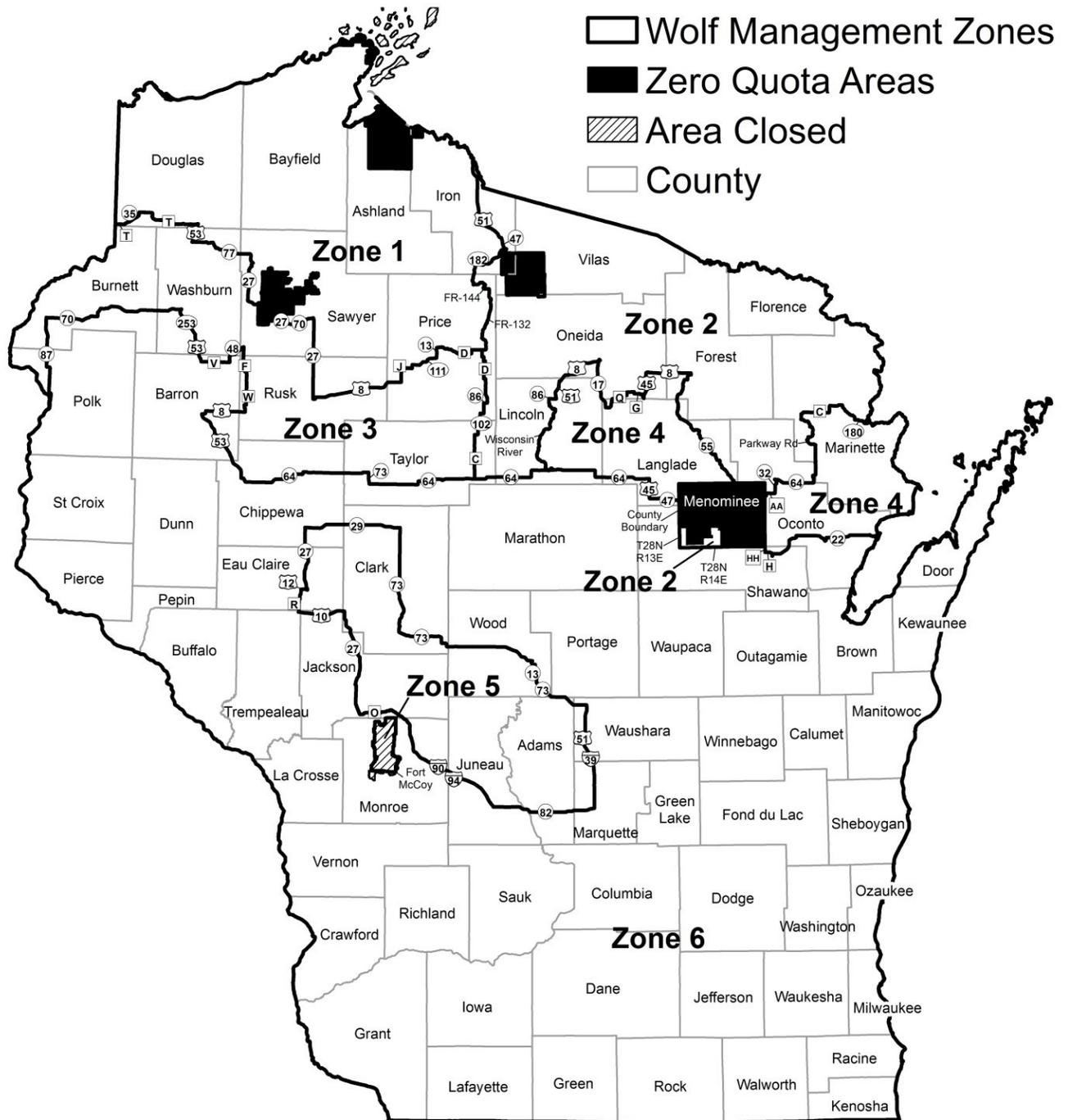


Figure 1. Wolf management zones

Table 1. Wolf permit applications.

	Resident	Non-resident	Total
Harvest permit	9,195	139	9,334
Preference point	4,859	146	5,005
Total	14,054	285	14,339

Table 2. Wolf quota, harvest and closure date by management zone.

Zone	2014 off reservation winter count mid-point	Total quota	State-licensed quota	Harvest	Harvest Rate as % of winter count	Closure date
1	275	33	32	36	13.1	10/19/14
2	139	16	15	29	20.9	10/18/14
3	82	41	40	30	36.6	12/5/14
4	18	9	8	5	27.8	10/19/14
5	106	21	20	18	17.0	10/20/14
6	28	36	35	36	128.6	12/5/14
Total	648	156	150	154	23.8	12/5/14

Table 3. Method of harvest by management zone.

Unit	Gun	Bow	Foothold Trap	Gun - with the aid of Dogs ^a	Total
1	8		28		36
2	2		27		29
3	4		25	1	30
4	1		4		5
5	1	1	16		18
6	5	2	24	5	36
Total	21	3	124	6	154

^a wolves harvested by gunshot with the aid of trailing hounds.

Table 4. Summary of law enforcement activity during the wolf season.

	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Total
# of Wolf Hunting related complaints received:	5		1			6
# of Wolf Trapping related complaints received:	11	1				13
# of Wolf related Investigations conducted:	14	2	1			19
# of Hunting related citations issued:	1		1			2
# of Trapping related citations issued:	4					4
# of Verbal Warnings Issued:	8	1				9

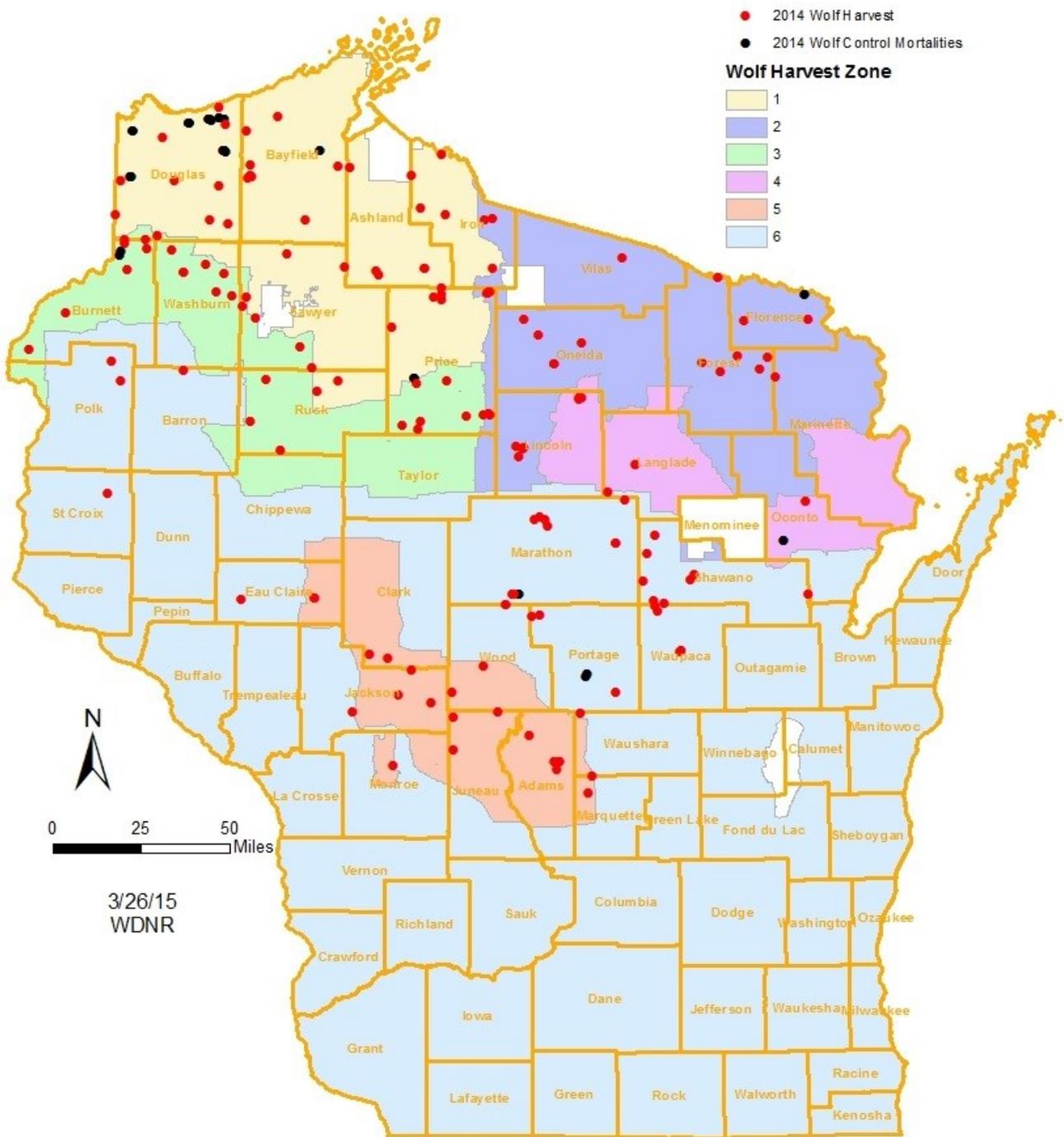


Figure 2. Location of 2014 wolf harvest and control mortalities.

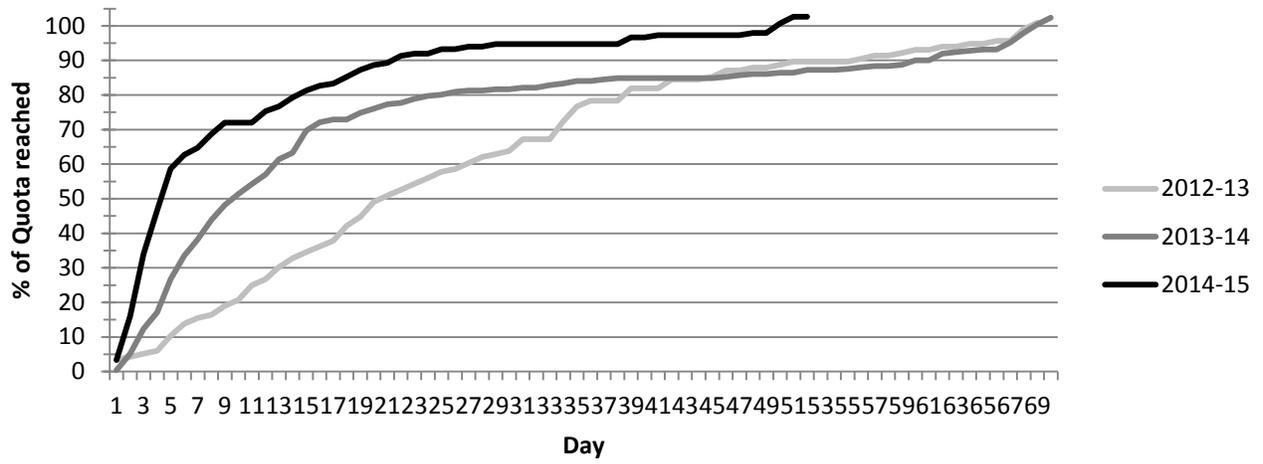


Figure 3. Comparative rate of harvest in Wisconsin's first 3 wolf seasons.