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DATE: January 22, 2026
RE: Testimony on Senate Bill 665
TO: Members of the Committee on Financial Institutions & Sporting Heritage
FROM: Senator Rob Stafsholt

Thank you, fellow members of the Senate Committee on Financial Institutions and Sporting Heritage, for hearing Senate Bill 665 relating to establishing a statewide wolf population goal.

This is a very simple bill that requires the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to include an exact number for the wolf population goal in their wolf management plan. This bill does not change existing framework concerning a wolf harvest season, and it does not dictate a specific number. It merely requires the DNR to have a population goal in its wolf management plan. How the DNR manages the population to get to that goal is already in their management plan, and is not impacted by this bill. This bill simply requires the plan to use a population goal in Wisconsin.

Again, thank you for allowing me to testify on Senate Bill 665. I would appreciate your support on this piece of legislation.

CHANZ GREEN

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 74TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

January 22nd, 2026

Testimony of Senate Bill 665

Senate Committee on Financial Institutions and Sporting Heritage

Thank you, Chairman Stafsholt and other Senate committee members, for having a hearing today on Senate Bill 665 relating to establishing a statewide wolf population goal.

Every successful wildlife management plan begins with a clearly defined goal. While the Wisconsin DNR has worked with the public to develop its current wolf management plan, that plan does not include a specific population goal. In talking with many of my constituents about wolf management, one message is consistent: they want to see a clear population target put in place.

Other states have taken that approach. Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming all manage gray wolves with defined population goals, so why shouldn't Wisconsin?

- **Idaho's** 2023–2028 Gray Wolf Management Plan aims to reduce the wolf population from more than 1,200 wolves to approximately 500.
- **Montana's** Gray Wolf Management Plan aims to reduce the population from over 1,100 wolves to about 450, while maintaining at least 15 breeding pairs.
- **Wyoming's** Gray Wolf Management Plan targets an annual population of at least 100 wolves and 10 breeding pairs outside of other zones such as Yellowstone National Park and the Wind River Reservation.

For comparison, the Wisconsin DNR currently estimates there are at least 1,225 gray wolves in the state, with a heavy concentration in Northern Wisconsin.

This bill just requires the DNR to establish a wolf population goal in their plan. This bill does not change the existing framework concerning the wolf harvest season. How the DNR picks that number is up to them.

Thank you for your time today, and I can answer any questions the committee might have.



Formerly called the Humane
Society of the United States and
Humane Society International

**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Financial Institutions and Sporting Heritage
in opposition to Senate Bill 665**

Megan Nicholson, Wisconsin State Director, Humane World for Animals

January 22, 2026

On behalf of Humane World for Animals and our Wisconsin members and supporters, I am writing in opposition to Senate Bill 665. The best available science supports the DNR's decision to remove an outdated and unscientific numeric population goal from the wolf management plan. As written, this bill would force the DNR to manage wolves based on politics, not sound science.

Most wildlife management plans have goals related to land and habitat conservation, not numeric limits. In fact, the current black bear management plan includes an objective to eliminate the numeric population goals that were defined in state statute, an action that was accomplished in 2020. Likewise, Wisconsin does not have a statewide deer population goal. The DNR has acknowledged that Wisconsin's few remaining wildlife management plans that do include numerical population goals are considered older plans in need of updating or plans for species that are not yet well established in the state.

Americans who live in states with wolves, including Wisconsin, show strong support—by a margin of 78%—for protecting gray wolves under the Endangered Species Act, according to a 2025 survey.¹ Even groups assumed to be less supportive such as farmers, hunters and rural residents support continued ESA protections for wolves by 75% to 79%.² A 2021 survey conducted by Remington Research Group also found that 60% of Wisconsinites oppose the trophy hunting and trapping of wolves, and most residents felt that the February 2021 wolf hunt was “mismanaged” and reckless.³ Polls and surveys show that support for a wolf population at the current level or higher is growing, even among residents who share the landscape with wolves.

For years this species, beloved by Wisconsinites and tourists, has been persecuted and politicized. No other species in Wisconsin has had its fate determined by lawmakers.

Finally, wolf populations do not need to be “managed” to specific numbers through human intervention.⁴ Scientific studies show that wolf numbers are generally limited by prey availability, as well as disease, human densities, terrain, and their own territorial and social nature.⁵ Wolves do not need to be “controlled” to an arbitrary numerical goal, but rather the goal should be for Wisconsin to have a self-sustaining, self-regulating, and genetically diverse population that maintains connectivity with wolf populations in neighboring states and fulfills its ecological role. Killing even one wolf may destabilize a wolf pack leading to unintended consequences for Wisconsin's farmers.⁶ Further, wolves provide significant economic, environmental and public safety benefits to Wisconsin and should be preserved and protected, not ruthlessly killed to maintain only minimal numbers.⁷ It's time to move to new peer-reviewed science about wolf management, where we prioritize co-existence over random, wanton killing and trophy hunting.

For all of these reasons, I respectfully ask that you vote no on SB 665.

Megan Nicholson
Humane World for Animals

¹ J. A. Vucetich and J. T. Bruskotter, "Attitudes toward the Continued Protection of Gray Wolves under the Endangered Species Act," <http://doi.org/10.37099/mtu.dc.michigantech-p2/2055> (2025).

² Ibid.

³ Remington Research Group. (June 2021). Wisconsin public opinion.

<https://www.humaneworld.org/sites/default/files/docs/WI%20Statewide%20Public%20Opinion%20Survey%20060821.pdf>

⁴ Wallach, A.D., Izhaki, I., Toms, J.D., Ripple, W.J. and Shanas, U. (2015), What is an apex predator?. *Oikos*, 124: 1453-1461. <https://doi.org/10.1111/oik.01977>

⁵ Cariappa, C. A., Oakleaf, J., Ballard, W., and Breck, S. 2011. A reappraisal of the evidence for regulation of wolf populations. *J. Wildlife Management* 75:3 (726-730).

<https://pubag.nal.usda.gov/pubag/downloadPDF.xhtml?id=49624&content=PDF>; Rich LN, Mitchell M S, Gude JA, Sime CA. 2012. Anthropogenic Mortality, Intraspecific Competition, and Prey Availability Influence Territory Sizes of Wolves in Montana. *Journal of Mammalogy* 93(3):722. DOI:[10.1644/11-MAMM-A-079.2](https://doi.org/10.1644/11-MAMM-A-079.2); Hatton, I.A., McCann, K.S., Fryxell, J.M., Davies, T.J., Smerlak, M., A. R. E. Sinclair, and M. Loreau. 2015. The predator-prey power law: Biomass scaling across terrestrial and aquatic biomes. *Science* 349: doi: [http://0-dx.doi.org/libraries.colorado.edu/10.1126/science.aac6284](http://dx.doi.org/libraries.colorado.edu/10.1126/science.aac6284); Lake, B.C., Caikoski, J.R., and Bertram, M.R. 2015. Wolf (Canis lupus) Winter Density and Territory Size in a Low Biomass Moose (Alces alces) System. *Arctic* 68: 62-68.

⁶ Elbroch, L. Mark & Treves, Adrian. (2023). Perspective: Why might removing carnivores maintain or increase risks for domestic animals?. *Biological Conservation*. 283. 110106. 10.1016/j.biocon.2023.110106.

⁷ Raynor, J.L., Grainger, C.A. & Parker, D.P. Wolves make roadways safer, generating large economic returns to predator conservation, *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A.* 118 (22) e2023251118, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2023251118> (2021); Flagel, David & Belovsky, Gary & Beyer, Dean. (2016). Natural and experimental tests of trophic cascades: gray wolves and white-tailed deer in a Great Lakes forest. *Oecologia*. 180. 10.1007/s00442-015-3515-z.

Table 1. This table provides guidance only and does not establish any population size as a management goal. The information in this table was developed based upon the prevailing wildlife science and a full suite of biological and social factors, including recognition that the Wisconsin wolf population has biologically recovered. The expected range of future population sizes was informed by the body of contemporary wildlife science. This includes the best estimate of maximum biologically sustainable carrying capacity in the state of approximately 1,242 wolves (Stenglein et al. 2015b) and the population dynamics best practice of maintaining wildlife populations above 50% carrying capacity to ensure population viability. It also reflects the department’s social science findings that most Wisconsinites would like *about the same number* of wolves or more in the state (approximately 1,000 wolves at the time of the survey). It has been developed in response to public input and feedback received during the development of this management plan centered on wolf harvest and desired population sizes. This table is intended to provide more transparency and accountability in these areas. Any future wolf harvest recommendations should consider not only these guidelines, but also the objectives and metrics of this management plan, wolf population estimates and trends, wolf-related conflict levels and trends, annual estimates of observed and expected wolf mortality, population modeling projections, outcomes of previous years’ harvests, legal requirements including off-reservation treaty rights and on-reservation jurisdiction of Native American tribes, relevant scientific developments and other relevant biological and social factors. The department’s wolf advisory committee should play a key role in this process to ensure inclusion of all perspectives during these discussions.

General guidance in anticipated future population sizes and likely statewide management outcomes for the Wisconsin wolf population.	
Statewide Off-Reservation Wolf Population Abundance Estimate	Likely Statewide Population Management Outcome
<650	Growth
650 - 799	Growth
800 - 999	Growth/Stable
1,000 - 1,199	Stable/Decline
1,200+	Decline

Together, the objectives and actions in this plan provide a pragmatic vision to wolf management and stewardship in the years ahead. If fully implemented, this plan will support the perpetuation of a healthy wolf population in Wisconsin to fulfill its numerous roles and benefits, while also being responsive in addressing wolf-related conflicts and recognizing the numerous values and perspectives of all residents in Wisconsin.

Please read the full Wisconsin Wolf Management Plan for more details and content.

Testimony on Senate Bill 665

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for holding this hearing today and for the opportunity to comment on Senate Bill 665.

The Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation (WFBF) is the state's largest general agricultural organization, representing more than 53,000 members. Our membership includes farms of all sizes, across a wide range of commodities and management styles. WFBF appreciates Senator Rob Stafsholt and Representative Chanz Green for introducing legislation requiring the Department of Natural Resources establish a numeric wolf population goal in state law.

WFBF supports many of the goals and objectives outlined in the Wolf Management Plan and appreciates the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' ongoing efforts to maintain a healthy wolf population.

The 2023 Wolf Management Plan does not define what constitutes a "healthy" wolf population, previous plans relied on the best available science and computer modeling. Instead it relies on ambiguous goals and objectives that can easily be redefined by the next administration or new department staff. Instead, the plan relies on an adaptive management approach built around broadly defined goals. Without a clear numeric goal, it becomes extremely difficult to establish consistent and defensible zone-level harvest quotas, as these objectives can be easily reinterpreted or redefined by the department.

WFBF was fortunate to work as part of the Wolf Management Committee, the committee charged with creating a new wolf management plane. During committee deliberations, 10 members supported returning to a numeric population framework. Despite this, the department has stated that the population goals included in the plan are merely guidance and are not intended to inform management decisions.

In closing, Wisconsin Farm Bureau supports Senate Bill 665 and appreciates Senator Rob Stafsholt and Representative Chanz Green for authoring this legislation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Brad Olson
President
Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation



Senate Committee on Financial Institutions and Sporting Heritage

Senate Bill 665 *Establishing a Statewide Wolf Population Goal.* *January 22, 2026*

Good morning, Chair Stafsholt, and members of the Committee. My name is Randy Johnson, and I serve as the Large Carnivore Specialist for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. With me today to help answer questions is Sam Jonas, Species Section Supervisor for the DNR Wildlife Management Program. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to Senate Bill 665, relating to establishing a statewide wolf population goal in the department's wolf management plan.

The Wisconsin Natural Resources Board approved the department's wolf management plan in October 2023 after an extensive public process that went to great lengths to listen to the many diverse perspectives regarding wolf management and develop a plan that strikes a balance among these diverse interests.

This management plan recognizes the biologically recovered status of wolves in Wisconsin and turns attention from wolf recovery to long-term sustainable management in the state. It demonstrates the state's dual commitments of maintaining a sustainable and ecologically functional wolf population while also being responsive in addressing wolf-related conflicts and concerns.

Notably, the plan does not include a single statewide population size or goal by which to guide management actions. While such numeric population goals may be appropriate for a recovering species, having static abundance goals often becomes ineffective and even unnecessary when considering the social, biological, and legal complexities of a recovered wolf population. In addition, there are significant challenges with determining what is the 'appropriate' population number that reflects the broad range of social preferences among the Wisconsin public and the biological considerations of a dynamic wildlife population. Further, a single statewide numeric population goal fails to consider the geographic distribution of wolves in the state which is critical given biological and social carrying capacities change over time and from one location to the next.

Instead, the plan recommends adjusting management actions, such as conflict abatement and public harvest, in response to real-world conditions observed on the ground. This style of adaptive management ultimately strives to find ongoing balance among the public's preferences regarding the benefits of wolves and negative interactions with wolves. It is more scientifically defensible than a static numeric population goal and, therefore, also more likely to support the long-term maintenance of full management authority upon future wolf delisting.

Utilizing the adaptive management approach identified in the management plan, changes in wolf population abundance and distribution would be the result of varying levels of regulated public harvest of wolves, when legally allowed, as well as natural wolf population dynamics. Based on state statute, an

annual regulated wolf harvest season would occur when wolves are not listed on the federal or state endangered species list, with management and harvest actions informed by this plan and designed to help balance the objectives identified in the plan.

To provide transparency in expected statewide population sizes under this plan, a table with various statewide population sizes and likely corresponding statewide population management outcomes is included in the management plan. The guidance in this table was developed based upon the prevailing wildlife science and a full suite of biological and social factors, including recognition that the Wisconsin wolf population has biologically recovered. Altogether, it is expected to generally maintain statewide wolf abundance and distribution at levels comparable to the last decade, while explicitly allowing for fluctuations in local wolf densities, including population reductions as warranted.

Any future wolf harvest recommendations should consider not only these guidelines, but also the objectives and metrics of the management plan, legal requirements, any scientific developments, and other relevant biological and social factors. The department's wolf advisory committee will play a key role in this process to ensure inclusion of all perspectives during these discussions.

This plan provides a practical vision for wolf management and stewardship in the years ahead. If fully implemented, this plan would support the perpetuation of a healthy wolf population in Wisconsin to fulfill its numerous roles and benefits, while also being responsive in effectively addressing wolf-related conflicts and concerns, particularly for those who are most affected by living or recreating among wolves in Wisconsin.

On behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, we would like to thank you for your time today. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



Thank you, Chairman Stafsholt and Senate Committee members, for holding this hearing today. My name is Chris Vaughan, and I am the Wisconsin State Director for Hunter Nation.

The Department has the authority to define and limit the number of wolf hunters and trappers along with the number of wolves that may be taken by issuing wolf harvest licenses. This defined number of hunters and licenses is based on population estimates, population goals and expected hunting & trapping success rates. A clearly defined numeric population goal and harvest quota is also necessary to ensure that we have a wolf population that is healthy and ecologically functional here in Wisconsin.

The previous plan included a population goal and clearly worked. Wolves are the single greatest recovery story we have in Wisconsin – Why Change? Because of social pressure to block hunting. PERIOD. This plan allows the DNR to create harvest quotas based on a vague “for reference” only table. We acknowledge wolves are an important part of our state’s natural and cultural heritage and our organization is proud of the incredible conservation success of the previous wolf recovery plan, but to continue the discussion of the “social impact” (NOT THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF A WOLF PACK, BUT THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF OUR SOCIETY) over science is the wrong approach to managing an apex predator.

Looking at four states currently harvesting wolves -

Alaska Wolf Management Plan – 20 pages “SOCIAL” 0

Idaho Wolf Management Plan – 54 Pages “SOCIAL” 8

Wyoming Wolf Management Plan – 64 pages “SOCIAL” 8

Montana Wolf Management Plan – 33 pages “SOCIAL” 14

Wisconsin Wolf Management Plan – 214 pages “SOCIAL” 83 (1999 – 134p & 9)

Adaptive management is vague without clear triggers for quotas, lacks enforceable limits, is easily influenced by social politics and rarely follows the Test – Learn – Adjust science cited.

A numeric population goal is simple and transparent, easy to communicate to the public and has accountability – Are we above or below our numeric goal?

The problem is that our current plan removed a proven and successful management method with one that has vague quota triggers leaving the direction unclear.

A recent audit of the DNR shows that we certainly need more transparency, accountability specific direction within the Department.

A quick review of previous successful Wisconsin wolf harvest seasons with a numeric population goal.

2012 / 2013 - Hunting Season October 15, 2012 – February 28, 2013

Season closed December 22, 2012 (State quota 116)

- 2012 Wolf Population – 815 - 880
- 117 wolf harvest - 14% Take
- 69 Days

2013 / 2014 - Hunting Season October 15, 2013 – February 28, 2014 (State quota 251)

Season closed December 23, 2013

- 2013 Wolf Population – 809 (Population decrease of 6)
- 257 wolf harvest – 32% Take
- 70 Days

2014 / 2015 - Hunting Season October 15, 2014 – February 28, 2015 (State quota 156)

Season closed December 5, 2014

- 2014 Wolf Population – 660 (Population decrease of 149)
- 154 wolf harvest - 26% Take
- 52 Days

February 2021 – 200 Statewide quota (119 state / 81 tribes). An additional 130 wolves were quoted for a fall hunt (74 state / 56 tribes)

- 2020 Wolf Population – 1,340 (Population increase of 680 – 6 years since last hunt)
- 218 wolf harvest – 16% Take
- 60 Hours

We need to be as specific as possible. If we use a firm quota system to determine harvest, we need a firm population number to base that on. There needs to be balance between science and common sense – A numeric population goal to compliment specific and clearly defined adaptive tools to trigger regional quotas in high conflict areas. Under adaptive management wolves rarely have these. The current plans stated goal is to “ensure a healthy and sustainable wolf population”. Compared to the previous plan which was - “to maintain a state delisting goal of 250 wolves outside of reservations.... and a state management goal of 350 wolves...”

The current plan references “public preferences” ahead of management plan objectives and will “establish and maintain a department Wolf Advisory Committee that is inclusive of the views of all stakeholders, tribes and partners”

Again, this falls short as the committee of 24 is not a fair and balanced group of resident stakeholders holding objective views of adaptive management vs numeric population goals.

When compared to other species where adaptive management works, wolves sit at a completely different intersection of biology, social politics and law where this vague management tool is impossible to apply.

Resident stakeholders and their elected officials overwhelmingly support a defined wolf population goal. Hunter Nation understands that proper and direct management of the wolf population is crucial for the balance of all our states’ wildlife. We support the efforts to implement a plan to maintain a healthy and sustainable wolf population that considers public safety, livestock, and domesticated animals. I urge the Committee to support a wolf management plan, not a wolf protection plan, that establishes a statewide wolf population goal.

On behalf of our Wisconsin members, I’d like to thank the Committee again for the opportunity to address this critical issue.

Chris Vaughan
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