

Dean,

The article by Patrick Durkin in your July 22nd issue and your confirmation of it really miss the point. In fact, Durkin's comments illustrate exactly why there should be a wolf summit.

Yes, Wisconsin's hands are tied, and yes, wolf numbers continue to skyrocket. And yes, Mr. Durkin's political biases are well known. But if history is a teacher, at some point wolf management will be returned to our DNR.

It has not been fashionable or politically correct for the media to report all the negative impacts wolves have had on our state, our farmers, our sportsmen and other wildlife. People that live and hunt downstate are being fed a lot of misinformation by Mr. Durkin and others in the press, which foster the impression that a few wolves up north are no big deal. One only has to look at the DNR's survey on attitudes towards wolves to see that the folks that don't have to deal with wolves like the "idea" of wolves, while those that have to deal with threats to their livestock, their pets, their hunting dogs and in many cases, their livelihoods, have wanted fewer or far fewer wolves.

I doubt if most folks know, for example, that in just the last 2 months, on two nights in two different parts of our state, wolf packs slaughtered (and did not consume) 17 sheep on one farm and 7 on another. Or that wolves have already eaten 6 out of the first 23 elk we brought in from Kentucky. Or that in 2015, it is likely that wolf deer-kill numbers exceed gun deer-kill numbers in at least 5 northern Wisconsin counties. Or that Wisconsin has one of the highest concentrations of wolves anywhere in the lower 48 states. Perhaps if they knew more of these facts, the public would have a better understanding of the real impact of wolves in our state.

If it takes a Great Lakes Wolf Summit to bring out these and many other facts, and get the press to report them, then we should be holding one every year.

Mr. Durkin's article also mocks speakers like Ted Lyon, who has carefully documented more about wolf problems and the political/media/financial structure that protects them than almost anyone on the planet. While at the same time, either out of ignorance or intention, Mr. Durkin grossly distorts the facts by suggesting that based on a DNR study of FAWNS, that wolves are a minor predator of deer compared to bears, bobcats and coyotes. When in fact, these other predators are normally only a threat to fawns and only for just a few weeks in the spring and summer when the fawns are vulnerable, while wolves are killing ALL deer: bucks, does (often pregnant) and fawns every day of the year. It's what they eat. The anti's; the same ones that said wolves wouldn't affect (now decimated) elk herds in the west, love to point to this study as "proof" that wolves aren't a major factor in the decline of deer in northern Wisconsin. A false narrative now further propagated by Mr. Durkin.

Durkin's "solution", published in several newspapers across the state, besides WON, doesn't even belong in a paper published primarily for sportsmen and sportswomen; in fact, it's almost identical to a resolution submitted to the Conservation Congress by an anti-hunting group in 2015. He suggests bear hunters, primarily dog hunters, should lose most of their baiting and training seasons so they won't conflict with wolves. Apparently Mr. Durkin doesn't even understand that for dog hunters, the chase,

whether during the training or the hunt, is what they live for. Taking away months of this very legitimate and worthwhile opportunity so wolves aren't bothered is just ridiculous, and is pure anti-hunting rhetoric.

The animal-rights and anti-hunting group's strategy has been effective: tie wolf control up in the courts while the wolf population skyrockets and spreads across the state (which the "experts" told us several hundred wolves ago could not happen) so when wolves are finally delisted, there will be more pressure on the DNR to raise the statewide wolf population goal from 350 to a higher number. That would be despite the fact that 350 wolves is already over 3 times more than is required by USF&WS per the Endangered Species Act as a stable and viable population, and why the county boards in several northern counties (where their citizens have to deal with wolves) have gone on record requesting that the goal and population be returned to 350 or less wolves.

So, while Mr. Durkin and your column try to pass this conference off as an "election year ploy", please consider that it doesn't matter who hosts it. This conference will be critical in informing the public of the "other side" of the wolf story. And as we move forward, having an informed public will probably mean the difference between controlling the primary wild predator of our deer herd, or living with a lot less deer and more wolves.

I would encourage you to attend the conference – and then report on it.

Mike Brust of Wausau chaired and served on the first WI Conservation Congress Wolf Study Committee and currently serves on the DNR Wolf Advisory Committee.