

Delist or downlist? Michigan wolf debate rages on following federal ruling that blocked hunting



(File Photo)



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MICHIGAN WOLF HUNT

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Wolf attacks on livestock and dogs in 2014 jump to one of the highest levels in more than a decade

New Michigan wolf hunt in question; supporters are angry, critics are 'ecstatic'

Two dead wolves has DNR looking for poachers, seeking tips

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LANSING, MI — The debate over Michigan wolves — and whether the state should be able to proceed with future hunts or lethal removal — rages on in the wake of a recent federal

U.S. Rep. Dan Benishek, a Republican whose district includes the entire Upper Peninsula, is working with colleagues from Wisconsin, Minnesota and Wyoming on bipartisan legislation that would **reportedly remove federal protections** that now block local wolf management in Michigan and other states.

“The language we are looking at would be narrow and would address the recent court decision, Benishek said in a statement provided to MLive. “It would not seek to change the Endangered Species Act, but would be designed to meet the need in our region for responsible stewardship of the wolf population. We are finalizing the details now and are hoping sometime in the next few weeks.”

State Sen. Tom Casperson, R-Escanaba, on Tuesday introduced **a resolution** that, if adopted, would offer support for the pending federal legislation and encourage the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Michigan Department of Natural Resources to appeal the federal court ruling.

Jill Fritz, state director of the Humane Society of the United States and the Keep Michigan Wolves Protected coalition, said it would be difficult to comment on the pending federal legislation because she has not seen the language, but she noted her group “would oppose any action to strip federal protections from Great Lakes Wolves.”

HSUS and other animal protection groups this week submitted a petition asking the USFWS to “downlist” all gray wolves in the contiguous United States by reclassifying them as a threatened species — rather than an endangered one.

The proposal, if adopted, would allow USFWS to work with state and local wildlife authorities to kill or remove **nuisance wolves attacking livestock**, which has been an issue for farmers in Michigan and other states.

“If wolves are downlisted to threatened status across the board, then if there are concerns about depredation on livestock and they want to use lethal controls, they can do so,” said Fritz.

“What it would not allow is that wolves return to management under the states, which did not work. The states, particularly Minnesota and Wisconsin, started off with these aggressive killing and population reduction programs that really threatened to stop recovery of wolves in its tracks.”

Wolves in Michigan and other Great Lakes states were removed from the federal endangered species list in 2012, but U.S. District Judge Beryl Howell ruled last month that the removal was “arbitrary and capricious” and violated federal law.

Federal endangered status trumps Michigan laws that had allowed the for lethal removal of problem wolves and **a pending law** reauthorizing the Natural Resource Commission to name new game species and establish hunting seasons.

with livestock and comfort levels around humans.

As MLive reported earlier this month, there were **35 wolf attacks on livestock or dogs** in Michigan last year, up from 20 in 2013 but lower than the 41 in 2012.

Twenty-two wolves were killed in late 2013 during Michigan's first-ever wolf hunt. There was n hunt last year, when voters **rejected two separate wolf hunting laws**, but a newer version set to take effect in April.

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