

# Grey wolf endangered status prompts heated debate, resolution in Michigan Senate

(File Photo)

By [Jonathan Oosting | joosting@mlive.com](#)

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## MICHIGAN WOLF HUNT

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LANSING, MI -- Michigan's Republican-led Senate on Tuesday approved **a resolution** urging Congress to remove grey wolves from the endangered species list in the wake of a recent federal court ruling that **reinstated the protected status**.

The resolution "effectively does nothing," according to Sen. Rebekah Warren, D-Ann Arbor, because it simply encourages federal action but does not require it.

But the resolution, approved in a 26-12 vote, reignited a long-running debate over Michigan wolves. At issue is whether the state should be able to manage its own wolf population and authorize hunting seasons, actions now prohibited by the federal status.

Warren, in a floor speech, took exception to a specific line in the legislation suggesting that wolves "increasingly endanger people and domestic animals as they encroach more and more on developed areas."

There are no recorded instances of wolves attacking people in Michigan, Warren said, and resolutions should be based on facts.

"Even though it really is symbolic, sending misinformation to Washington I think is a travesty," she told her colleagues.

Sen. Tom Casperson, an Escanaba Republican who introduced the resolution and also sponsored past wolf hunt laws, said the recent federal ruling was "very significant" even if the state resolution does not require action.

He noted that a wolf attacked a person in **Minnesota in 2013**, a rare instance later linked to a severe deformity and brain damage in the animal. Reports indicate there was also a 2010 attack in Alaska.

More locally, Casperson noted recent reports of beagles killed by wolves in Michigan. In one instance, he said, an owner found his two dead beagles a day after he had been out hunting rabbits with his son.

"I'm grateful his 8-year-old son did not have to come across something like that," Casperson said. "That is what people in my district are experiencing."

Michigan's Upper Peninsula is home to more than 600 grey wolves, up from just six in the 1970s. As MLive reported earlier this year, 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.

Casperson's resolution also encourages the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to appeal the December ruling that returned grey wolves in the Great Lakes region to the endangered species list.

"When good people stop speaking out, we lose," Casperson said, criticizing an animal rights group that organized successful petition drives to overturn past wolf hunting laws. "Let them continue to speak and be a megaphone, and then when people don't understand the issue, we get voted against."

U.S. Rep. Dan Benishek, a Republican whose district includes the entire Upper Peninsula, recently confirmed he is working on legislation that would reportedly remove federal protections that now block local wolf management in Michigan and other states.

The Humane Society of the United States and other animal protection groups are asking the USFWS to "**downlist**" all gray wolves in the contiguous United States by reclassifying them as threatened species -- rather than an endangered one.

Doing so 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.

*Jonathan Oosting is a Capitol reporter for MLive Media Group. [Email him](#), find him on [Facebook](#) or follow him on [Twitter](#).*