

Michigan sets controversial hunt to control wolf population

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Farmer John Koski pulls back a blanket covering the carcasses of beef cattle that he says were attacked by wolves over the winter and spring on his property in Matchwood, Michigan, May 13, 2013. Photo: Ryan Garza/Detroit Free Press/MCT

IRONWOOD, Mich. — John Koski grips the old blanket and pulls it back to reveal the carcasses of two cows, or what's left of them. More than half of each is picked clean, the spine and rib bones almost a polished white, with no traces of flesh. Some of the rib bones are snapped and show evidence of being gnawed upon.

The dead cattle on Koski's farm in Michigan's Upper Peninsula are the latest victims in his ongoing war with wolves. The 68-year-old farmer has had 119 cows killed or injured by wolves in the past three years.

"I think this is the last year I'm going to keep cattle here because I'm losing so many," Koski said.

There are no records of a human ever being killed by a wolf in the wild in Michigan. But Koski thinks that could change.

“Sooner or later, those wolves are going to kill a person, or a kid waiting for a school bus,” he said.

A Rising Wolf Population

The far western Upper Peninsula is a 600-mile drive from Detroit. Here, people don't argue about wolves just for the sake of debate. These are the people who've lost cattle, lost pets, who've encountered wolves in their backyards.

It's uncertain what will result from Michigan's first-ever wolf hunt, set for November and December. Not everyone supports it. But nowhere does the future of the wolf and the hunt mean more than it does here, where people and the animals sometimes get uncomfortably close.

Over the last few years, the city of Ironwood, about an hour west of Koski's farm, has seen the nearby wolf population increase, said city manager Scott Erickson.

“There's a wolf problem in the area — I think everybody understands that,” he said. “I've never heard anybody say they want to eliminate wolves, but just manage them in an appropriate manner.”

David Bolen recalled his wolf story as he ate breakfast at the Breakwater Family Restaurant. He spotted one last fall.

“I live in a senior apartment complex by a Little League baseball field,” said Bolen, who supports the wolf hunt. “I watched a wolf come from an area we call The Caves right across the field — on Vaughn Street, right in town. It was probably 20, 30 yards from the senior apartments.”

The 73-year-old has lived in the Ironwood area his entire life. “That was no coyote,” he said.

Ironwood resident Al Clemens said the wolves have killed off the local deer population. Deer hunting is a popular activity and it brings money to the local community. In recent years, hunters at his deer camp south of town have seen only about one-sixth of the deer they used to see, he said.

Ma'iingan, The Wolf

Wolves are important to [Native American](https://www.newsela.com/?tag=native-american) culture. The Anishinaabe people tell a story about Gzhemnidoo, the Creator. When Gzhemnidoo put the first man on Mother Earth, the man asked for a companion. Gzhemnidoo gave him Ma'iingan, the wolf. Gzhemnidoo told the pair to name all of the plants and creatures on Earth. When their task was finished, Gzhemnidoo told them to travel separate paths, but said that they would remain linked.

“The wolf’s mournful howling and bark, that is because of that sorrow. He wishes he still had that communication and partnership with (the tribes),” said Roger LaBine, chairman of the conservation committee of the Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians.

When wolves were nearly wiped out and hunted for their fur by white settlers, the tribes lost much of their land to the same settlers, LaBine said. Their fates were again linked, he said.

Wolves were all but [extinct \(https://www.newsela.com/?tag=endangered species\)](https://www.newsela.com/?tag=endangered-species) in much of the U.S. by the 1930s. Michigan lost almost all of their wolves by the end of the 1950s.

In 1973, Congress enacted the Endangered Species Act and officially protected the wolf that same year. The wolf population began to bounce back. Michigan’s Upper Peninsula was known to have three wolves as recently as 1989. The population today stands at 653 wolves.

“The reason they became able to thrive were the protections they were given,” said Nancy Warren, who works for the National Wolfwatcher Coalition, a group dedicated to wolf conservation. She opposes the wolf hunt.

Wolves were taken off the endangered species list in January 2012. Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder last December signed into law a bill designating wolves as a game species. Then the Natural Resources Commission was able to approve a hunt for later this year.

Will The Problem Be Solved?

John Vucetich teaches wildlife ecology at Michigan Technological University. He questioned whether a hunt will accomplish the state's goals.

“These wolves are territorial, and they are going to keep other wolves away. They are like the landlords. The thing you can hope for is to train the wolves not to harm livestock in the area. But if you are shooting these wolves, the pack gets disrupted, the wolves get dispersed, and other wolves come in. There’s a good chance you can make things worse.”

Biologists say there are other ways to keep wolves from preying on livestock besides killing them. Farmers can try fencing, guard animals such as barking dogs, loud noises or flashing lights.

LaBine said the Anishinaabe have welcomed the recovery and return of their “wolf brother.” He had urged the commission not to approve a wolf hunt just before they did. Fear has a lot to do with the misunderstanding of the wolf, and with the desire some have for a hunt, LaBine said.

“We believe that if there was a respect for Ma’iingan, once you respect and honor that spirit, once you understood Ma’iingan, it would eliminate that fear,” he said.

Quiz

- 1 What can somebody learn from reading this article?
 - (A) strategies to protect children from a wolf attack
 - (B) the differences between wolves and coyotes
 - (C) the issues surrounding the wolf hunt debate
 - (D) the similarities between humans and wolves

- 2 What is a possible negative effect of wolves' lack of fear of humans?
 - (A) wolves may attack humans
 - (B) humans may eliminate wolves
 - (C) wolves may destroy property
 - (D) humans may keep wolves as pets

- 3 How is a wolf similar to a landlord?
 - (A) They both keep strangers out of their home.
 - (B) They both defend their friends and family.
 - (C) They both welcome guests to their home.
 - (D) They both kill to protect their territory.

- 4 Select the paragraph from the article that provides the MOST evidence that wolves do not pose a threat to humans.

Answer Key

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Paragraph 3:

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