GREAT LAKES WILDLIFE ALLIANCE
Policy Position Statement

GLWA Policy Position on Wisconsin's Wolf Depredation Emergency Rule (SS 043-26)

Great Lakes Wildlife Alliance offers conditional support for the emergency rule — with critical conditions — because addressed correctly, it can protect the Endangered Resources Fund, protect farmers, protect wolves, and expose the structural and political drivers behind this funding crisis. GLWA's support is conditioned on the reforms below being adopted alongside the rule, not treated as separate from it.

Wolves Are Not the Core Problem

- Wolves account for a small share of Endangered Resources Fund spending relative to the fund's overall strain — GLWA's analysis places this at roughly 10%. Depredation conflicts are trending down, not up: DNR's own reporting shows 2025 wolf damage payments down from 2024's peak. If the ER Fund were adequately resourced rather than structurally capped, wolf depredation compensation would not be presented as a crisis.

The Real Crisis Is Structural

The ER Fund is strained by legislative decisions, not wolf biology:

- Statutory caps on endangered species funding, including the $100,000/year sub-cap in § 20.370(1)(fs)
- Elimination of bipartisan-supported non-lethal fencing assistance for farmers
- Withholding of a $30 million forestry account transfer approved by the Legislature but locked without Joint Finance Committee spending authority
- A significant increase in per-incident livestock payout rates written into permanent wolf-hunting rules, without a corresponding increase in dedicated funding
- Refusal to modernize hunting license fees, which have remained flat since 2005 despite rising costs
- Wolf hunting itself operates at a net fiscal deficit once management, enforcement, and litigation costs are counted against license revenue — it is not a funding solution
- A confirmed statewide fish and wildlife account shortfall of $16 million (Wisconsin Public Radio, April 23, 2026), independent of wolf listing status, already cutting wildlife monitoring, fish stocking, and winter wolf tracking

Compensation and Coexistence Are Not the Same Goal

- Wisconsin's wildlife damage program was built to compensate for loss after it occurs, not to prevent loss or build tolerance for wolves on the landscape. Treating compensation as a substitute for prevention is a category error. Where prevention has actually been funded, it has worked: DNR's own large carnivore specialist, Randy Johnson, reported in June 2026 that verified conflicts are down substantially across the board, attributing part of that decline to the predator-proof fencing DNR has installed protecting 12 cattle operations and 3 sheep operations, with more underway. This is direct evidence, not theory, that prevention reduces conflict — yet Wisconsin remains one of only two wolf states nationally funding no dedicated conflict-prevention program at scale.

Retaliation Is Illegal, Not Management

- Threats that hound handlers or others will retaliate against wolves absent payment are coercion, not stakeholder input. Retaliatory killing occurred in 2021 even when compensation funds were available, demonstrating that payment does not prevent illegal retaliation or reliably increase tolerance. Wildlife policy cannot be built around the threat that a subset of individuals will break the law.

Bear Hound Training Must Be Regulated

- Wisconsin's advisory-only wolf caution area system has failed to function as a deterrent for over a decade. DNR's own 2024 Black Bear Hunter Questionnaire shows only 21.5% of hunters are even aware caution areas are posted, and of those aware, 60.8% do not avoid them.
- GLWA calls for enforceable closures in chronic conflict areas, replacing advisory notices; limits on pursuit distance and duration; and restoration of the bear hound training license eliminated in 2015.

Farmers Should Not Bear the Cost of a Recreational Activity's Externalities

- Endangered Resources Fund assistance exists to support endangered species conservation — it should not be treated as a subsidy for an unregulated recreational hunting practice, nor should farmers be required to open private land to hunting access as a condition of receiving support for damage outside their control.

Structural Solutions GLWA Supports

- Restore dedicated non-lethal conflict prevention funding for farmers and livestock producers.
- Enforceable restrictions on bear hound training in chronic conflict and posted caution areas.
- Full public transparency on Endangered Resources Fund account balances and the specific appropriations funding wolf damage payments.
- Restore a bear hound training license fee (proposed: $25/dog), estimated to generate over $460,000 annually — more than double 2025's wolf damage payout.
- Explore a dedicated Endangered Species Stamp and a mechanism for wildlife-advisory stakeholder organizations to contribute a share of annual revenue to the ER Fund.
- Exploration of a state threatened listing for gray wolves if political pressure continues to drive funding and management decisions ahead of science.
- Direct, transparent public appeals for ER Fund support, so the public understands the true state of endangered species funding.

GLWA's support for SS 043-26 is conditioned on adoption of these structural reforms alongside the emergency rule. GLWA stands for science-based management, Tribal sovereignty, endangered species protection, and fiscal transparency.

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