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## **Title: TWA OPPOSES WOLF HUNTING LEGISLATION**

### **For Immediate Release – February 8, 2012**

**Manitowish Waters, WI** – Over the last two decades, the ecology of the northern Wisconsin landscape has been changing. Wolves, a natural part of our state’s heritage and ecology, are reclaiming their presence in the northland. Now, as that recovery is becoming complete, the Wisconsin legislature is proposing the first hunting season on wolves in over half a century. This proposal has brought strong reactions from a public that holds widely varying views on this predator.

Since these proposals have come to light, many have asked the *Timber Wolf Alliance* (TWA) about our position on the legislation. The mission of TWA is to use education to promote and maintain healthy, ecologically functional wolf populations in the western Great Lakes Region. We have been working for 25 years with state and tribal officials, natural resource agencies, wildlife managers and the public at large in efforts to restore and maintain healthy wolf populations.

TWA views the recovery of Wisconsin’s wolf population as a tremendous ecological success, and an accomplishment to celebrate. TWA also maintains that the healthy population of wolves now found in the state no longer requires the intense protection it once needed. We have supported both the delisting of wolves in the state, and the use of lethal depredation control – stances based on sound science. Since our mission is science-based education rather than advocacy, we neither support nor oppose the public harvest of wolves at this time. However, TWA maintains that any public harvest system must preserve a healthy, ecologically functional wolf population. In addition, any management system incorporating public harvest needs to be grounded in the best science available. These criteria are critical not only for the wolves, but to ensure that the state and tribes maintain their recently gained management authority.

Assembly Bill 502 and its twin, Senate Bill 411 fail in both these criteria, and because of this TWA opposes their passage.

There are a number of questionable management strategies in these bills that go against the best science we have on maintaining healthy wolf populations. The most scientifically questionable points include:

- Restriction of DNR management options regarding the use of zones and closed areas, common practice in many other animal’s hunting seasons;
- A season that begins before pelts are prime, a waste of a natural resources;
- A season that closes too late, interfering with mating season and population monitoring efforts;
- Ability to hunt with dogs; which may increase wolf/dog conflicts and dog depredation payments;
- The introduction of big game night and road hunting, which pose direct human safety concerns; and
- A generalized harvest with little effort to direct harvest towards areas with the greatest wolf depredation problems.

Introducing hunting legislation at this time is also inconsistent with Wisconsin's *Wolf Management Plan*. Proposing to abandon important provisions of the plan on the same day delisting was finalized increases the likelihood of legal challenges to the entire delisting effort.

In addition to the issues with the bill itself, the process by which this bill was proposed provided little opportunity for public input. The assembly bill was published at the end of the day on Friday January 27. The public hearing on the bill was held the third business day following publication, a fact that left many with a strong stake in wolf management in the state little more than a day's notice to review the bill and prepare comments.

While the bill's authors testified they worked closely with the Wisconsin DNR in developing the legislation, there is little evidence that state wolf biologists or members of the DNR Wolf Science Committee were consulted in drafting this legislation. A WDNR press notice released just 3 days before the bill was published, states "*There are currently no plans for a hunting season on wolves.*" Furthermore, many entities, including members of the State's Wolf Stakeholders Group, tribal governments, concerned citizens, and the larger scientific community, were not a part of the process nor were they informed of the legislation ahead of the February 1<sup>st</sup> Assembly hearing.

Wisconsin has a strong legacy of leadership in wildlife management, a history that has been shaped by greats like Aldo Leopold and Sigurd Olson. We spent decades wiping wolves out of the state, and we have now spent decades working to see them return. If Wisconsin is going to consider the public harvest of wolves, it can take the time to do it right. Our State Legislature has a public trust responsibility toward wildlife and to proceed in a manner that incorporates broad public input, the best available science, and sound conservation practices. These bills fail on all these criteria.

For more information visit [www.timberwolfalliance.org](http://www.timberwolfalliance.org), call toll free (877) 543-2085 or follow us on Facebook.

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