



Senate Fiscal Agency
P. O. Box 30036
Lansing, Michigan 48909-7536



BILL ANALYSIS

Telephone: (517) 373-5383
Fax: (517) 373-1986
TDD: (517) 373-0543

Senate Bill 1084 (Substitute S-4 as passed by the Senate)
Sponsor: Senator Ron Jelinek
Committee: Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs

Date Completed: 10-16-08

RATIONALE

As the population of gray wolves has recovered from near-elimination in Michigan, attacks by gray wolves on domestic animals have become a concern. Although the gray wolf has been protected under Michigan and Federal laws since 1965 and 1973, respectively, it was removed from the Federal list of endangered and threatened species in a portion of the country, including this State, in 2007. Under the Michigan Administrative Code, the gray wolf remains on the State's list of threatened species, which means that gray wolves may be taken, or killed, only in an emergency situation involving an immediate threat to human life, or as authorized by a permit in order to protect property or human life. Although a proposed rule change would remove the gray wolf from the State's list of threatened species, it has been suggested that the statute should specifically permit dog owners to kill, capture, or remove a gray wolf that is pursuing or attacking their animal.

CONTENT

The bill would create new act to do the following:

- Authorize a dog owner to remove, capture, or kill a gray wolf that was preying upon the dog.**
- After a gray wolf was legally taken, require the dog owner to report to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), transfer the wolf to the DNR, and produce the dog for inspection if it had been injured or killed.**

- Prescribe a misdemeanor penalty for a violation of these requirements.**
- Require a DNR official to respond within 12 hours after being notified that a wolf was killed.**

Specifically, the owner of a dog, or his or her designated agent, could remove, capture, or, if deemed necessary, use lethal means to destroy a gray wolf that was in the act of preying upon the owner's dog.

The owner or designated agent would have to report the taking of a gray wolf to a Department of Natural Resources official as soon as practicable, but not later than 12 hours after the taking. A DNR official would have to respond to the scene within 12 hours after being notified. Except as provided below, the owner or designated agent would have to retain the wolf until a DNR official was available to take possession of the wolf and transfer it to the appropriate DNR personnel for examination. A person who violated the requirement to report a taking or retain a wolf would be guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment for up to 90 days, a fine of at least \$100 but not more than \$1,000, or both, and the costs of prosecution.

If lethal means were used to destroy a gray wolf, a person could not move or disturb it until a DNR official was available to take possession of and transfer the wolf to the appropriate Department personnel for examination or until as otherwise directed by a DNR official. A person could not disturb the area where the lethal means were used until after an official investigation by the

DNR was complete. If a dog were physically attacked or killed, a person who used lethal means to destroy a gray wolf would have to produce the dog for inspection by DNR officials. A person who violated these provisions would be guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment for up to 90 days, a fine of at least \$100 but not more than \$1,000, or both, and the costs of prosecution.

A dog owner or his or her designated agent could report the taking of a gray wolf by using the DNR's Report All Poaching hotline at 1-800-292-7800.

The DNR could promulgate rules to implement the proposed act.

If any Federal or State litigation overturned the decision to remove gray wolves from the list of endangered species, the DNR would have to report the impact of that litigation on the proposed act to the standing committees of the Legislature with jurisdiction over issues primarily dealing with natural resources and the environment.

Under the bill, "dog" would include a domesticated dog and a dog used for hunting.

BACKGROUND

Federal Endangered Species List

The Federal Endangered Species Act authorizes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list and delist species, subspecies, and distinct population segments of animals. A distinct population segment (DPS) is a discrete and separate population that occurs in a portion of a species' or subspecies' range. The Western Great Lakes DPS includes the wolf populations in Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, parts of Illinois, Iowa, North Dakota, and South Dakota, and fractions of Indiana and Ohio. This DPS encompasses a "core area" where wolf recovery has occurred. The core area includes the Upper Peninsula of Michigan as well as northern and central forested areas of Minnesota and Wisconsin.

In January 2007, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service removed the Western Great Lakes Distinct Population Segment of gray wolves from the Federal list of threatened and endangered species, and removed Federal

protection for critical habitat for the species in Michigan and Minnesota. According to the Service, the affected states have management plans in place and will manage wolf populations in accordance with population objectives. At the time of the delisting, the wolf populations were estimated to be 434 in Michigan, 3,020 in Minnesota, and 465 in Wisconsin.

Wolf Management in Michigan

According to the Department of Natural Resources, it is believed that gray wolves were once present in all of Michigan's 83 counties. A combination of factors, including active predator control programs, virtually eliminated gray wolves from Michigan. They had completely disappeared from the Lower Peninsula by around 1910, and had nearly vanished from the Upper Peninsula by 1960, when the State-paid bounty on wolves was repealed. The species was given legal protection in Michigan in 1965, and placed on the Federal list of endangered species in 1973. Michigan's gray wolf population began to recover in the 1990s, and grew from an estimated 20 wolves in 1992 to 361 in 2004.

In 1992, the DNR Director appointed a Michigan Gray Wolf Recovery Team and charged it with developing a wolf recovery plan for the State. The Department finalized the *Michigan Gray Wolf Recovery and Management Plan* in 1997. Subsequently, the context of wolf management in Michigan changed due to several developments, including the expansion of the wolf population size and distribution; active involvement of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Inspection Service Wildlife Services; the development and implementation of *Michigan's Wildlife Action Plan* in 2005; and the delisting of wolves from the Federal endangered species list in the Western Great Lakes DPS.

These events contributed to the development of the *Michigan Wolf Management Plan*, which was finalized in May 2008. This plan resulted from discussions the DNR began with other State and Federal agencies in August 2004; public meetings the DNR held in May 2005; focus group meetings coordinated by the Michigan State University Department of Fisheries and Wildlife during the summer of 2005; and the

work of the Michigan Wolf Management Roundtable, an advisory committee convened by the DNR. The Roundtable met between June and September 2006 and submitted its report the following November.

According to the *Michigan Wolf Management Plan*, the plan provides strategic guidance for the management of wolves in this State but does not outline operational details. The plan was developed to help do the following: 1) maintain a viable Michigan wolf population above a level that would warrant its classification as threatened or endangered; 2) facilitate wolf-related benefits; 3) minimize wolf-related conflicts; and 4) conduct science-based wolf management with socially acceptable methods.

Wolf-Related Conflicts

The *Michigan Wolf Management Plan* addresses the management of wolf depredation of domestic animals. The plan states that a depredation event occurs when a predator kills or injures one or more animals at a given time. Although wolves normally kill or injure wild prey and competitors, they sometimes attack domestic animals.

According to the plan, the DNR and the USDA Wildlife Services verified 40 wolf attacks on domestic dogs in Michigan between 1996 and 2007. Of those, 43% involved bear-hunting hounds in the field.

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

Michigan residents should have the right to protect their dogs from attacks by wolves, even when lethal means are necessary. A hunting dog can be an investment as well as a pet, and other domestic dogs often are considered members of the family. Although there is not a high number of documented incidents in which wolves have injured or killed dogs, these attacks are likely to increase as the wolf population continues to grow in Michigan. It also is likely that the number of verified incidents understates the actual number of attacks.

Allowing dog owners to remove or kill wolves that prey on their animals would have little impact on the population of wolves. On the other hand, antiwolf sentiments and superstitions are largely responsible for the near-extinction of the species. As wolves become more populous and more common in developed areas, these negative attitudes could be reignited if residents cannot take steps, including lethal measures, to protect their animals.

Legislative Analyst: Suzanne Lowe

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have no fiscal impact on the State. The additional responsibilities of Department officials to retrieve a gray wolf from the owner of the dog would be paid for from existing resources.

The bill would have an indeterminate fiscal impact on local government. There are no data to indicate how many offenders would be convicted of the proposed offenses. Local governments would incur the costs of misdemeanor probation and incarceration in local facilities, which vary by county. Additional penal fine revenue would benefit public libraries.

Fiscal Analyst: Lindsay Hollander
Jessica Runnels

A0708\S1084a

This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.