

Living With Wolves: Wolf Hunting In Perspective

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Great Falls and North Central Montana

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The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks believes that in order to maintain a healthy wolf population in Montana, wolves need to be hunted, and the results of the first wolf hunting season may have strengthened that argument.

The agency is calling the first-ever wolf hunting season in Montana a success, with 72 wolves harvested and license sales generating more than \$325,000 in revenue.

But just as important, FWP learned more about Montana's wolves.

Carolyn Sime, Gray Wolf Program Coordinator for FWP, explained, "I guess first and foremost, what we did learn is hunting as a management tool really does have the potential to manage wolves as resident wildlife."

The numbers show that wolf hunting did not decimate the population; Montana had more wolves at the end of 2009 than it did in 2008, prior to the wolf hunting season.

Sime noted, "From our perspective it was incredibly important that we demonstrate that hunting can be managed professionally and in ways that don't harm the population."

Some people would like to see no quota set on wolf hunting and instead adopt a "shoot on sight" policy, while others want no hunting season at all.

Montana will not be pursuing either of those options, said Sime, adding, "One of the commitments we've made is to secure the wolves' future on the Montana landscape. We're committed to having them in our state, committed to managing them as resident wildlife, and along with that, some wolves will be harvested through a hunting season."

State managers do not want to see wolves fall back under federal control, and to make sure that doesn't happen, FWP believes that Montanans need to commit to living with wolves.

A lawsuit asking for a federal judge to put wolves back on the endangered species list will be heard in coming weeks.

The quota for the 2010 hunting season will not be set until after a ruling is made on that litigation.