

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS AND HUNTERS

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Honourable Donna Cansfield, M.P.P.
Minister of Natural Resources
6th Floor, Room 6630, Whitney Block
99 Wellesley Street West
Toronto, Ontario
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Dear Minister:

On behalf of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (O.F.A.H.), our 83,000 members and 655 member clubs, we are writing with respect to the decision made in 2000/01 to ban the hunting of wolves and coyotes in the townships outside of Algonquin Park.

At the time, the decision was made based upon science developed by Dr. J. Theberge who concluded that because wolf pack numbers were small, wolves *may* have been declining in number in Algonquin Park, and that hunting and trapping outside of the park *may* have been a factor in this *hypothetical* decline. He reached this conclusion despite the fact that wolf populations are known to be sustainable at a 30 to 50% harvest rate, well below harvest levels outside of the park.

Unfortunately, the Ministry of Natural Resources accepted Theberge's hypothesis and implemented a moratorium on the hunting and trapping of wolves in townships around the park. A year later, the government announced an outright ban, despite the absence of sound science to support this action, and despite recommendations made by the Algonquin Wolf Advisory Group (A.W.A.G.), which advised that hunting and trapping seasons should continue. At the time, the O.F.A.H. argued that the declining wolf numbers had little to do with hunting and trapping, and everything to do with declining prey species in the park, notably deer, beaver and hare.

Recently, an article by M.N.R.'s Dr. Brent Patterson and Trent University's Dr. Dennis Murray in the Journal of Conservation, 2008, debunked the conclusions reached by Dr. Theberge, particularly his flawed population assessments, which resulted in an over exaggeration of the perceived threat to Algonquin Park wolves. They also found that he had overlooked strong evidence of density-dependence in wolf population dynamics. When modeled correctly, the Population Viability Analysis (P.V.A.), revealed that wolves were *not likely to decline within 20 years, even if hunting and trapping continued*. Patterson and Murray also found that high winter wolf densities related to low spring/fall recruitment – further support for the argument that population dynamics were based upon food source availability, *not hunting and trapping*.

In their most damning indictment, Patterson and Murray concluded that the government's original acceptance of the Theberge material resulted in a "significant redirection of government staff and financial resources toward implementation of the harvest ban, subsequent monitoring of compliance with the ban and an assessment of the ban's overall efficacy."



CONSERVATION PLEDGE

I give my pledge, as a Canadian, to save and faithfully defend from waste the natural resources of my Country – its soils and minerals, its air, water, forests, and wildlife.

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Had Theberge been correct, these actions would have been reasonable; however, given the flaws in both his methodology and conclusions, the government's reliance on this data resulted in a huge waste of time and money that could have been better spent on other real conservation priorities. Drs. Patterson and Murray who noted that the government's unfortunate reliance on the flawed science "impeded the conservation of other wildlife species" echo this sentiment.

The conclusions reached by Patterson and Murray in their research support the position taken by both A.W.A.G. and the O.F.A.H. at the time, namely, that a hunting and trapping ban had no positive effect on population growth, and therefore could not have been a causal factor for the decline of the population. In their view, reliance on badly flawed science resulted in the perception of an exaggerated threat to the viability of the Algonquin wolf population and the *"implementation of scientifically indefensible restrictions on harvesting of wolves in areas outside of the park."*

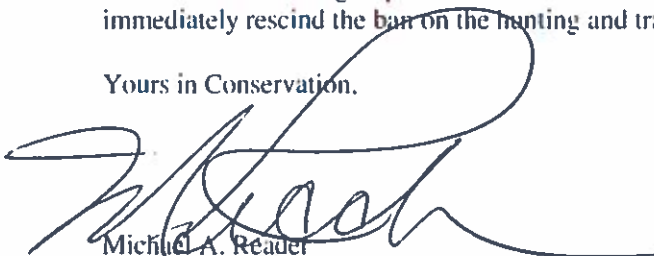
It is clear from this example that in cases where flawed wildlife science is developed and relied upon, poor management decisions are the result. When it is clear that the data is questionable, the government needs to undertake due diligence to review and develop better science. They also need to listen to the community and take advantage of the extensive knowledge that already exists. If the M.N.R. had listened to the position taken by the O.F.A.H. and the Ontario Fur Managers Federation (O.F.M.F.) at the time, this error in judgment could have been avoided.

In 2007, compensation payments to farmers for wildlife damage to livestock rose to over \$1 million for the first time ever, and as a result of wolf/coyote predation, payments have increased substantially over the past three years. As a result, the agricultural community is growing increasingly sensitive to the effects of wolf/coyote predation, particularly in southern Ontario.


Minister, wolf and coyote hunting in Ontario is an effective wildlife management tool. We do not want to find ourselves in the same position as the province of Alberta, where the government conducted controversial "culls" of wolves to deal with excessive predation.

Given the scathing review of the previous "science" that the government used to make the original decision on wolves outside of Algonquin Park, and the conclusions reached by Drs. Patterson and Murray, we ask you to immediately rescind the ban on the hunting and trapping of wolves in townships outside of Algonquin Park.

Yours in Conservation,



Michael A. Reader
Executive Director



Greg Farrant
Manager, Government Relations
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MAR/GF/jb

cc: Neil Currie, Ontario Federation of Agriculture
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