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AUDUBON

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RESEARCH EDUCATION ACTION

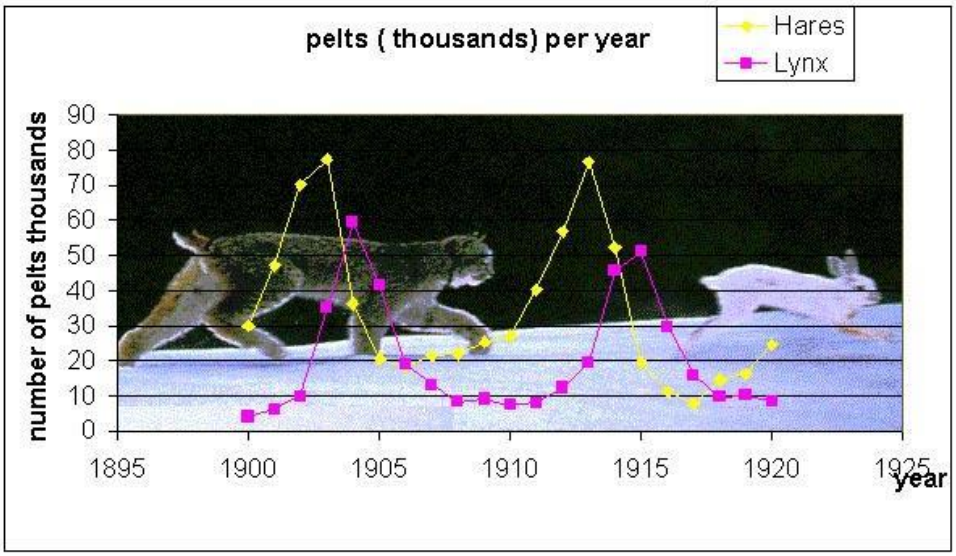
Dear Editor,

I am writing on behalf of the 6,000+ members of Detroit Audubon, in response to the article "Upper Peninsula Wolf Hunt Back in the Crosshairs" which appeared Friday, January 28, 2022. In that article State Senator Ed McBroom asserted that "science supports a wolf hunt as a management technique." He and others plead that trimming wolf numbers is necessary to "reduce their impact on the deer population," to address concerns about livestock depredation, and human conflicts. He cites no sources to back this up, and from my background with a Ph.D. in Natural Resources, I can tell you he has it exactly backwards.

Ecology research clearly demonstrates that it is the prey population (in this case deer) that controls the predator population more strongly (in this case wolves) not the other way around. When there is more food available, predators like wolves have more pups and more survive into adulthood. When the prey population plummets, with less food available and the predator population goes down.

In fact, with most predators, it is not only a question of abundant food or starvation, but physiology is at work as well. The female wolf's body senses whether it is a good or bad year from a nutrition standpoint and regulates the size of the litter born that year accordingly. In years when the female has good consistent nutrition, she may have a litter of 4-6 pups, but when her nutrition is meager, she may have only one or two pups, or maybe none at all- a natural birth control mechanism.

Perhaps the clearest dataset is from a Canadian study of the Canada Lynx and the Snowshoe Hare from 1895 TO 1920. When the Snowshoe Hare population went up, the Canada Lynx population went up in response, and when the Snowshoe Hare population went down, the Canada Lynx population went down in its wake as shown in this graph from the Hudson Bay Company:



Another instructive example is the experiment President Teddy Roosevelt conducted on the Kaibab Plateau in Arizona when he ordered the killing of all predators (wolves and cougars primarily) in that area in order to allow game species especially the Mule Deer to thrive or so he thought. The result was mass starvation of deer and other prey species in that area. And your article points out that the Michigan DNR itself has debunked the notion that wolves are causing a decline in the deer population, quoting DNR Wildlife Biologist Brian Roell saying, "There's no science to back that up—it just isn't occurring," pointing instead to weather, habitat decline, and hunting for the smaller deer take recently.

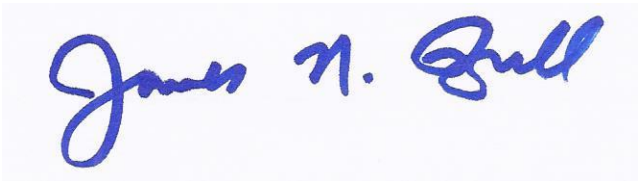
Dr. Rolf Peterson and Dr. John Vucetich, the two top wolf researchers in Michigan from Michigan Technological University (in the U.P!), who currently run the 60+ year study of wolves and moose on Isle Royale (an island national park in Lake Superior) which has been on-going for over 60 years, both argue that a wolf hunting season in the UP is not needed and in fact as Scott Carter of the Detroit Zoo and the Humane Society's Molly Tamulevich testified, it could make livestock depredation, which is now negligible, far worse. As alpha animals (the likely sought-after trophies), the older leaders of the pack are killed, the less experienced adolescents are no longer reined in by their superiors thus more likely to have run-ins with livestock and humans. Moreover, killing random wolves in a hunt will do nothing to curb livestock depredation. Farmers already can get permits to kill problem wolves, which is the sensible way to address any such problem directly. The reality is that one farm in the UP has accounted for the majority of livestock depredation reports and the farmer in question has left carcasses around to deliberately entice wolves, and allowed donkeys given to him by the Michigan DNR to deter wolves to starve to death.

Hunting prey species like deer, especially where top predators like wolves have been extirpated makes sense ecologically, and it also works when there are multiple predators in a system including

humans as well. Detroit Audubon supports hunting of existing game species. Hunting of predators is not ecologically sound and is something we cannot support.

Rep. LaFave's argument that folks in the Lower Peninsula should be prohibited from weighing in on this issue is totally off-base. Regardless of where we live in the state, we are all Michigan citizens and the wildlife of this state belongs to us all and we not only have the right but a duty to make our views known on how best to assure that this important wildlife heritage, our common inheritance, is not squandered by poor management decisions. Detroit Audubon strongly agrees that wildlife management needs to be guided by sound science. That is exactly why; we oppose the resolution pressuring the Natural Resource Commission to institute a wolf hunt— because it advocates actions that are patently counter to science! IF McBroom, LaFave, UP Sportsmen's groups, and MUCC are for using science to manage wildlife populations. Good! Then, listen to and heed the foremost experts in this state who have been studying wolves for years. Yes, indeed follow the science! This resolution pushing a wolf hunt does not.

Sincerely,



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