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Judge Orders DNR To Begin February Wolf Hunt

Decision Follows Vote By Natural Resources Board To Hold Off On Hunt Until November
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A Jefferson County Circuit Court judge [has ordered](#) the state Department of Natural Resources to hold a wolf hunt this month. That means the agency must begin a hunt immediately even though state statute requires the hunting season to close by the end of February.

In January, members of Wisconsin's Natural Resources Board [narrowly rejected](#) a request by Republican state lawmakers to resume wolf hunting this month. The request came on the heels of a decision by former President Donald Trump's administration to [remove wolves from the endangered species list](#).

The DNR had previously said it [would resume the state's wolf hunt](#) this November because more time was needed to develop a science-based harvest quota and work with tribal nations and the public while creating a new wolf management plan.

On Feb. 2, a Kansas-based organization called [Hunter Nation](#) filed a lawsuit in Jefferson County Circuit Court challenging the DNR's decision not to immediately resume the hunt. President and CEO Luke Hilgemann praised the judge's decision as a victory for the rule of law.

"The Wisconsin DNR is now under judge's orders to move forward with a wolf harvest season here," said Hilgemann. "That was statutorily required and that allows hunters and others to go out and manage this population of predators here in Wisconsin."

In an email to WPR, DNR spokeswoman Sarah Hoyer said the Wisconsin Department of Justice, which defended the DNR in court, is reviewing the judge's decision.

"Meanwhile, the DNR will be taking steps to implement the court's order," said Hoyer.

Colette Atkins is an attorney with the [Center for Biological Diversity](#), based in Arizona. The group filed an amicus brief in support of the DNR's decision to hold off on a hunt until next fall. Atkins told WPR it's unfeasible and potentially impossible for the DNR to do the work of implementing a wolf season within the next 17 days.

"(The DNR) committed to having a wolf hunt in 2021 that would start in November," said Atkins. "The Legislature made a conscious decision to have that start in November. There's a lot of problems with starting a wolf hunt right now in February. That's in the middle of the wolf breeding season. That's never been done before."

While [state law](#) requires the wolf hunt season to conclude by the end of February, there has never been any wolf hunting during that month. That's because harvest quotas in various parts of the state were quickly filled by the end of December according to DNR wolf hunt reports from [2012](#), [2013](#) and [2014](#).

The lawsuit is the latest in a decades-long battle over wolf management at the state and federal level. Wolves in the Great Lakes region [have been delisted multiple times](#) by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service only to return to protected status following legal challenges in federal court.