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Wisconsin judge orders wolf hunt be held this month

The Department of Natural Resources says it will work to comply with the order.

Written By: [John Myers](#) | Feb 11th 2021 - 2pm.

A Wisconsin state court judge has ruled that the state Department of Natural Resources must hold a wolf hunting season yet this winter despite the agency's objections.

Judge Bennett Brantmeier in Jefferson County court made the ruling from the bench, with no written opinion released as yet.

The ruling came Thursday after a sportsman's group sued to force the hunt, which some hunters and livestock owners say is necessary to quickly cull the state's wolf population, which stands at about 1,034.

Wolf supporters say the hunt is premature, while the DNR itself had planned to wait until November to hold the first state wolf hunt since 2014, saying it needs more time to develop scientific guidelines and rules.

DNR officials said Thursday, however, that they will move to comply with the order pending legal review.

"Today, the DNR was ordered to hold a wolf hunt in February. The DOJ (state Department of Justice) is reviewing the decision at this time. Meanwhile, the DNR will be taking steps to implement the court's order," said Sarah Hoyer, DNR communications manager, in a statement to the News Tribune.

It's not clear how the DNR could issue permits or hold a lottery for licenses to take wolves with only 17 days left in the month.

On Jan. 22, the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board, which sets policy for the DNR, narrowly rejected a push by Republican lawmakers to direct the department to immediately open a wolf hunting and trapping season.

On Feb. 2, the Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty filed a lawsuit on behalf of Kansas-based Hunter Nation demanding the DNR hold the hunt based on existing state law that kicked in when federal protections ended in January. The state law calls for a hunt between November and February.

Some critics of the mid-winter hunt say it would happen during wolf breeding season and could disrupt pack behavior, potentially leading to more conflicts with livestock and pets, not less conflict.

"This ruling is such a disappointment for Wisconsin's wolves and all who believe that science, not bullets, should drive wolf management," said Collette Adkins, carnivore conservation director for the Center for Biological Diversity. "Trophy hunters wasted no time in pushing for this wolf hunt in the middle of the wolf breeding season, against the advice of state experts, and without consultation with regional tribes. We will continue our fight to stop the hunt."

But the group that pushed the issue praised the judge's decision.

"This is a historic victory for the Wisconsin hunter and our constitutionally protected right to hunt and manage our wildlife here in Wisconsin," said Luke Hilgemann, president of Hunter Nation.

The Trump administration's removal of federal protections for gray wolves, announced in October, went into effect Jan. 4, turning wolf management over to state and tribal agencies for the first time since 2014, when a federal court ordered that Endangered Species Act protections be restored for the big canines. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials concluded that wolves

have recovered enough in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula to allow hunting and trapping, although the delisting included all 48 contiguous states, even where wolves don't exist.