



October 12, 2026

Dear Secretary Hyun and Natural Resources Board members,

I am writing to you to express Sierra Club's disappointment and frustration with the actions and lack of process and transparency that led to the killing of nine wolves in Price County in August and September 2026.

The situation and process have raised concerns about Wisconsin's approach to wolf management in these situations. Public health and safety are paramount. At the same time, this incident highlights the need to reassess how the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) evaluates potential risks, determines appropriate responses, and engages with Tribal Nations in decisions affecting wolves.

The DNR's apology to the Tribes is an important first step. The next step is to establish clear policies and procedures to prevent this from happening again. **We urge the Department to use this incident as an opportunity to strengthen its decision-making processes, rebuild trust, and establish a more transparent and collaborative approach to wolf management.**

Based on the public reports released to date, the encounters cited in the Price County incident included an adult collared wolf coming within six to eight feet of a house on two nights, a wolf entering a clearing within 20 yards of a man who was mowing, and an uncollared juvenile wolf watching a man from approximately 45 feet away as he placed bear bait on his property. These encounters may understandably have caused concern, and reports of potential conflicts deserve appropriate investigation. However, more transparency is needed on how these reported encounters establish that the wolves displayed aggressive behavior or posed an imminent threat to human safety.

If the DNR's decision was based on additional information indicating a greater risk, we ask the Department to publicly release more details about the evidence supporting its determination, the response options considered, and the rationale for the actions taken. The public deserves to understand how the Department concluded that the situation warranted killing nearly an entire pack, potentially eliminating an entire wolf family. **If the mere existence of wolves near humans is considered aggressive and results in almost an entire pack being killed, it raises serious concerns about the state's management of wolves.**

We are also calling on you to create a transparent, science-based process based on co-management with your Tribal partners for future decisions. This new process should be built on some core principles:

- **Ensure meaningful Tribal consultation and co-management.** Policy reform is especially important given the failure to consult with the affected Tribe before taking action. This should include meaningful

Tribal participation at every stage of reviewing the Price County incident, developing new policies, establishing response criteria, and implementing future procedures. The Department should work directly with the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission and affected Tribes to determine how consultation will occur, who must be involved, how urgent situations will be handled, and how Tribal perspectives will inform final decisions. These processes must respect Tribal sovereignty and establish a foundation for genuine co-management.

The 2023 Wolf Management Plan states, “The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources would also like to recognize that while many of Wisconsin’s Tribal Nations participated in the development of this plan, they have continued to express firm opposition to any wolf harvest seasons. The Department acknowledges these concerns and will continue to respectfully engage with Wisconsin’s Tribal Nations regarding wolf management and harvest.”

In our view, the Department's failure to consult with the Tribe in this incident represents a breakdown in its commitment to this element of its wolf management plan. Respectful engagement must mean more than acknowledging Tribal concerns in a written document; it must be reflected in the Department’s actions and decision-making processes. As a member of the Wolf Management Plan Committee and an advocate for the current plan, the Sierra Club is extremely disappointed to see this violation of a core principle.

- **Establish clear, publicly available standards for lethal removal.** The DNR should review and refine its Human Health and Safety Conflict Investigation Classifications to clearly define when lethal removal is necessary. Develop these standards through meaningful public input and Tribal Consultation, and make them publicly available. They should clearly distinguish between the presence of wolves near people, behaviors that warrant monitoring or intervention, and circumstances that pose a demonstrable threat to human safety, as well as conditions that require removal if a wolf is sick or injured. They should also include the different actions taken in different scenarios.
- **Make non-lethal conflict prevention the priority.** Non-lethal deterrence and conflict-prevention measures should be the first course of action whenever practical and appropriate. The use of lethal removal should be justified by evidence and considered only after evaluating and pursuing reasonable non-lethal alternatives. The Department should also document which alternatives were considered or attempted, and explain why those options were insufficient. This is especially important when wolves are on the endangered species list. We encourage the DNR to clarify how applicable federal and state legal requirements informed its response to the Price County incident.

The Price County Wolf Pack incident should prompt a careful reassessment of how Wisconsin responds to wolf-related concerns. Protecting public safety and responsibly managing wildlife are important responsibilities, but they must be carried out through a transparent, rational process. The process and creation of these rules need to be grounded in the best available science and with respect to Tribal sovereignty.

We ask the DNR to move beyond an apology and take concrete steps to ensure future decisions are guided by clear standards, prioritize non-lethal options, and meaningfully co-manage Wisconsin’s wolves with the relevant Tribes.

We hope the Department will treat this incident as an opportunity to rebuild trust and establish a more consistent, collaborative, and accountable approach to wolf management. The most important outcome now is meaningful, lasting change that helps ensure this situation does not happen again.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to hearing what specific steps the Department will take to address these concerns. If the Wolf Management Committee implements the next steps, we look forward to partnering on an improved process.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Ward, Chapter Director
Sierra Club Wisconsin Director