

GRAY WOLVES IN IOWA

Wolves were extirpated from Iowa in 1955.¹ However they periodically are found in Iowa. Under state law, gray wolves are classified as a furbearer; the hunting season for the gray wolf is closed which makes killing a wolf illegal unless the wolf is harming livestock.²

In February, 2024, a deceased gray wolf was found in the median of I-80 in northwest Davenport.³ Since 2014 four hunters, that we know of, have killed wild gray wolves⁴ in Iowa – in Buchanan, Jones, Van Buren, and Osceola counties.⁵ The hunters claimed that they thought that they were shooting a coyote instead of a wolf.



Photo courtesy National Park Service

Wolves are noticeably larger in size than coyotes, with adult wolves weighing between 50 to 100 pounds while coyotes weigh between 35 and 40 pounds. Wolves are five to six feet long while coyotes are three and a half to four and a half feet long. Wolves stand 27 to 33 inches at the shoulder while coyotes are 20 to 22 inches tall at the shoulder.⁶

By now hunters should be aware that wolves have begun to repopulate the state and there should be no excuse to kill a wolf and claim that it is a coyote.

Policy Recommendations

Hunter education. Given that wild wolves have started repopulating Iowa, it is time for the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to embark on an aggressive hunter education program. That program should involve teaching hunters how to identify a wolf, explaining that it is illegal to kill a wolf in Iowa, and encouraging hunters to make a careful identification before they pull the trigger.

Description of wolves and coyotes in hunter regulation booklet. Every year the DNR publishes a booklet of hunting and trapping regulations. That booklet should have a section that describes the physical differences between wolves and coyotes, along with photographs demonstrating the differences.

Enforcement of laws against killing wolves. Additionally the Iowa Chapter encourages the DNR to enforce the law banning hunting of wolves and to aggressively prosecute any hunter who kills a wolf.

¹ Orlan Love, "Time to consider Iowa as bear habitat?", Cedar Rapids Gazette, August 7, 2014

² Oliver Milman, "Trump administration ends gray wolf's endangered species protections", The Guardian, October 29, 2020

³ Vince Evelsizer, "Gray wolf found dead on the northwest edge of Davenport", Press release, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, February 23, 2024

⁴ Gray wolves are also called timber wolves.

⁵ Orlan Love, "No charges in shooting of 2 wolves", Cedar Rapids Gazette, March 5, 2016

⁶ Orlan Love, "No charges in shooting of 2 wolves", Cedar Rapids Gazette, March 5, 2016