

USDA-WILDLIFE SERVICES

WOLF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN MINNESOTA 2025

Background

The USDA-Wildlife Services (WS) Minnesota gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) conflict management program utilizes a variety of methods to manage wolf damage. Wolves in Minnesota regularly kill and/or injure livestock (cattle, sheep, poultry and occasionally horses and other domestic animals) and pets (primarily dogs). While the overall damage to livestock producers and pet owners is relatively small, the financial losses and personal impact to livestock producers and pet owners can be significant.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR) estimated that there were 2,919 wolves in approximately 631 packs in Minnesota over the winter of 2022-2023 (Erb and Humpal, 2023). WS investigates reports of livestock and pet losses to wolves and wolf threats to human safety in cooperation with the MNDNR Enforcement Division. State statute also authorizes peace officers from the county sheriff's office, University of Minnesota Extension agents or licensed veterinarians that have been trained in wolf damage identification to verify wolf damage for the purposes of compensation through the MN Department of Agriculture. If wolf damage is verified and there is potential for further losses, WS may initiate wolf removal efforts near the depredation site to reduce the likelihood of additional damage. WS also provides technical assistance to cooperators to reduce wolf damage and recommends the use of nonlethal methods whenever possible to reduce conflicts with wolves. The MN WS program also assists state and federal agencies in documenting the extent of wolf depredations in Minnesota and provides wolf-related information to livestock producers, resource managers, Tribes, private citizens, and other interested parties. The ability to mitigate losses associated with wolves promotes public acceptance of this species and contributes to the sustainability of wolves in Minnesota.

2025 Summary

In 2025, the MN WS program verified wolf damage at 76 different sites (Figure 1). In 2025, the MN WS program received a total of 185 calls for wolf conflict management assistance related to livestock, poultry, pet owners or citizens concerned about public safety (Table 1). This year's total of 185 wolf complaints was down from a record of 252 calls in 2024, but very close to the previous ten-year average of 188 requests for assistance.

A total of 102 of the 185 requests for assistance in 2025, or approximately 55%, were verified as wolf-killed or injured domestic animals or public safety concerns (Table 1). This past year's rate of verified wolf complaints is in line with the previous 10-year average of a 54% verification rate. In response, WS implemented a variety of nonlethal and lethal measures to reduce wolf threats to domestic animals and public safety.

In 2025, a total of 203 wolves were taken/removed by the MN WS program in response to verified damage (Table 1), which was higher than the previous 10-year average of 197 wolves taken in response to verified wolf damage.

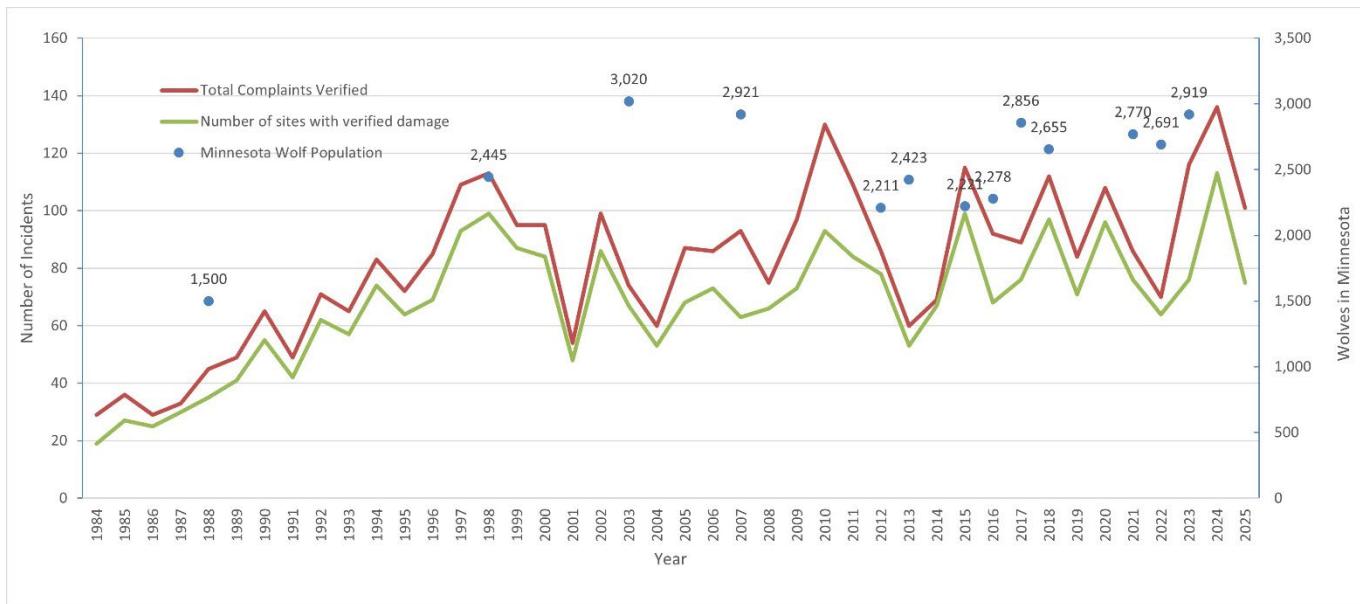


Figure 1. Number of verified wolf complaints, depredation sites, and wolf population estimates for Minnesota from 1984 through 2025 (WS Unpublished Data).

The 102 verified wolf complaints in 2025 included 93 depredations on livestock/poultry (Table 1). Cow/calf depredations continued to account for the largest number of domestic livestock impacted by wolves again in 2025. Of the 102 verified complaints for 2025, seven involved depredations of domestic dogs by wolves.



Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Total complaints received	220	157	152	180	166	207	187	139	217	252	185
Total complaints verified ¹	115	92	89	113	84	108	86	70	116	136	102
Verified livestock and poultry complaints	92	80	80	101	80	105	83	69	107	128	93
Verified complaints involving dogs	18	8	6	7	3	1	3	1	7	7	7
Percentage of total complaints verified	52	59	59	63	51	52	45	50	53	54	55
Number of farms/sites with verified losses	99	76	76	97	71	96	76	64	76	113	76
Number of wolves taken	220	191	199	189	168	221	152	147	248	238	203
Number of wolves killed	213	183	190	189	166	216	152	142	248	238	203
Verified Wolf-Killed Domestic Animals											
Calves	67	63	68	82	74	76	62	62	92	108	75
Cows	17	13	8	9	11	7	10	5	12	13	8
Sheep	12	3	3	7	2	4	10	5	5	11	22
Dogs	16	5	6	4	2	1	1	5	5	6	3
Horses	0	1	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	3
Turkeys	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Other**	7	2	7	11	10	5	6	0	3	24	10
Verified Wolf-wounded Domestic Animals											
Calves	5	5	4	12	8	14	19	4	16	12	8
Cows	0	0	0	2	1	2	1	5	0	1	1
Dogs	4	4	2	5	2	0	2	0	2	3	4
Other ²	0	1	3	0	2	1	0	0	3	1	1

Table 1. Wolf depredation on domestic animals in Minnesota, 2015-2025.

¹ A verified complaint is one in which WS determines that wolves have killed or injured one or more domestic animals as evidenced by: (1) Observing wounded animals or remains of animals killed and (2) Finding evidence of wolf involvement (i.e.. tracks, scat, other indicators).

² Others include a variety of domestic animals such as chickens, donkeys, pigs, llamas, bison, rabbits, goats, and captive deer.

The geographic distribution of verified wolf damage complaints during 2025 is shown in Figure 2, along with the approximate range expansion of Minnesota's wolf population from 1978 through 2018. From a relatively recent historical perspective, as the wolf range in MN has expanded into the Forest/Ag transition zone of MN, conflicts with wolves have increased along with requests for assistance to resolve those conflicts.

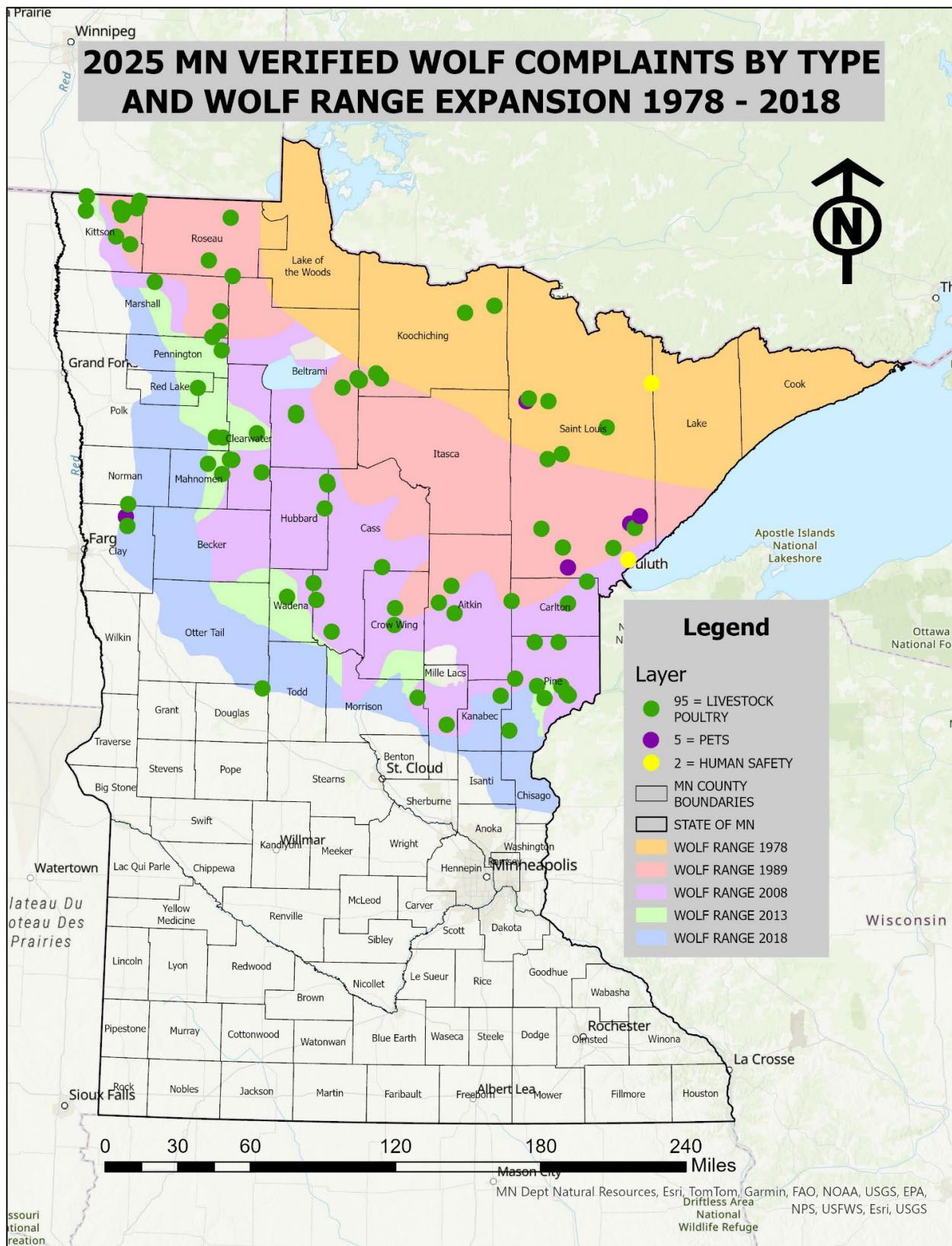


Figure 2. Location of verified wolf complaints in Minnesota in 2025 overlaid with wolf range expansion in Minnesota since 1978.

The seasonal distribution of wolf depredation complaints varied by month during 2025 (Figure 3). Wolf damage complaints in the spring usually correlate with spring livestock calving activities and decline after white-tailed deer fawning occurs in May. Wolf damage complaints usually increase again in later summer appearing to correlate with the current year's wolf pups becoming more active with an increase in nutritional demands.

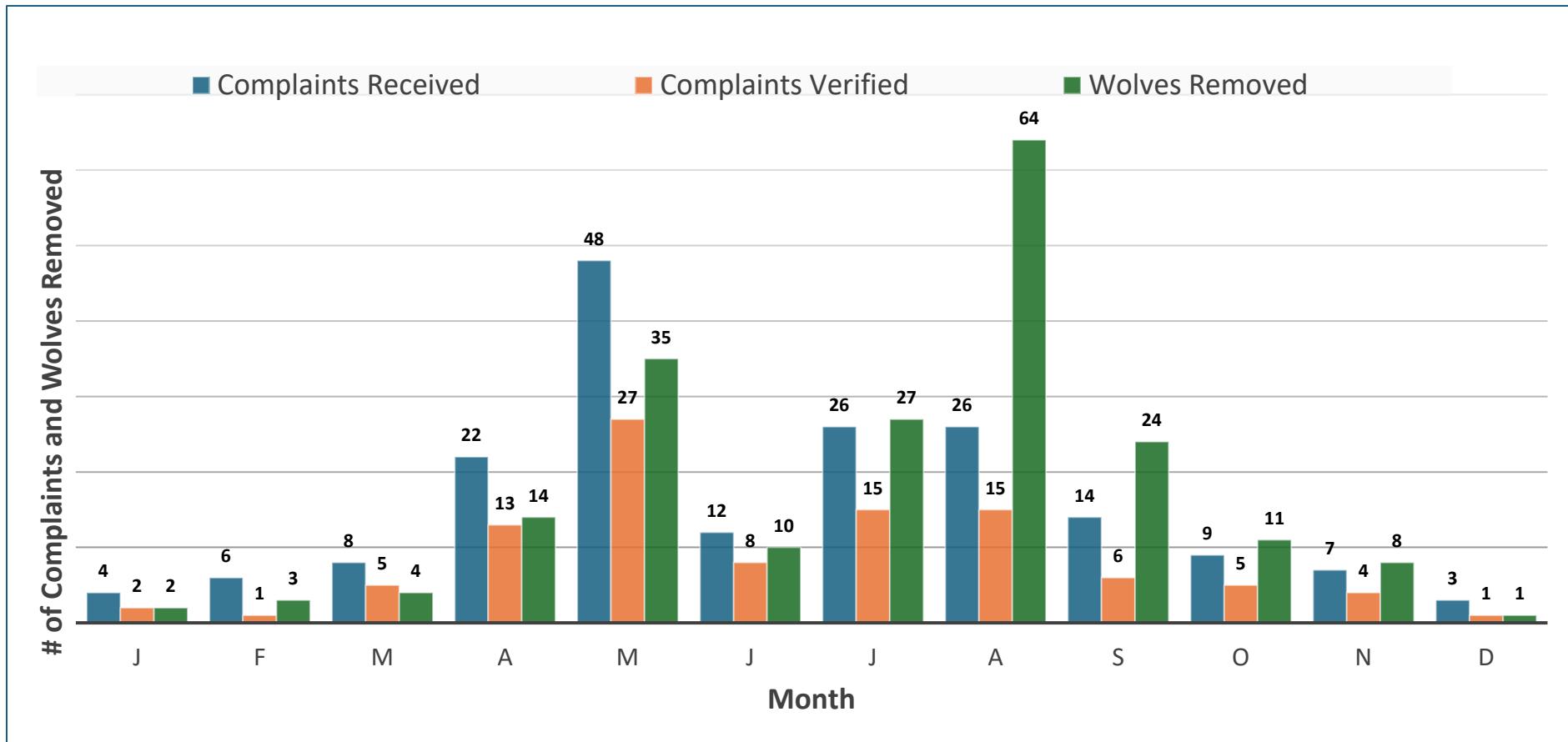


Figure 3. Seasonal Distribution of Wolf Depredations in 2025. As in previous years, wolf complaints are received throughout the year.

Most verified wolf complaints in 2025 (Figure 4), as in previous years, were related to cattle, followed by dogs and sheep.

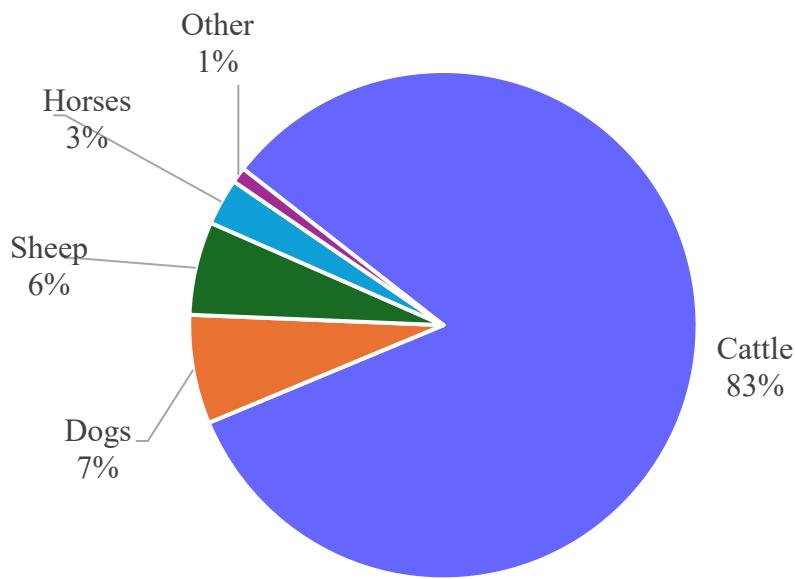


Figure 4. 2025 verified wolf complaints by type.

Verified wolf complaints occurred in 24 of Minnesota's 87 Counties in 2025 with the greatest numbers occurring in St. Louis, Kittson, Pine, Marshall, and Koochiching counties (Table 2).

County	Verified wolf complaints in 2025	Wolves removed 2025	County	Verified wolf complaints in 2025	Wolves Removed 2025
Aitkin	3	4	Mahnomen	3	2
Beltrami	4	6	Marshall	7	9
Carlton	4	9	Mille Lacs	1	2
Cass	4	19	Morrison	1	2
Clay	2	3	Norman	2	0
Clearwater	4	4	Pennington	1	0
Crow Wing	4	11	Pine	10	29
Douglas	1	3	Polk	2	1
Hubbard	3	8	Red Lake	1	0
Kanabec	1	0	Roseau	3	5
Kittson	13	26	St. Louis	19	37
Koochiching	5	20	Wadena	4	3
			TOTAL	102	203

Table 2. Verified wolf complaints and wolves taken by county in Minnesota during 2025.

A total of 203 wolves were taken in 2025 by WS in response to verified complaints in 24 counties (Figure 5).

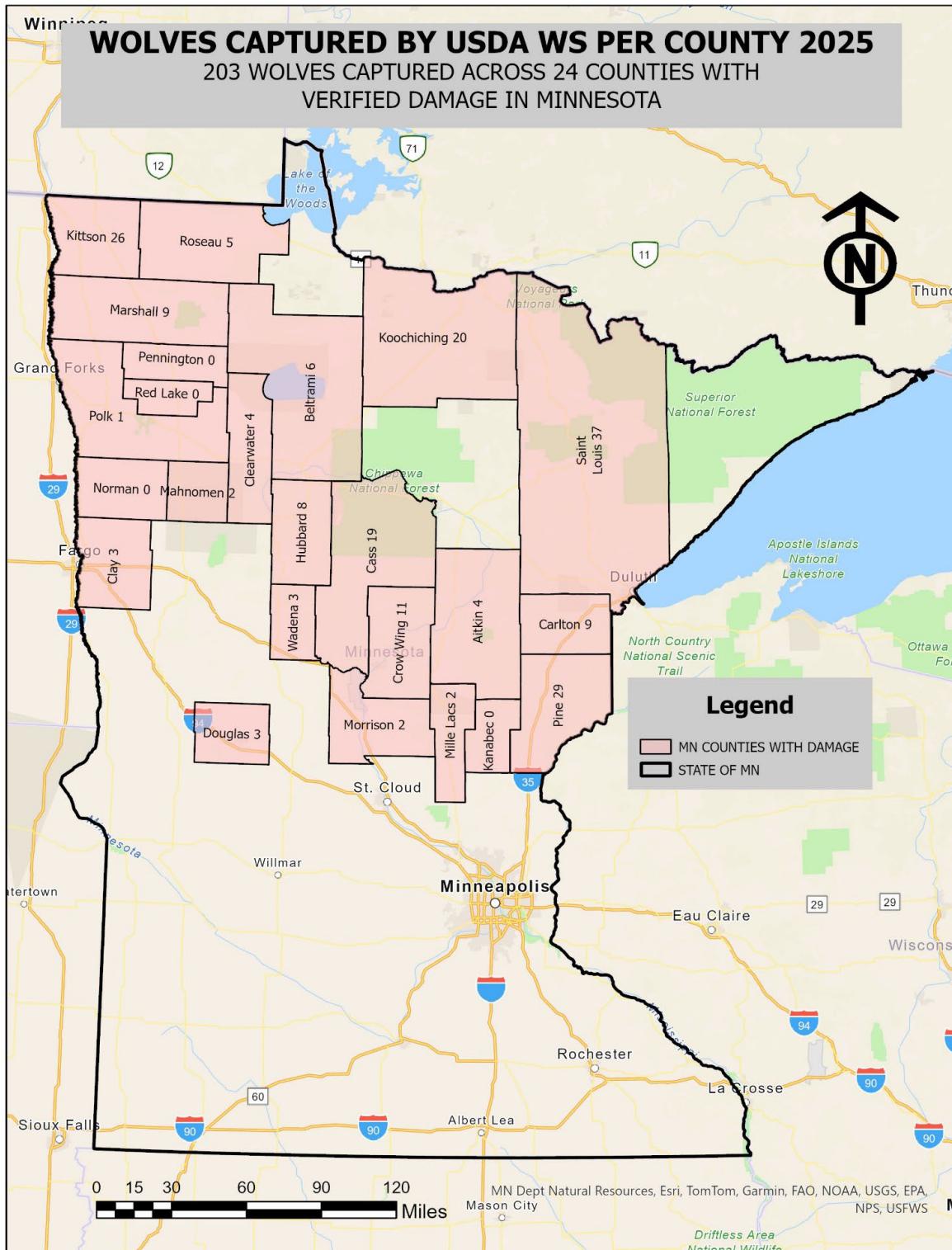


Figure 5. WS wolf take in Minnesota by county in 2025.

Nonlethal Initiative/Conflict Prevention

The USDA Wildlife Services program in Minnesota has always incorporated a nonlethal/conflict prevention component in its wolf damage management practices and recommendations. In 2020, however, funding became available to further enhance the conflict prevention component of our existing wolf damage management program in Minnesota. The conflict prevention component of the MN WS program is intended to provide livestock producers and pet owners a nonlethal alternative to lethal removal of wolves to prevent or minimize livestock or pet losses due to wolf depredations. Prior to 2020, Minnesota WS personnel had less resources available to provide assistance where wolves were present but hadn't caused a verifiable loss of livestock or pets. With the initial nonlethal funding in 2020, MN WS was able to hire a fulltime seasonal conflict prevention specialist, as well as purchase nonlethal equipment, such as fladry and frightening devices, to deploy in instances where wolves were present, but hadn't caused verifiable damage that could warrant lethal removal of wolves. Continued funding along with the increased demand for assistance, resulted in MN WS's Conflict Prevention Specialist to be needed and funded year-round, as well as 4 other existing MN WS staff to assist and implement Nonlethal abatement measures throughout 2025.

While requests for wolf damage management assistance occur year-round, the most active part of the wolf depredation season in Minnesota typically runs from April to November.

During 2025 MN WS fielded over 50 phone calls and conducted site visits (Human Health and Safety, pets, livestock), where nonlethal abatement measures/ technical assistance was either provided, discussed, or recommended. Most MN WS staff carry Nonlethal abatement supplies (lights, sound devices/deterrents, pamphlet) in their trucks and offer supplies and/or technical assistance to producers that are reporting wolf conflicts that are not verifiable.



Figure 6. MN WS installed Fladry at farms that reported seeing wolves around cattle but did not have a verifiable loss.

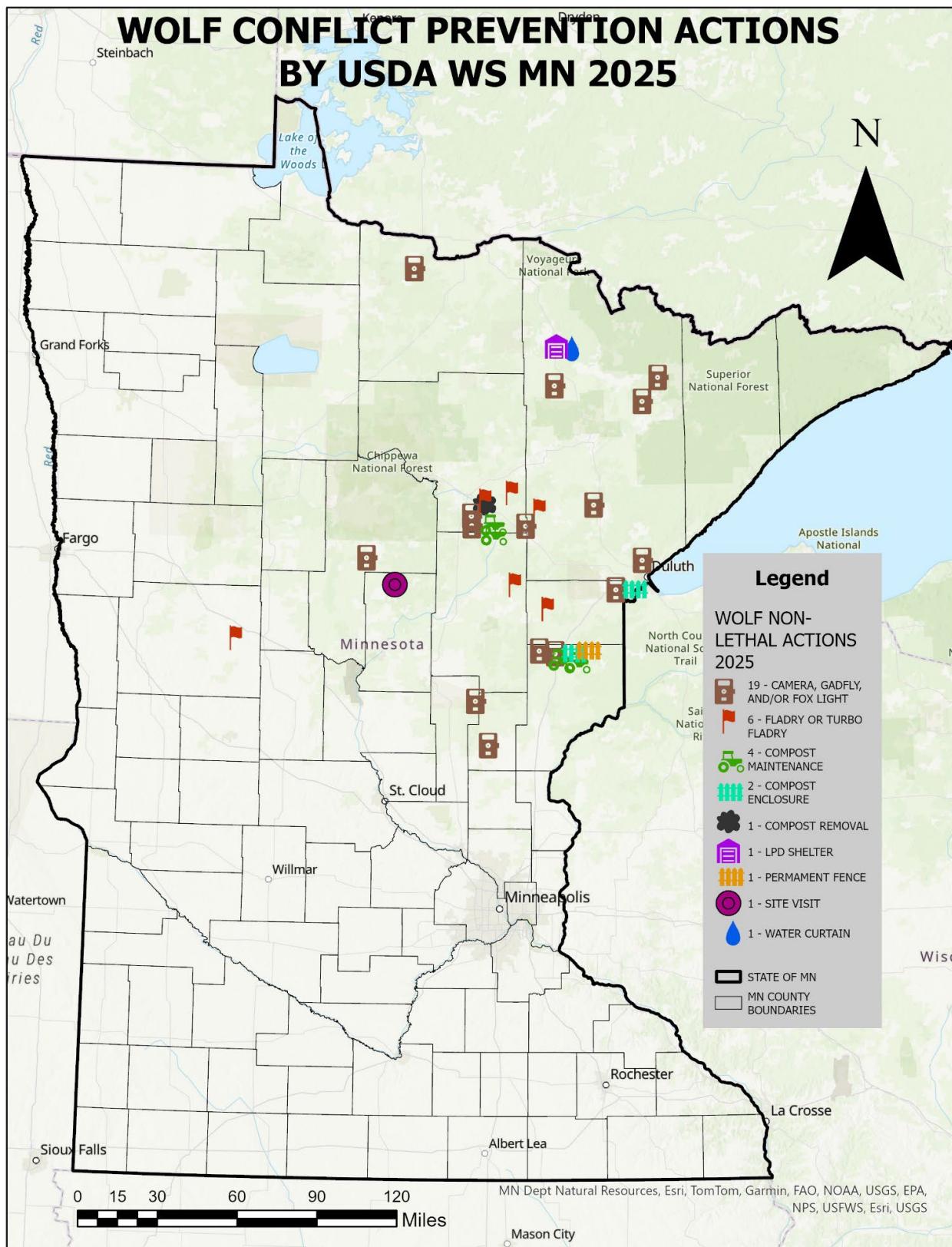


Figure 7. Location and types of nonlethal conflict prevention projects in MN in 2025.

Permanent Fence Updates



Figure 8. In 2025, MN WS installed a 6ft tall, woven wire, permanent fence with apron around a lambing pasture with historic depredation, using a new nonlethal initiative procured fence roller.

The large, nationally recognized permanent fencing project (Orr MN) that Wildlife Services helped design and install was made possible due to NLI (Nonlethal Initiative) funding. Those efforts have resulted in no lethal removal of wolves being required at that cattle operation for nearly 2 years. MN WS continued assisting that project again this year by implementing and maintaining new barrier devices to prevent wolf access through creek bottoms during low water periods. NLI funding also allowed MN WS to help this producer keep his livestock protection dogs (LPD) in place and in the pasture with the cows by installing an LPD kennel with the assistance of University of Minnesota Voyageurs Wolf Project (VWP).

An additional woven wire, permanent fence installed at a chronic farm in Itasca County has resulted in only one verifiable depredation incident since 2020.



Figure 9. NLI funding is available to help producers mitigate conflict.



Figure 10. Wolf interacting with a permanent fence installed at a St. Louis County Farm.

Composting Enclosures

MN WS developed a pilot project in the summer of 2022 to give producers a way to dispose of dead livestock that discourages wolf scavenging activity near livestock by reducing wolf access to livestock carcasses. Using a combination of predator resistant fencing and composting to break down livestock carcasses, it has proven to be less incentivizing for predators to spend time on/near a livestock producer's property scavenging carcasses, which may reduce livestock losses. To date (2022-2025) MN WS has installed ten carcass composting enclosures. These enclosures measure 70'x70' with 75" standing woven wire fence and a 20" ground apron attached around the perimeter of the fence to prevent digging under (Figures 11, 12 and 13). Monitoring the success and use of these composting structures is ongoing.

MN WS is also collaborating with the University of Minnesota on a research project to reduce predator – livestock interactions using these carcass compost enclosures. All enclosures that are part of the research project have been installed. Field data collection including compost monitoring, compost pile turning, and predator interactions is ongoing with the assistance of MN WS.



Figure 11. Installing a composting enclosure.



Figure 12. A wolf investigating an operational composting enclosure.



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Figure 13. A wolf investigating a non-enclosed composting pile.

Outreach

MN WS staff attended the 2025 Cow Calf Days Outreach Event. MN WS discussed wolf conflict mitigation and had examples of nonlethal equipment on display.

MN WS staff attended and presented at a variety of outreach events for elementary schools and colleges in 2025.

MN WS continued its work with Tribal partnerships in 2025 by communicating and working together during wolf investigations as well as other projects, salvaging beaver and wolf carcasses for educational or ceremonial use, and provided training on depredation investigations.

MN WS depredation program was noted several times by local news organizations in 2025.

Other Wolf Damage Management Activities

Beginning in 2021, WS personnel started documenting producer-implemented non-lethal practices they observed during wolf depredation investigations. Producer-implemented non-lethal practices include such things as increased human presence, fencing, proper livestock carcass disposal or composting, harassment of wolves, livestock guarding animals, lights, flagging, and other practices that help prevent or deter wolf depredations (Figure 13).

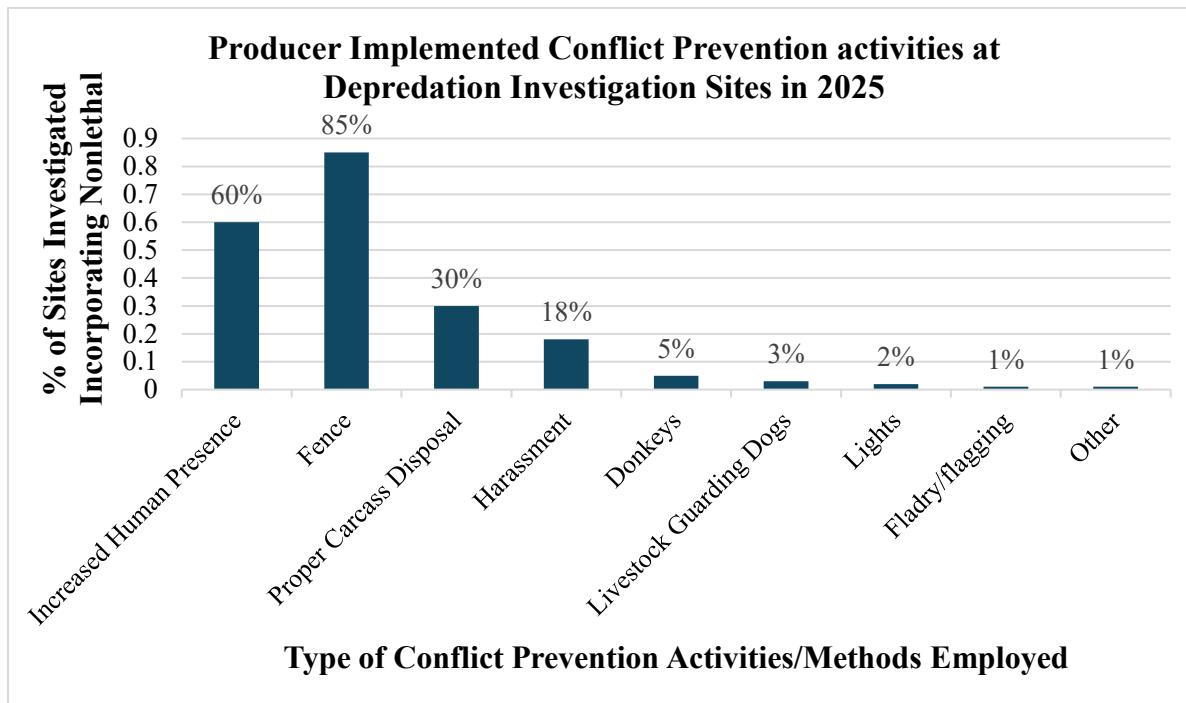


Figure 14. Producer-implemented conflict prevention practices documented by WS personnel in 2025 at sites with verified wolf damage.

Legal Changes

Since February 10th, 2022, gray wolves in MN have again been federally protected and classified as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). MN WS continued to provide wolf damage management assistance per federal statute and guidance during the year, coordinating activities with State and Tribal authorities as appropriate.

Compensation

Livestock verified as killed by wolves in Minnesota are eligible for compensation from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA). Annual compensation paid by MDA for wolf related damage in MN is indicated in Table 3. No compensation is currently paid for pets that are killed or wounded by wolves in Minnesota or for livestock that are wounded, unless injuries to livestock are so severe the animal needs to be euthanized.

State Fiscal year (July 1-June 30)	Total wolf claims	Number of wolf claims
1993	\$30,996	NA
1994	\$34,328	NA
1995	\$29,697	NA
1996	\$31,777	NA
1997	\$39,309	NA
1998	\$57,480	111
1999	\$66,052	103
2000	\$91,585	121
2001	\$80,174	70
2002	\$69,515	67
2003	\$82,646	97
2004	\$42,077	47
2005	\$45,100	37
2006	\$72,895	71
2007	\$81,683	82
2008	\$95,526	82
2009	\$88,366	87
2010	\$106,615	104
2011	\$102,230	128
2012	\$119,659	81
2013	\$113,714	94
2014	\$109,475	98
2015	\$106,102	65
2016	\$253,313	137
2017	\$156,020	96
2018	\$165,912	117
2019	\$107,460	78
2020	\$116,150	76
2021	\$122,025	89
2022	\$114,725	73
2023	\$136,387	99
2024	\$185,791	88
2025	\$197,920	81
*2026	\$171,820	88

Table 3. Compensation paid by Minnesota Department of Agriculture for livestock killed by wolves.
Source: Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA). *FY 2026 data is from the time this report was prepared and does not reflect the final 2026 data from MDA, as the state FY 2026 goes through June 1, 2026.

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Literature Cited

Erb, J., C. Humpal, 2023. Minnesota Wolf Population Update, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, St. Paul.

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