

prepare a new management plan based upon various new wolf protection and wolf take provisions also contained in that bill. MN DNR, in cooperation with the MN Department of Agriculture, completed a Wolf Management Plan (MN Plan) in early 2001 (MN DNR 2001).

The MN Plan's stated goal is "to ensure the long-term survival of wolves in Minnesota while addressing wolf-human conflicts that inevitably result when wolves and people live in the same vicinity." It establishes a minimum goal of 1,600 wolves, with provisions to monitor the population and to take prompt corrective action if wolf numbers drop below that threshold. The MN Plan divides the State into 2 wolf management zones, designated as Zones A and B. Zone A corresponds to wolf management zones 1 through 4 in the Federal Eastern Recovery Plan, while Zone B constitutes zone 5 in the Federal Eastern Recovery Plan. Within Zone A, wolves would receive strong State protection, unless involved in attacks on domestic animals. In Zone B, more-liberal taking regulations would allow wolves to be killed to protect domestic animals under a much broader set of circumstances. However, neither the Zone A nor the Zone B regulations can be implemented while Minnesota gray wolves are federally listed as a threatened species.

When our July 13, 2000, proposed rule was being written, the Minnesota Legislature had not passed wolf management legislation, so we had little basis on which to evaluate the management and protection that Minnesota wolves would receive if we would remove their Federal protection. Therefore, we did not propose any change in Federal protection at that time. Because this final rule retains the Federal threatened listing and the associated protection for Minnesota gray wolves, and thus precludes the implementation of the MN Plan, we have not included a detailed review of the MN Plan in this rule. In the future, if and when we propose a change to the Federal protection of Minnesota gray wolves, we will evaluate and discuss the resulting affects of implementing the MN Plan in that proposed rule.

The complete text of the Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota wolf management plans, as well as our summaries of those plans, can be found on our Web site (*see FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT*).

On the basis of discussions and written communications with Native American tribes and organizations prior to our proposal, and further supported by the comments we received from

those sources during the comment period, we expect wolf populations to continue to be conserved on most, and probably all, Native American reservations in the western Great Lakes area. Those practices will augment the wolf population goals described above for the State DNRs. While we are unable to perform a comprehensive analysis of the likely future management and protection afforded to wolves on Native American reservations, we believe their traditional respect for the wolf, and its importance in Native American culture, will secure the species' future existence on most land under Native American control. At the time we consider initiating work on a proposal to delist or otherwise further reduce the Federal protection of gray wolves, we will again consult with Native American tribes and organizations to further discuss and evaluate their wolf management and protection plans and preferences.

The wolf retains great cultural significance and traditional value to many tribes and their members (Eli Hunt, Leech Lake Tribal Council, *in litt.* 1998; Mike Schrage, Fond du Lac Resource Management Division, *in litt.* 1998a). Some Native Americans view wolves as competitors for deer and moose, while others are interested in the harvest of the wolf as a furbearer (Schrage, *in litt.* 1998a). Many tribes intend to manage their natural resources, wolves among them, in a sustainable manner in order that they be available to their descendants. However, traditional natural resource harvest practices often include only a minimum amount of regulation by the tribal government (Hunt *in litt.* 1998).

In order to retain and strengthen these cultural connections, some tribes are opposed to the unnecessary killing of wolves on reservations and on ceded lands, even if wolves were to be delisted in the future. For example, because of the strong cultural significance of the wolf to their culture, the Ojibwa people support its protection (James Schlender, Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, *in litt.* 1998). Additionally, the Tribal Council of the Leech Lake Band of Minnesota Ojibwe recently has adopted a resolution that describes the sport and recreational harvest of gray wolves as an inappropriate use of the animal. The resolution supports the limited harvest of wolves to be used for traditional or spiritual purposes by enrolled tribal members. This limited harvest would only be allowed by the tribe if it does not negatively affect the wolf population. Based on the Council's request, we will assist the Council with obtaining wolf pelts and parts that become available from other sources,

such as depredation control activities. The Leech Lake Reservation is home to an estimated 75 to 100 gray wolves, the largest population of wolves on a Native American reservation in the 48 conterminous States (Hunt *in litt.* 1998).

The Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians (Minnesota) has indicated that it is likely to develop a wolf management plan that will probably be very similar in scope and content to the plan developed by the MN DNR. The Band's position on wolf management is "wolf preservation through effective management," and the Band is confident that wolves will continue to thrive on their lands (Lawrence Bedeau, Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians, *in litt.* 1998).

The Keweenaw Bay Indian Community (Michigan) has at least one wolf pack of four animals on its lands. They will continue to list the gray wolf as a protected animal under the Tribal Code even if federally delisted, with hunting and trapping prohibited (Mike Donofrio, Biological Services, Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, pers. comm. 1998). Other tribes, such as the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, have requested a slower pace to any wolf delisting process to allow more time for the preparation of tribal wolf management plans. The Fond du Lac Band has passed a resolution opposing Federal delisting and any other measure that would permit trapping, hunting, or poisoning of the gray wolf (Schrage *in litt.* 1998b).

Several Midwestern tribes (*e.g.*, the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians and the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians) have expressed concern regarding the possibility of the reclassification (and a potential future delisting) resulting in increased mortality of gray wolves on reservation lands, in the areas immediately surrounding the reservations, and in lands ceded by treaty to the Federal government by the tribes (Kiogama *in litt.* 2000). Interest has also been expressed in having our assistance in developing tribal and intertribal wolf management plans prior to delisting.

The Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) has Stated its intent to work closely with the States to cooperatively manage wolves in the ceded territories in the Upper Midwest, and will not develop a separate wolf management plan. The Commission intends to work with us to ensure that State plans will adequately protect the wolf (Schlender *in litt.* 1998).

The tribes are very concerned with the details of any change in Federal