

WI Volunteer Carnivore Tracking Program – Tracker Retention



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Summary

Volunteer Carnivore Tracking has been a major component of wolf monitoring in WI since 1995, with most survey blocks tracked most years (Fig.1). With changes in wolf management in 2012, including delisting and a harvest season, we anticipated a larger number of volunteer trackers might leave the program than normal. Since experienced trackers provide data that we need to determine the wolf count & distribution (Wydeven et al. 2009), we provided incentives to core & experienced trackers to encourage them to remain in the program and maintain similar levels of survey effort as previous years.



Figure 1. Wisconsin carnivore tracking blocks

Methods

An advanced tracking class, focused on their reported needs, was offered to returning trackers at no cost. Mileage reimbursement was provided for volunteer regional coordinators who typically track 1/4 - 1/3 of all volunteer miles. Additional training materials were purchased to provide enhanced training opportunities & tracking aides. Curriculum is being developed for a lower cost alternative to the current required wolf ecology class.

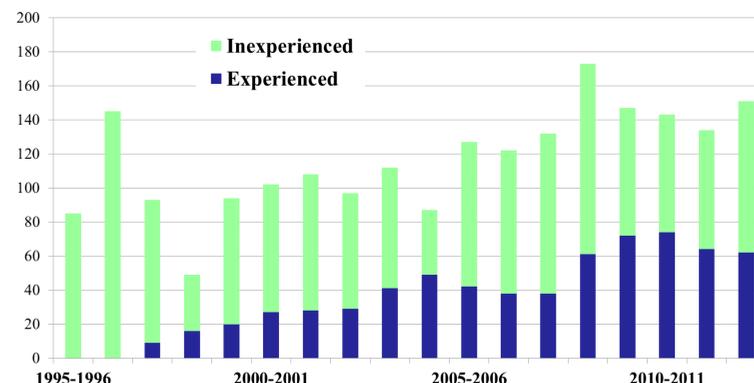


Figure 2. Number of participating volunteers.

Volunteer Involvement

Sixteen returning trackers attended the advanced track training at Mead Wildlife Area in January 2013, concentrating on distinguishing canid tracks, especially dog & wolf, and using gait, stride & straddle to help ID & count tracks in difficult conditions. Five of 13 regional coordinators left the program & 2 new coordinator couples were recruited. Seventy-two new trackers recruited in fall 2012 conducted surveys during winter 2012-2013. In winter 2012-2013, 151 volunteers participated in carnivore track surveys compared to 134 the previous winter (Fig. 2). Volunteers helped determine state wolf distribution in 2013 (Fig. 3).

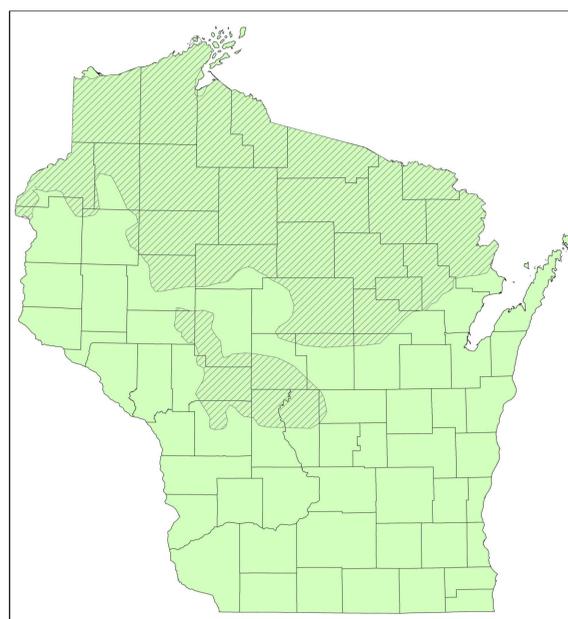


Figure 3. Probable wolf pack range in WI in 2013.

Results

Overall, we had a 49% return rate of volunteers from winter 2011-2012, with 61% of trackers with ≥ 2 years experience returning. We exceeded our goal of 7,000 miles of volunteer surveys by 11% (Fig. 4). We were unable to retain our goal of 10 coordinators from 2012 & were unable to recruit coordinators for all of the openings. The advanced tracking class was popular with returning trackers with 20% attending. Recruitment of new trackers exceeded our goal by 44%.

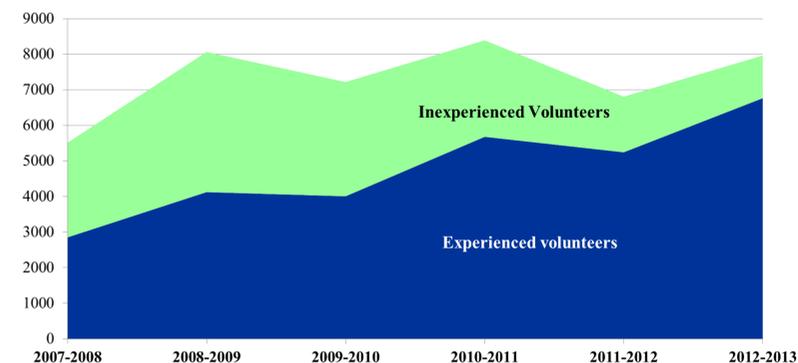


Figure 4. Miles tracked by volunteers.

Conclusion

Providing mileage reimbursement was not effective in retaining or recruiting as many coordinators as we had hoped. It was effective in encouraging coordinators to increase their tracking effort overall. The advanced class for returning trackers may have played a role in encouraging those trackers to increase their tracking efforts as well.

Acknowledgments

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References

Wydeven, A.P., J.E. Wiedenhoeft et al. 2009. History, population growth, and management of wolves in Wisconsin. Pp. 87-105 in Recovery of Gray Wolves in the Great Lakes Region of the US. Springer, New York.