

# Understanding wolf coexistence with Landowners in Central Wisconsin

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## Introduction

As urbanization shrinks habitats (1), gray wolves face increased proximity with humans, leading to conflict driven by their large ranges, endangered status, and negative perceptions. Despite their crucial role in ecosystems (2), public attitudes in Wisconsin often support lethal control of wolf populations (3), which disrupts ecosystem's health. This is an observational descriptive study focused on finding the best ways to support wolf coexistence with landowners in Central Wisconsin by understanding how many landowners know the number and identity of wolves sharing their lands, detect wolf signs, experience costs or benefits, and how they perceive coexistence with wolves. The research hypothesizes that landowners are unaware of wolf activity on their properties, and that sharing wolf imagery will foster mixed reactions but ultimately promote understanding and coexistence. By educating residents about wolves' ecological benefits and addressing misconceptions, the project aims to support peaceful coexistence and conservation.



Figure 1: For the last 18 months, researchers from The Carnivore Coexistence Lab at UW-Madison have been studying a wolf pack in Columbia County, Wisconsin. The Bog Pack Project, directed by Olivia Deering, focuses on wolf seasonal-spatial habitat use patterns within the 4.5 square kilometer site highlighted above. This project will supplement their work and install trail cameras on the farmland surrounding the study site. (4)



Figure 2: A trail camera photo of "The Bog Pack", the wolf pack being studied at the site mentioned above, whose members may be observed in future data collection in this study.

(4)

## Carnivore Coexistence Lab



## Methods

- Project director will contact landowners bordering wolf habitat to request trail camera placement on their properties.
- Spypoint and Reconyx trail cameras will be used to monitor wildlife.
- Cameras will be serviced bi-weekly; photos will be downloaded, analyzed, and shared with landowners.
- Follow-up visits will explore landowner reactions, concerns, and perceptions of coexistence.
- Different photo types (e.g. day vs. night, individual vs. group) will also be tested for varying landowner responses.
- A landowner participant meeting will culminate the project with honest discussions about coexistence solutions.

## Results

- As of writing, three trips to the study site have been completed.
- Sixteen Landowners, owning ten parcels of property, have been reached.
- Two cameras have been deployed on a three acre property along a wildlife trail.
- Images of various animals (no wolves) have been shared with landowners.
- Access to an additional 800 acres of land across three properties has been granted.
- Camera deployment on this land will be delayed to mid-late January due to hunting restrictions and winter break.

## Discussion

- Results about successful coexistence strategies with landowners will be published and used to influence coexistence work going forward.
- Detailed metrics on wolf behavior, visit frequency, and group size will be analyzed.
- Bar graphs comparing wolf observations by area and group size with seasonal distinctions will be presented.
- Research demonstrating wolves and humans can successfully coexist will be used to advocate for and draft coexistence policies.
- Relationships developed with landowners may also create more advocates for wolf coexistence.
- To gain a better understanding of coexistence in Central Wisconsin, more projects with larger study areas and more landowners should be conducted.

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