

Gray Wolf



Photo courtesy of ND Game and Fish Department

Scientific Name: *Canis lupus*

Description: Most gray wolves are gray, but their coloring can vary from black to white. Gray wolves are the largest members of the dog family, weighing 70-115 pounds.

Preferred Habitat: Wolves are adapted to many different climates and habitats. They live in such diverse places as the deserts of Israel, deciduous forests of Virginia and the frozen arctic of Siberia. In North Dakota there is not a permanent breeding population of wolves, the wolves that occasionally wander through the state prefer more wooded areas such as the Turtle Mountains, but they can show up anywhere. Wolves are listed as endangered west of Highway 83 in North Dakota, and are not listed east of Highway 83.

Diet: Main food items are large ungulates: white-tailed deer, moose, elk, big horn sheep, but they also eat beaver and hares. They usually focus on old, weak or injured animals. There are no known gray wolf attacks on humans.

Life History: Wolves often establish lifetime mates and in the springtime have four to six pups. The pups are reared in a den and depend on their mother's milk for the first month, and afterwards are fed regurgitated meat brought back from other pack members. Pups are cared for by the entire pack and by late fall will weigh up to 60 pounds. Young adults will travel together for about two years before they disperse, sometimes as far as 500 miles. Wolves usually breed when they reach two to three years of age.

Reason for Decline: The spread of European settlers west depleted wild ungulate populations, the preferred prey of wolves. Wolves then began to prey on livestock, and government agencies instituted a bounty program to eradicate gray wolves.