No wolves to be brought to Isle Royal

TRAVERSE CITY (AP)– No additional gray wolves will be transplanted to Isle Royale National Park for now, the park's top manager said recently, despite concerns that the Lake Superior island chain's dwindling and inbred population might not survive much longer.

After consulting with experts and reviewing comments from the public, Isle Royale Superintendent Phyllis Green said staffers will develop a management plan that considers the wolves' long-term survival prospects and their interactions with moose. The two species' predator-prey relationship is the subject of one of the world's longest scientific studies of its type, now in its 56th year.

It will take about three years to craft the plan, which also will focus on park vegetation and the effects of climate change, Green said. Officials could reconsider augmenting the wolf population if gender imbalance prevents them from reproducing or if moose begin overbrowsing trees and bushes, stripping them of leaves and needles.

"As long as there's a breeding population, we're going to let these animals have a chance to live their lives without us intervening," Green said.

Scientists, park officials and wildlife advocates are divided over whether to attempt a rescue of the wolves, a popular attraction for visitors even though most never glimpse the wily creatures.

They are a relatively recent addition to the landscape. The first arrivals are believed to have crossed an ice bridge extending some 18 miles from the mainland near the Canada-Minnesota border in the late 1940s.

Moose had made their way to Isle Royale a half-century earlier, probably by swimming, and had suffered a recent population crash from overbrowsing when there was little left to eat. As wolf numbers grew, they helped keep the moose in check.

The wolf population has averaged 23 but fallen drastically in recent years because of inbreeding, disease and a temporary moose shortage. Only eight wolves were counted a year ago, the least since the 1950s. Two pups are believed to have been born since then, while one wolf escaped over the ice this winter and was shot dead on the mainland, leaving the current total at nine.

Rolf Peterson and John Vucetich of Michigan Technological University, the scientists who lead the wolf-moose study, are campaigning to bring more wolves to the 45-mile-long archipelago. Vucetich declined comment about Green's decision, but said he and Peterson would issue a statement soon.

Because Isle Royale is a federal wilderness area where human influence is strictly limited, some contend nature should take its course, even if the wolves or moose disappear. Peterson and Vucetich say the principle of nonintervention is outdated when people have altered virtually every corner of the planet. More important now is keeping ecosystems healthy, with or without human involvement, they say.

"As long as there are moose on Isle Royale there should be wolves on Isle Royale," Vucetich said in a 2013 interview.

Green said tinkering with the island's ecology could have unforeseen consequences. While some scientists believe the wolves could die out in a few years, others say they could survive up to 25 years, which suggests there is time for careful consideration including a study with the U.S. Geological Survey of moose effects on vegetation, she said.

The wolves are a "compelling story," Green said, but park managers must consider "a larger stewardship picture that considers all factors, including prey species, habitat and climate change, which could in a few generations alter the food base that supports wildlife as we know it on Isle Royale."

Fuelwood permits available for 2014

With the 2014 fuelwood season beginning April 1, the Department of Natural Resources has streamlined its system to make it more convenient for residents to purchase personal-use fuelwood permits in person and by mail. The season runs through Dec. 31.

The mail-in order forms are available online at the DNR website www.michigan.gov/fuelwood.

"Folks are encouraged to save gas and time by ordering this year's fuelwood permit through the mail," said Bill O'Neill, chief of the DNR Forest Resources Division. "Many people rely on wood to heat their homes at a lower cost. We wanted to give people a couple of options for purchasing their permits to make the process easier and more convenient."

Permits cost $20 and are for use on designated state forest land in the northern two-thirds of the state and allow for collection of up to five standard cords of wood per household. Fuelwood collected with the permit can be used for personal use only and cannot be resold or traded. The permits are good for 90 days.

In response to residents' heating energy needs during Michigan's long winter this year, the DNR began early sales of 2014 fuelwood permits – more than a month before the traditional starting date of April 1.

Because of the unique winter, the DNR is allowing those who purchased an emergency permit to purchase another regular permit this calendar year.

The DNR has issued fuelwood permits for decades and issues between 2,500 and 3,500 each year.

For further information on how and where to purchase a personal-use fuelwood permit, contact your local DNR office or visit www.michigan.gov/fuelwood.

Registration for annual BOW Program open until May 12

Women seeking to improve their outdoor skills can now register for the 17th annual Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW) summer program, held the weekend of May 30 to June 1 at Bay Cliff Health Camp, in Big Bay, located approximately 30 miles north of Marquette in the Upper Peninsula.

Sponsored by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, this BOW program offers instruction in more than two dozen types of outdoor activities, including kayaking, stand-up paddleboarding, wilderness first aid and survival, lake and fly-fishing, fly-tying, geocaching, shooting sports, boating, mountain biking and much more.

Volunteer BOW instructors provide basic and advanced instruction that is uniquely tailored to each participant's individual ability, helping the participants learn the basics in a short amount of time.

The $185 registration fee includes all food and lodging, as well as most equipment and supplies. Participants will be housed in a universally-accessible dorm-style facility with numerous amenities, including a pool, sauna, tennis courts, hiking and biking trails and easy access to Lake Superior. The BOW summer program also includes special evening programs, such as hikes, group bonfires and more.

Class information and registration materials are available online at www.michigan.gov/bow, and registration can be paid online at www.michigan.gov/estore. The summer program typically fills quickly, so early registration is encouraged. The deadline for registration is Monday, May 12.

A limited number of BOW Scholarships are available to help low-income participants with the cost of registration, with an application deadline of Friday, April 25.

For more information about the summer BOW program, contact Sharon Pitz at 906-228-6561 or e-mail pitzs@michigan.gov.

BOW is a noncompetitive program in which each individual is encouraged to learn at her own pace. The emphasis is on the enjoyment, fun and camaraderie of outdoor activities, and sharing in the success of one another. To learn more about the DNR's BOW program, visit www.michigan.gov/bow.

Secretary of State Newberry office to close for remodeling

The Secretary of State office at 504 W McMillan Ave. in Newberry will be closed for remodeling April 21-25.

Customers and staff will benefit from renovations that include new carpeting and a new customer-friendly counter design.

The office will reopen at 9 a.m. Monday, April 28.

Residents who need to renew license plates, renew or replace driver's licenses and ID cards, change their address or obtain duplicate titles or registrations are encouraged to do the transactions online at www.ExpressSOS.com.

Additional services are offered online as well.

Area residents who need Secretary of State services during the remodeling period also may visit the next closest offices at 2700 Davitt St. in Sault Ste. Marie

The Sault Ste. Marie office is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, and from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Wednesday.

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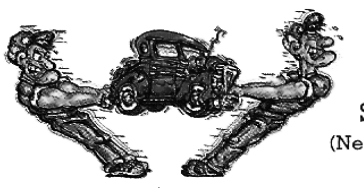

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Sat., July 12, 2014
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