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**DNR board member’s refusal to leave sparks controversy over wolf hunt**

*By WisPolitics.com*

Frederick Prehn, a Wausau dentist, is causing pain for Democrats and those who oppose a big wolf hunt.

The controversy surrounding the disputed member of the Natural Resources Board has led to a lawsuit from Democratic Attorney General Josh Kaul. Kaul’s lawsuit seeks to force Prehn from the board that controls policy of the Department of Natural Resources.

This comes after the Wausau dentist declined calls to step down more than three months after his six-year appointment ended.

Prehn, the board chair, has cited precedence that allows board members to continue serving until their replacement has been confirmed by the state Senate.

But Kaul argued in the Dane County lawsuit that state law on DNR board appointments doesn’t include such a holdover period.

The suit notes other statutes specifically say appointees may continue serving after their term and until a successor is elected or confirmed. But the Department of Justice argued in the suit that state law specific to the DNR board doesn’t include similar language.

“Dr. Prehn’s term is over. His attempt to remain on the Natural Resources Board indefinitely, in defiance of the will of the voters, is fundamentally undemocratic,” Kaul said in announcing the suit.

Former GOP Gov. Scott Walker appointed Prehn to the board, and his six-year term expired May 1. But the GOP-run state Senate has yet to take action on Gov. Tony Evers’ appointment of Sandra Nass, an Ashland teacher, to replace Prehn. While he continues to serve, the board remains controlled 4-3 by Walker appointees.

Several environmental groups had urged Kaul to take legal action to force Prehn from the board. Kaul’s suit seeks an order taking Prehn from the board or a declaratory judgment that Evers may remove him.

The Natural Resources Board earlier approved a state wolf hunt quota of 300 wolves for the November hunt this year — more than twice what agency staff had recommended.

Gray wolves were delisted from the Endangered Species Act on Jan. 4, 2021, and the DNR originally planned to wait until fall 2021 for the first hunt since 2014. But it went forward with a February hunt after a Jefferson County judge ordered the agency to hold one before month’s end.

For the February hunt, there was a quota of 119 kills for state-licensed hunters with tribes able to harvest 81. The number of state-licensed kills came in at 281 as hunters quickly blew past the quota, and the hunt was cut short.

Agency staff recommended a quota of 130 wolves for this fall. DNR’s Fish Wildlife and Parks Division Administrator Keith Warnke said the department arrived at that number because it would allow hunters to harvest wolves without changing the population.

“We don’t know what the population is right now. We don’t have an estimate,” Warnke said. “We don’t want to change the population, and that’s the key.”

Warnke also said his division has received about 27,000 wolf kill permit requests so far for the November hunt.

DNR Secretary Preston Cole slammed Prehn for his vote in favor of the new quota.

“So now, for the viewing public, you get a sense as to why the chair chose to stay,” Cole said. “I wonder what the vote would have been with Sandy Nass sitting in that chair. You now know why he’s sitting in this chair.”

Prehn countered the vote would have been the same regardless of his decision to remain in his current role and slammed Cole for what he said was an out-of-order comment.

“I think it would have passed without me being present, Mr. Secretary,” Prehn said. “And I think you’re out of line for commenting and editorializing,” he added before being interrupted by Cole.

“I am out of order?” Cole said before Prehn could finish.

Cole said he stands behind the 130 quota recommendation from the DNR because that’s the number science backs.

Some board members advocated for quotas as high as 504 wolves. They argued tribal hunters would accept roughly 40 percent of the kills allotted in Wisconsin, but wouldn’t actually harvest them. Given that, they said a quota of 504 would mean only about 300 wolves would be killed.

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