**Reading: What’s up with the wolves now?**

**Ecological Studies of Wolves on Isle Royale:** Annual Report 2017–18

(http://www.isleroyalewolf.org/sites/default/files/annual-report-pdf/wolf%20moose%20annual%20report%202018.pdf)

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Between January 2017 and January 2018, the wolf population continued to be comprised of just two wolves [as it has been since 2016]. The wolves are believed to be a male-female pair and closely related to one another. The wolf population is also almost certainly headed for extinction, and wolf predation has been effectively absent as an ecological process for the past seven years.

Moose abundance probably increased over the past year even though the most recent point estimate declined from 1600 to 1475 moose based on the moose census in 2018. In the absence of wolf predation, moose abundance may double over the next four or five years. If that happens, it will be the largest number of moose ever observed during the six-decade history of the wolf-moose project. The National Park Service recently announced it has decided to restore a viable wolf population in Isle Royale National Park, but we await a signed Record of Decision and a projected timetable for wolf restoration.

On 20 January the wide-ranging tracks of the remaining two wolves were followed through many frozen lakes at the east end of the island. The two wolves that remain on Isle Royale in 2018, not outfitted with radio collars, are considered to be the two adults most recently identified by fecal DNA [DNA samples from poop] collected on 5 March 2015.They both originated in the Chippewa Harbor Pack, born to the same mother. The female is also the daughter of the male, so any offspring from this pair would be extremely inbred and probably non-viable. The wolf pair was first observed on February 14, probably having recently fed on a moose carcass. The pair traveled slowly across a beaver pond lined with wolf and fox tracks, the female leading the male and occasionally prodding him to rise when he lay down. Next the pair were seen on February 22 on Angleworm Lake, where they were feeding on another moose carcass of undetermined origin. Again the female was more active in initiating any activities, although the male was seen in a brief chase of a moose that traveled across the lake when only the male was watching.

Finally, on February 28 the two wolves traveled over to Sargent Lake where they were observed sleeping in the warm sun much of the day. An ice bridge formed between Isle Royale and the Ontario mainland during February 2-9. We did not observe wolves traveling on the ice bridge, either coming from or going to the mainland. With apparently just two wolves present, there has been no wolf mortality or reproduction in the past three years. In 2017 the female clearly rejected courtship advances of the male. In 2018 we observed only one short interaction, consistent with previous behavior and suggesting the female would not accept the male as a mate.

On 16 March 2018 the NPS released its final environmental impact statement (EIS), which identified

the NPS’s preferred action would be to restore a viable wolf population by releasing 20-30 wolves over a three-year period. A final decision was pending at the publication of this report.