MN TWS - Oral Presentation Submission
Graduate Student

The ethology of wolves foraging on freshwater fish in a boreal ecosystem

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Gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) are generalist predators that capitalize on newly available food within days, however, the brief availability of many food pulses makes documenting wolf responses to these foods a challenge. Since 2017, we have recorded, using GPS-collar locations, remote cameras, GPS-collars equipped with cameras, and field observations, several wolves hunting and killing fish in the GVE. Combined, these multiple lines of evidence indicate that wolves are adept at quickly responding to fish as an alternate prey. Wolves primarily hunted white suckers (*Catostomus commersonii*) at night during April and May, coinciding with peak sucker spawning activity. Wolves likely exploited spawning freshwater fish in the spring given their abundance, availability, and catchability of fish. Individuals targeted shallow sections of rivers often below beaver dams where spawning fish congregate, suggesting that beavers may indirectly facilitate wolf fishing behavior. Wolves caught suckers by waiting-in-ambush on creek banks and launching an attack after detecting fish, adding to growing evidence that wolf hunting strategies are more flexible than the cursorial behaviors generally used to hunt ungulates. We observed wolves fishing from five different packs at four different creeks, suggesting that wolf 'fishing' behavior is widespread across similar boreal ecosystems but has likely remained undocumented and hard to study given the ephemeral nature of the behavior.