



Musing

February 2017 - "Tracking Wolves"

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Imagine a cold sunny winter day in January, only 9 degrees above zero with 2-3" of new snow, a perfect day for tracking wolves in the northwoods. I headed out on the forest service roads north of Drummond to conduct a Carnivore Track Survey for the DNR. I have been volunteering in this program for five years and still enjoy the thrill of finding wolf tracks and the tracks of other carnivores.

Heading down Cisco Lake Road, I soon spotted the tracks of two foxes traveling the side of the road, probably listening for the sounds of mice. Farther down the road I came across two "S" shaped tracks, otters had crossed the road from a frozen pond and slid down the bank into an open stream. Otters are very active in the winter, traveling widely to find access for fishing below the ice. I have seen evidence of otters feeding where the ice was littered with a dozen carp bodies pulled onto the ice, heads ripped off, the high food value guts consumed, the rest left for the eagles and ravens.

I turned off of Cisco Lake Road and headed east on Nymphia Lake Road. The road was not plowed and the snow was 4-5" deep; I kept my truck in the tracks of previous vehicles to keep from getting stuck. Soon I spotted what I was looking for, wolf tracks and lots of them! The wolf pack was headed west and exited the road to the south. I got out of my truck and tried to get a count of the wolves, the tracks showed at least 4 wolves but some of them were following others and it was hard to get good number.

I continued on slowly to the east finding places where some of them had left the road and returned, places where they scraped the snow, and numerous places with double urinations from the dominant male and female marking their territory. After a half mile I found a stretch where the wolf pack had fanned out across the road and I counted six wolves. There were tracks of four large animals and two smaller ones. The size of the stride gives you a clue as to the size of the wolf. I traveled over two miles along the length of Nymphia Lake road and saw the tracks of the wolf pack along the entire route. In several places I confirmed the count of six

wolves. Where the road ends just south and west of the Bibon Swamp I found where the pack had entered the road from the swamp.

I doubled back and continued my survey north on Delta Drummond Road, east on W. Kern Lake Road, west on Sutherland Road, and finally on Taylor Lane near Grand View. I had circled the Bibon Swamp and surveyed all the unplowed roads around it. I found the tracks of four wolves on Star Lake Road and W. Kern Lake Road and two wolves on Sutherland Road. The cold weather had made the wolves very active searching for food and there was signs of the Bibon Pack all around their territory.

The goal of the DNR Carnivore Tracking Program is to find out where wolf packs are located and get an accurate count of their numbers. In addition we collect data on the activity of all other carnivores including: fox, coyote, otter, bear, mink, fishers, badgers, bobcats and look for rare species like pine martins, cougar, lynx and wolverine which are almost never found in Wisconsin. The DNR uses volunteer trackers in addition to radio collars, airplane flyovers, and their own surveys to assess the size and location of wolf packs.

Winter is an enjoyable time to be out in the woods and being able to identify tracks and see all the animal activity makes it more fun.