

New wolf exhibit at the Lake Superior Zoo

The gray wolf's story is one of the most compelling tales of American wildlife. And that story is coming to life at the Lake Superior Zoo.

The zoo has acquired a bachelor group of three gray wolves on loan from the Wildlife Science Center of Columbus, MN. The three gray wolves are settling into their new home in a specially designed exhibit at the zoo.

“This is an opportunity for us to educate people on an animal that is part of our culture and lives where we live,” said the zoo’s Director of Education and Animal Management, Leslie Larsen. “We’re excited and honored to be able to have these wolves on exhibit here.”

Gray wolves were once widespread across most of North America, but were seen as a nuisance animal that preyed upon hoof stock. They were hunted ruthlessly and the population destroyed. Today, the wolves are making a successful comeback in some of their former habitat due to strong conservation efforts. Under the federal protection provided by the Endangered Species Act it is illegal to kill a wolf, except in the defense of a human life.

“Predator-prey relationships in nature are very complex,” Larsen said. “By being able to learn more about wolves we can perhaps help people better understand them and their role in nature.” Wolves are habitat generalists and can thrive in any type of habitat in the Northern Hemisphere, but Larsen noted there will be adjustments for the wolves as they settle into their new territory at the Lake Superior Zoo.

“While these wolves are from the same pack, they were in a larger pack at the Wildlife Science Center, so they are now re-establishing their social hierarchy or pack order,” she explained.

The animals will be fed a typical carnivore diet, along with bones and carcasses. In the wild, wolves prey on deer, wolves, beaver, snowshoe hare and sometimes birds and small mammals.

Larsen said the wolves will continue to display many of the traits they do in the wild, including howling.

“Wolves do howl in captivity as it is an important vocalization in territory marking,” she said. She noted that it is important the public be respectful of the wolves’ communication and not try to engage them in howling.

“It can become an annoyance to captive wolves when folks constantly howl at them,” Larsen said. “In fact, some states and parks prohibit howling during denning season so as not to disturb wolves because they may abandon the site.”

Larsen said she hoped the wolf exhibit at the Lake Superior Zoo would act as an educational tool for the general public.

“These animals are a significant symbol in our culture and have always portrayed a sense of mystery,” she said. “We hope our exhibit will give people a better understanding of their role and their significance.”