The year of 2017 set landmarks for the International Wolf Center in more ways than one, but perhaps one month stood out among the others. March was a milestone month for the Center, as Ely staff reported that its 1,000,000th visitor attended the What’s for Dinner program on March 25. The community helped celebrate the event on Earth Day in April.

The Center made a $1.2 million proposal to the LCCMR to fund the design and construction of an innovative wolf Discovery Center to replace its 35-year-old Wolves and Humans exhibit. The Center’s Board allocated $100,000 in matching funds for the grant and sent out requests-for-proposal to museum design studios.

The 2017 temporary exhibit by Heidi Pinkerton featured one-year old wolf pups Axel and Grayson and research by Dave Mech on wild arctic wolves on Ellesmere Island. Heidi also received the year’s Who Speaks for Wolf award. With plans for the event underway, international speakers were invited to participate in the Center’s 2018 Wolves in a Changing World symposium set for Oct. 11-14, 2018 at the Minneapolis Marriott Northwest in Minneapolis. An expanded billboard program funded with a grant from the IRRRB and a match by the Center was partly responsible for an uptick in attendance at the Center.

As educational efforts increased, webinars began featuring prominent wolf biologists, including Rolf Peterson who spoke during Wolf Awareness Week in October on “What Does it Mean to Have Wolves on Isle Royale?” With grant funds for the Center’s Wolves at Our Door program due to run out, the Board decided to fund the program through 2018. The successful program has brought wolf education programs to more than 49,000 classroom students from 2014 to Dec. 31, 2017.

With the help of the Center’s donors, members and volunteers, board members and staff made innovative strides for the future. In the new year we will look forward to work on an exciting new Discovery Center exhibit and an international symposium. Thank you for your support, which makes possible our essential educational work to support the survival of populations.
2017 Highlights

Education / Outreach

- More than 2,680 students experienced a WolfLink virtual field trip with the education team by videoconference in Ely during 2017. These interactive presentations were seen by students in 17 states and 3 countries.
- Wolf Discovery Kits include artifacts and props for tactile learning opportunities and have been used by teachers and more than 1,700 students in 10 states.
- Our weekly What's for Dinner? program helped educate 1,766 people about the hunting and feeding behavior of wolves while these center visitors watched our ambassador wolves and asked our education team questions.
- Through our education and outreach programs, we are able to provide up-to-date science-based information about wolves to audiences all over the world.
- The International Wolf Center outreach program, Wolves at Our Door, continued its third year with funding by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, with more than 635 programs in 2017. The program reached students in grades 2-12 throughout public schools in Minnesota, as well as audiences of all ages at libraries, nature centers and state parks around the state. The Wolves At Our Door program provides science-based information about wolf biology, behavior, pack dynamics, predator/prey relationships, the loss of Minnesota habitat, and the complex issues surrounding wolf management and changes in legal status as they return to more areas of the state. Students are able to examine and study wolf and prey animal artifacts.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- 38,974 visited the organization’s Interpretive Center in Ely, Minnesota
- 2,083 participated in group visits and single- and multi-day programs
- 683 students participated in live Minnesota WolfLink interactive videoconferences
- 2,682 students participated in live WolfLink global interactive videoconferences
- 1,722 students used Wolf discovery kits in their classrooms across the country
- 1,766 experienced the popular What’s for Dinner? program
- 79,269 fans followed us on Facebook.
- 607,811 unique visitors reached wolf.org, up from 601,255 in 2016.

LEAF: A group of young women play on the wolf sculptures in front of the International Wolf Center in Ely.
CENTER: A big group took a coach bus to visit during Blueberry/Arts Festival weekend.
RIGHT: A wolf gazing back at us! Boltz/Andy before morning walked.
**2017 Highlights**

**Wolf Care**

As we have experienced in the past, the year following a pup introduction can result in a significant display of behaviors as the pups mature to yearlings, but the year 2017 was a bit more significant than most. The 2017 maturation of pups Axel and Grayson coincided with another wolf care milestone and that was the aging of the pack leader, Aidan.

In the Wolf Care Department’s history, we have had three notable pack leaders. MacKenzie retired in 2002, Shadow retired in 2010 and Aidan, psychologically retired in 2017 because of testing by Axel and Boltz. We say psychologically retired because the changing of a pack leader is not a one-time event and Aidan stayed in the pack throughout the year. This was important as he needed to let go of leadership so he could accept a change in packs and calmly renew social relationships in retirement.

So, how does a pack leader psychologically retire? It starts with the systematic testing of yearlings to all pack members. This is how young wolves learn the meaning of the body postures that say “No.” Yearlings display behaviors that they learned as pups, including tail pulling, chasing, rearing, mounting and things that may have been viewed as play behaviors as pups, but as yearlings, now have a bit more tenacity. This isn’t a case of wolves being bad, rather it’s likely driven by hormonal responses. Higher ranking wolves display behaviors described as ride-ups, jaw sparring, grab bites and chin rests, all in an effort to set some boundaries and limitations to the yearlings, teaching them acceptable behavior for the social group. Aidan was the pack leader that adopted Luna and Boltz in 2012 and, as a 6-year old, it was clear Aidan established acceptable boundaries and led the pack during the winter of 2013-2014. Fast forward to the winter of 2017-2018, Aidan was approaching 10, and the testing behaviors of Axel and Grayson affected Aidan’s confidence and ultimately resulted in a change to the Exhibit Pack leadership.

**Membership / Development**

- The Center achieved a four-star rating with Charity Navigator—the highest rating possible!
- Donors contributed an impressive $78,000 via Give to the Wolves Day 2017. This one-day fundraising event is our biggest single donation day each year.
- We participated again in the Twin Cities bracket for a fun, online “March Madness” style fundraising tournament called Brackets For Good. We made it to the sweet sixteen round and raised $19,500 for ongoing wolf education efforts.
- We held our 4th Howl at the Moon gala at Midland Hills Country Club in Roseville, Minnesota, with keynote speaker Carter Niemeyer. Over $42,000 dollars were raised to aid ongoing wolf education work.
- The Center filled a tour bus for an Ely visit during the town’s Blueberry Arts Festival in July. A special “Behind the Scene’s” tour, wolf videos, trivia, programs and wolf viewing made the one-day trip memorable and fun.
The International Wolf Center received a four-star rating from Charity Navigator and a Top Rated Nonprofit badge from GreatNonprofits.

Our mission: The International Wolf Center advances the survival of wolf populations by teaching about wolves, their relationship to wildlands and the human role in their future.

Awards

Our 2017 financial statement included a four-star rating from Charity Navigator and a Top Rated Nonprofit badge from GreatNonprofits.

2017 Financials

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