

# 2021 Annual Report



**International Wolf Center**



**Grant Spickelmier,  
Executive Director**

It is easy to say that 2021 was a time of upheaval and change in the wolf world. After the removal of gray wolves from the U.S. endangered species list several places in the Midwest and West suddenly found themselves in charge of wolf management for their state. I watched in dismay as emotional rhetoric rather than science dominated much of the decision making and old long-disproven statements about wolves as vicious killers that needed to be “controlled” surfaced again online. On a more positive note—2021 saw the expansion of wolf populations in many places including Washington, Oregon and California. Successful breeding took place on Isle Royale and plans were made to release more red wolves into North Carolina to support that critically endangered population.

At the International Wolf Center, our 2021 programming too had its ups and downs. COVID continued to cause disruption with occasional closures and impacts on group

activities. While we still weren’t able to physically go into schools, we reached the highest number of students ever (over 7,000) with our WolfLink virtual programming thanks to a generous gift that allowed us to offer programming to all Minnesota schools for free and 50% off for everyone else. We had over 2 million pageviews on our website ([www.wolf.org](http://www.wolf.org)) as people sought out accurate information about wolves and our social media following grew on all platforms with our most significant growth on Instagram (56%!).

Over 40,000 visitors came to see us in person at our Ely facility where a big draw was the addition of new female Rieka to our Exhibit Pack. In a spurt of creative genius, our staff developed a new outdoor enclosure for Rieka right next to our auditorium that would allow visitors to watch her grow without needing to crowd together improving the experience for both our visitors and wolves.

Continuing our strong connection with the latest wolf research, we launched a new educational partnership with the Voyageurs Wolf Project in 2021. We followed along as Tom Gable, Joseph Bump and their team made interesting discoveries about the impact of wolf populations on the Voyageurs ecosystem (who knew that wolves impact the formation of wetlands!) and we were able to watch and share several incredible videos capturing wolf behavior rarely observed in the thick forests of Northern Minnesota.

A final highlight of the year was the launch of the Dr. L. David Mech Fellowship program named after our organizational founder. This program, which was made possible thanks to gifts from people who have named the International Wolf Center in their estates, was inspired by the many students Dave has instructed, mentored and supported over the years. Our hope is that this program will support the next generation of wolf biologists for many years to come.





**Nancy Jo Tubbs,  
Chair, Board of Directors**

**O**ur newest pup, Rieka, was born in May, and when she came to the Center her first public viewings were set outside with small groups rather than in the auditorium to protect the public from COVID-19. Under COVID restrictions, the Center's guest capacity was increased from 25% to 50% in that first quarter of the year.

While visitation numbers had to be limited, the Center welcomed more than 40,000 in 2021. PPP loans and a St Louis County grant helped offset the cost of COVID-19 related expenses. A successful "Pupalooza" virtual 30-minute gala in June, a spring wolf care auction, and Give to the Wolves Day in November boosted our supporters' giving and helped keep the Center's finances healthy in 2021.

Looking back, the Center mourned the loss of Denali, a 14-year-old member of the Retired Pack, known for his bounding play bows when

inviting a chase. Looking forward, the Center planned to add two pups to its pack in 2022.

There were several additional highlights to report, including:

- Educational efforts proceeded with the opening of a new moose exhibit in the building lobby.
- With \$20,000 the Center partnered with the new Voyageur Wolf Project to report findings from its summer study of wolves in northern Minnesota.
- With \$20,000 it established two L. David Mech Fellowships to support students entering the field of wildlife biology.
- The board of directors approved a diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) statement to guide the Center's future planning.
- In July the Center received two education and communications awards: the Pinnacle Award

for the Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration (CILC) and a 2021 Traveler's Choice Award from Trip Advisor.

We are grateful that in 2021 nearby wildfires did not severely impact Ely or the Center.

We are also grateful to note that our volunteers donated more than 250 hours in staffing our Minnesota State Fair booth for 11,242 visitors in August and September.

Our supporters, staff, volunteers and board of directors guided the Center through one of its toughest years with generosity, persistence and resilience. It is a story we can be proud of, now and in the future! Congratulations to a pack that has staying power.



As COVID-19 impacted our visitor center, the International Wolf Center increased its online presence through a variety of WolfLink virtual field trip and webinar opportunities.

## EDUCATION



The education team led WolfLink virtual field trips for approximately 7,000 students countrywide in 2021. These students were able to connect live to our programs with our education team from their classrooms or with their classmates from their individual homes. They learned about wolf biology and observed natural wolf behavior through our live webcams. Webinars were viewed by over 2,500 participants.

Nearly 1,700 people attended our weekly program, What's for Dinner? They learned about the hunting and feeding behavior of wolves while having the opportunity to observe our Exhibit Pack and ask our education team questions.

More visitors than ever before came to the Center's website at wolf.org. Our online educational material was viewed by 863,600 unique visitors.

New content drew new visitors to our website at wolf.org. In 2020, that content included myth busting posts, including one about a viral photo of a wolf pack traveling through snow that is inaccurate. There were also a number of new articles about wolf science, including posts about why the term "alpha wolf" is misleading and what went into the decision to remove gray wolves from the Endangered Species Act.

Audiences all over the world are able to access current, science-based information through our educational programming about wolves and wildlands.

2021 continued our partnership with explore.org, where the Center's ambassador wolves are featured on two live webcams. These cams are staffed by volunteer camera operators and provide a unique look at real wolf behaviors.



## New study shows wolves save Wisconsin residents \$10.9 million annually because of reduction in deer-vehicle crashes

The presence of wolves in Wisconsin saves residents of the state an estimated \$10.9 million every year because there are fewer deer-vehicle collisions in counties that have wolves. That's according to a study published in 2021 by agricultural and economic researchers.

Simply put, wolves use roadways as travel corridors and also prey on deer in those areas. This leads to deer avoiding roadways, and fewer deer near roadways leads to fewer collisions.

The study was conducted by Jennifer Raynor of the Department of Economics at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, as well as Corbett Grainger and Dominic Parker, both of the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Most economic studies about wolves have focused on the negative impact of wolves, such as the cost of livestock depredation. Very few have shown a positive economic impact.

“The only other studies we know of showing positive economic values of wolves are a study of the value of the International Wolf Center to the city of Ely, Minnesota, and the Duffield Report,” said International Wolf Center founder and wildlife biologist Dr. L. David Mech. “The Duffield Report covers a national park and a unique situation where wolves are readily viewable by the public because the government radio-collars them and locates them via radio daily.

“In contrast, the Wisconsin study applies to wolves in a much larger non-park area, and its results would apply to similar areas, such as certain parts of Minnesota and Michigan and possibly of some of the western states, as well as densely roaded areas of wolf range elsewhere, such as Eurasia and the Middle East.”

The authors note that the 63:1 ratio comes from comparing the estimated annual savings in Wisconsin of \$10.9 million compared to the average annual payments from the state for wolf depredation of \$174,000.

“Findings like these make it clear that apex predators are useful in ecosystems,” said Grant Spickelmier, the executive director of the International Wolf Center. “Predators, such as wolves, can have a cascading effect that starts with one set of actions and results in a chain of events that impact other species, sometimes including humans.”





2021 brought new life to the Center's ambassador wolf program with the adoption of a single female pup we originally nicknamed "Our Girl Sunday" because she was born on Sunday. A name-the-pup contest in June selected Rieka as her official name.

Caring for wolves was a team effort and the summer of 2021 included 24-hour a day scheduling from May 30 to Aug. 8. Rieka was brought into the Exhibit Pack space on Aug. 9. She weighed approximately 23 pounds and was 79 days old. After the introduction, staffing levels continued at 12-hour days until we could ensure that Rieka could hold her own with the larger packmates.

The summer of 2021 demonstrated the highest level of team investment in time, energy and tenacity and those efforts paid off. Webcam watchers and Center visitors saw Rieka running with her pack and, during the quieter times, she was resting in close proximity to Grayson. By her 7-month birthday on Dec. 23, she weighed over 70 pounds, thanks in part to staff offering food several times a day.

While the newest pack member dominated staff time, the oldest pack member benefited from the additional hours as well. Grizzer, born in 2004, was the sole remaining member of the Retired Pack and rather than disrupt his life, he stayed within the Pack Holding Area, just inches away from the gates that brought Rieka in and out of the nursery. Of course, there was a protective fence to keep Rieka safe. To say that Grizzer was stimulated by the young pup was an understatement. Her finicky appetite would often mean Grizzer got to feast on the leftovers, definitely a bonus in his mind.

## WOLF CARE

We'd like to offer a special thank you to:

- The many supporters who donated to Rieka's food, medical and staffing needs;
- The supporters who helped fund the necessary improvements to consistently improve the retirement enclosure from the elements, which can weaken older immune systems; and
- All of the donors who helped fund our webcam investments and collaboration with Explore.org to bring the ambassador wolves even more people to help us teach the world about wolves.

## Farewell to Denali, an ambassador wolf at the International Wolf Center

**D**enali, an ambassador wolf at the International Wolf Center in Ely, Minnesota, was euthanized at approximately 9 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 4. The 13-year-old gray wolf was born in 2008 at the Wildlife Science Center in Minnesota. He came to the International Wolf Center with his littermate, Aidan.

Early reports on Saturday noted that Denali was very interactive and seemingly had no issues, but by Saturday evening that had changed. At about 7 p.m, a wolf care staff member noticed Denali's gums were pale, his ears were cold and that he seemed dehydrated. Two additional wolf care staff members were quickly called in, including the Center's longtime wolf curator, Lori Schmidt. As Denali's condition deteriorated, the Center's veterinarian, Dr. Kristine Woerheide, was also called in.

His condition continued to deteriorate and he was euthanized shortly thereafter. A necropsy was performed at the Ely Veterinary Clinic where Dr. Woerheide found a tumor on Denali's liver that had ruptured. There were also calcifications throughout his lung lobes and a mass on his right atrium.

"The benefit of working with socialized wolves is the trust that is developed between wolf care team members and the animals in our care," Schmidt said. "This trust takes hours and hours to build during the critical bonding period as pups, but the benefits are never more important than those final moments when the hard decisions need to be made to end an animal's suffering. Denali's last minutes were spent surrounded by the wolf care team, all of whom are dedicated to their task of caring for our ambassadors.



"He will be fondly remembered for his foreleg stabs, seeking attention from fellow packmates and staff doing wolf checks, as well as his bounding play-bows, when he was inviting anyone to chase him."

After 12 years in the Exhibit Pack, Denali joined the Center's retirement pack in October 2020.

He and his packmates at the Center have educated tens of thousands of visitors at the Center's exhibit in Ely, as well as thousands of people throughout the world through regular YouTube videos, wolf logs and webcams.





## FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Because of the lingering effects of COVID-19, limited admissions were available at the International Wolf Center in 2021.

While that impacted the Center's financials, donors and members stepped up to help make up the difference.

To those donors and members, we offer our sincere gratitude.

Your generosity made an incredible difference at the International Wolf Center in 2021. As our financials show, the effects of COVID-19 lingered in 2021.

For much of the summer, the Center limited the number of visitors per day to keep our employees and our guests as safe as possible. Even though our admissions revenue was down, donors and members like you stepped in and more than made up the difference!

Our financials illustrate that bright spot clearly. With your help and that of our Board of Directors, we raised more than \$100,000 during our biggest one-day fundraiser, Give to the Wolves Day, in November. We were so encouraged by members and donors who have supported us for decades and to brand new donors who stepped forward. There's just no way we would have made it through 2021 without your support.

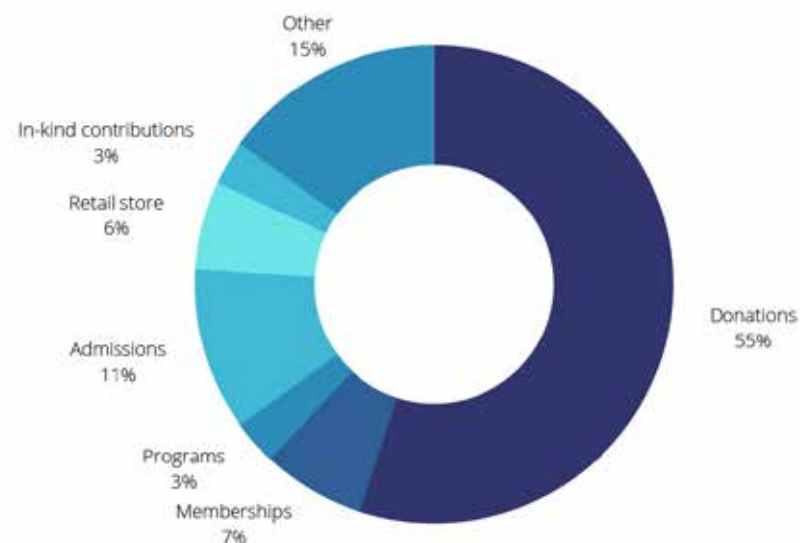




For the year ending December 31, 2021

ASSETS	2021	2020
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 2,002,546	\$ 1,594,525
Accounts receivable	2,042	2,233
Inventory	97,060	98,758
Prepaid expenses	28,858	27,394
<b>TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS</b>	<b>\$ 2,130,506</b>	<b>\$ 1,722,910</b>
INVESTMENTS	1,758,340	759,679
PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT (net)	1,617,643	1,762,399
<b>OTHER ASSETS</b>		
Deferred rent asset	13,378	14,947
Security deposits	3,617	3,617
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$ 5,523,484</b>	<b>\$ 4,263,552</b>
<b>LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>		
<b>CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>		
Accounts payable	24,484	14,167
Accrued payroll and payroll taxes	74,638	78,530
Accrued retirement contribution	3,795	4,018
Credit card payable	25,285	13,707
Deferred revenue	25,951	18,219
Paycheck Protection Program Loan	-	192,300
<b>TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>	<b>\$ 154,153</b>	<b>\$ 320,941</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>		
Without donor restrictions		
Undesignated	\$ 1,049,499	\$ 294,843
Investment in property and equipment	1,617,643	1,762,399
Designated	2,613,806	1,679,066
Total Net Assets w/o donor restrictions	5,280,948	3,736,308
With donor restrictions	88,383	206,303
<b>TOTAL NET ASSETS</b>	<b>5,369,331</b>	<b>3,942,611</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$ 5,523,484</b>	<b>\$ 4,263,552</b>

2021 sources of revenue





## Teaching the World about Wolves

1396 Highway 169  
Ely, MN 55731  
218-365-HOWL  
wolf.org

