FROM THE PRESIDENT

William A. Demmer
PRESIDENT
Boone and Crockett Club

Predators and Policy Constraints

Your previous *Fair Chase* issue included a summary of the Club's Triennial Awards Program celebration held in Reno, Nevada this past July. It was a roaring success! Trophy owners from across the country were honored; their trophies on display for five days, which inspired the wonderfully attended event. The Friday evening dinner honored the Generation Next hunters, those who were 16 or younger when their trophy was taken. Attendees were teary-eyed with joy as these young hunters, 40 percent of whom were young women, came on stage, told their story, and were feted and charged with the responsibility of becoming Boone and Crockett Club disciples! Congratulations to you parents who are inspiring such a wonderful generation of new and ethical hunters.

Boone and Crockett Members Buck Buckner and Richard Hale, with the assistance of many members and staff, worked hard to create the finest records celebration ever. Work has already begun on the next awards celebration, tentatively scheduled for July 2016. Mark your calendars, as I suspect we'll have even greater memorable trophies and the opportunity to secure hunts at our auction.

The focal point of this issue's column will be large predators and the associated challenge of policy constraints. Professional Club Members, Bill Porter, PhD, and Greg Schildwachter, PhD, will take you into the weeds on the challenges and opportunities associated with large predator control. For many years, science has concluded that large predators are necessary for an ecosystem to thrive. This tends to conflict with us as hunters since these large predators can have substantial impacts on the big game we hunt. Aldo Leopold, also a Boone and Crockett Professional Member, recognized that "Harmony with the land is like harmony with a friend. You cannot cherish his right hand and chop off his left. That is to say you cannot have game and hate predators." In Leopold's essay, "Thinking like a Mountain," a chapter from his seminal book, *A Sand County Almanac*, he discussed the issue of unchecked ungulate populations that were browsing the mountainside, highlighting the idea that an unchecked number of ungulates would eventually deforest the mountain, requiring decades of managed care in order to restore it to health. Leopold also recognized that by achieving the proper balance of predator-prey interaction, ecological health of the mountain would be naturally maintained.

The best way to build policies is to give great consideration to conservation and hunting ethics. This is not merely a moral nicety; it is a moral necessity for keeping predator policy relevant.

The big question for us hunters, ranchers, farmers, and nature explorers, is: *what is that correct balance between our North American big game species and our large predators?* Years ago, I had the chance to spend a wonderful day at our Club's Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch situated on the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains in Dupuyer, Montana. Our ranch has been honored with signage identifying the trail used by the first human inhabitants as they crossed over our land in the populating of the Americas thousands of years ago. As I was sitting in a wagon being pulled by two beautiful Percherons with my wife Linda and two Professional Members, Charley Kaye, PhD, and Loren Hicks, PhD, I asked what the purpose of reintroducing wolves was to the Yellowstone ecosystem as the public outcry of protest was just beginning.

I asked if the decision to reintroduce a wolf species into the Rockies was to establish some pre-land bridge ice-age balance of animal life in the Rocky Mountains. These two Socrates-like mentors smiled and said, "Listen up Bill. If no land bridge or European settlement of North America had occurred, the predator at the top of the food chain in North America would have been a short-nosed, 2,000-pound bear that could have run a 100-yard dash in 6 to 7 seconds!" Their point was that ever since the first humans crossed the land bridge into Alaska, people (or policy) controlled the destiny of what animals survived and what animals disappeared from the North American landscape.

Since animal protein was the most efficient food source for the early humans, those animals that were more easily hunted and that provided a substantial amount of protein were the first to decline, like the wooly mammoth. Also hunted and in decline were predators that competed with humans for protein, like the saber-toothed tiger. By the time the first European settlements were established, ungulate populations in the west survived primarily in those no-man zones between competing North American Indian tribes.

The Iroquois tribes of the Mohawk Valley and Ohio River Valley had negotiated amongst themselves that the area of Kentucky would become their protein provider. The seven tribes shared hunting rights throughout

View from the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch situated on the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains west of Dupuyer, Montana.

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the Kentucky region. The European settlers, led by one of the Club's namesakes, Daniel Boone, were treading on critical lands used for tribal protein. It should be pretty obvious that for hundreds, if not thousands of years, the outcome of what animals were to survive was determined by the politics and rudimentary policies of the times. What a lesson I received on that wagon ride along the Front Range!

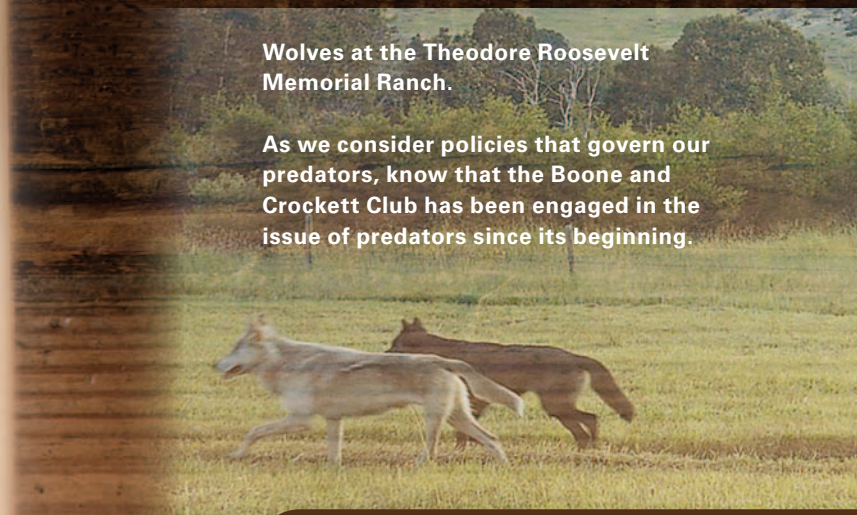
Today, as we consider policies that govern our predators, know that the Boone and Crockett Club has been engaged in the issue of predators since its beginning. Aldo Leopold wrote of an apocryphal experience seeing a "green fire" in the eyes of a dying wolf that helped inspire wolf restoration. Today's Boone and Crockett Club are playing a critical role in securing state management of the gray wolf.

Within this issue of *Fair Chase*, Boone and Crockett Club's professionals will discuss two key issues surrounding predators, and in particular, wolves. The issues are firstly, the fact that science still has much work and research to perform to understand the long-term relationship between predator and prey. When society reintroduces a large predator, what will that impact be? Science needs to conduct more research and develop tools to provide policy makers with guidance so wolf populations can be managed appropriately, whether for the rancher, the farmer, or for the hunter.

The second critical issue is ethics. Most North Americans look at wolf re-establishment from the perspective of their feelings. The policies that evolve must be sensitive to those feelings. The best way to build those policies is to give great consideration to conservation and hunting ethics. This is not merely a moral nicety; it is a moral necessity for keeping predator policy relevant. Policy success rides on both the head and the heart, because quite correctly, American politics demand that we as hunters know and that we care!

Your Boone and Crockett Club contributors for this subject include Bill Porter, PhD, Boone and Crockett Chair at Michigan State University, and Club conservation policy guru, Greg Schildwachter, PhD, who is one of the first Boone and Crockett Club doctoral students mentored by Dr. Hal Salwasser, former Boone and Crockett Chair at the University of Montana. Thank you both for all that you do for our Club and conservation. ■

Wm D. Demmer



Wolves at the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch.

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Changing Landscapes Series: Predators and Policy Constraints

By Greg Schildwachter, William Porter

Like game management, people have differing needs that they demand managers meet. Even when policy makers can reconcile the competing demands into goals, there is still a lag time between action and response during which pressure rises, debate continues, and second-guessing is fair game.

The Boone and Crockett Club has engaged the issue of predators since its beginning and continues to do so. Theodore Roosevelt himself presided over the killing of predators on the Kaibab Plateau in the early 1900s, thinking it would create a big-game hunter's paradise. Aldo Leopold wrote of an apocryphal experience seeing "green fire" in the eyes of a dying wolf that has helped inspire wolf restoration. Today's Club members played a central role in securing state management of the gray wolf.

The wolf is most prominent in predator policy, but skunks, raccoons and even sea lions eating endangered salmon are the more prevalent cases that have shaped predator policy. Deer, elk, and other depredators present a related problem. Unlike most game management, predator policy is about controlling populations, not sustaining or enhancing them. Like game management, people have differing needs that they demand managers meet. Even when policy makers can reconcile the competing demands into goals, there is still a lag time between action and response during which pressure rises, debate continues, and second-guessing is fair game.

The challenge is that we are still learning what works, and we need the answers to also make sense to the rest of America.

Two main forces challenge us. First, predator ecology is still a developing science, especially for the wolf population in Yellowstone. Only recently in Yellowstone have scientists, managers, and the public begun to see what is evident on Isle Royale after decades of research: ecosystems do not balance. Instead, factors such as winter weather and disease that limit wolves, and birth and growth responses in elk or moose, alternate in staccato patterns that sometimes cycle, sometimes boom or bust and guarantee that at any given time someone wants more of one or less of the other.

Second, as always, we must apply our science and reason to the emotional tides of tradition and myth on which people demand results. People have their own ideas about what works. Furthermore, science may confront us with harsh realities if we find that hunting programs fail to control wolf populations and we must cull. Hunters and trappers will want more opportunity. Non- and anti-hunters will want to know why we cannot let nature take its course. Public opinion confronts us with the age-old problem of superstition, which has always been a plague, but now spreads like a computer virus across the internet. And now, since the public-participation processes became law in the 1960s and '70s, those opinions can delay, derail, and disrupt science-based decision-making.

The terrain we cross going forward is pocked with the hazards of making conservation policy that works on the ground and also makes sense to people. In reconciling hard science and soft hearts, the proven (if

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occasionally self-correcting) scientific approach must drive the inner-workings of any policy, and policymakers must appreciate the symbolism by which many people form opinions about wildlife and wildlife policy.

Addressing perception in policymaking may be as simple as how we choose labels and how open we are to alternative methods. We may need to abandon antique labels such as nuisance wildlife, varmints, or even predator where it means a broad category of species that cause property damage. Today we could easily apply newer terms, some already in use in game management, for use in predator and damage policies; for example, resident starlings, suburban predators or keystone species. Depredation permits could honestly and accurately be called disease-control permits or health and safety permits.

We also have options in how we carry out management. There is a point of view that has been troubling in the conservation of deer and elk that may be useful in future management of predators. To some people, professionals are more acceptable than hunters in controlling overcrowded wildlife populations. Granted, it will be difficult to convince some people that wolves could ever be overcrowded in backcountry big game habitats, but perhaps easier to win approval for intervention by professionals if wolves prove to be uncontrollable using hunting and trapping alone.

To prepare for these challenges, sportsmen must approach predator policy with the same set of ethics applied to all conservation. This is not merely a moral nicety, it is a necessity for keeping predator policy up-to-date. Policy success rides on both head and heart because–quite rightly–American politics demands that you know and that you care.

In the throes of the wolf debate in 2010, the Club led a public statement with other renowned big-game conservation groups in which we urged hunters to "turn their anger into passion, speak up, and ask for hard but fair commitments from state and federal government [and] as we seek hard commitments from government, we also need to draw a hard line for ourselves: we are sportsmen, not wolf-haters."

The same call for order applies to all predator policy. Our sport cannot continue without all wildlife under proper management with the support of other Americans. That cannot happen without hunters embracing the entire experience: partaking of and sustaining the game, and also grasping how predators and other wildlife fit in the ecological scene around our chase and also appreciating the drama. For if predators are managed well, one of them may still claim some meat you seek, but at least then it will be a fair chase. ■

B&C ONLINE

Learn more about the Club's position on wolves and large predators.

EXPERTS REAFFIRM BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB POSITION ON WOLVES

DECEMBER 11, 2008

The Boone and Crockett Club authored a letter in support of delisting northern Rocky Mountain gray wolves, which was circulated through the Club-founded American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP) network. Eighteen conservation organizations endorsed the letter before it was submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as official comment on the proposed delisting under the ESA.

The letter offered the following six principles to guide federal and state wildlife agencies.

1. **When wolf populations meet scientific viability criteria for recovery they no longer require federal protection under the ESA. They should be de-listed if recovery plan goals are met and where regulatory mechanisms are in place to adequately manage the species.**
2. **After the wolf is de-listed, scientifically sound wolf management programs administered by state wildlife agencies should maintain sustainable wolf populations to preclude the need to re-list under the ESA.**
3. **Reflecting the success of other historic hunter/conservationist-led species recovery programs, wolves should be managed as big game animals in areas designated for wolf occupancy and wolf seasons should be regulated by the states.**
4. **Where and when hunting is deemed appropriate under state regulations, methods used by hunters must conform to fair chase principles.**
5. **When classified as game animals, wolf populations should be maintained in accordance with the biological and cultural carrying capacities of the habitats they occupy.**
6. **Management of individual wolves and wolf populations should also recognize the need to balance management objectives with respect for private property and human well being.**