

ANIMAL RIGHTS? OR HUNTER'S RIGHTS?

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We're witnessing a new round of interest in wolf protection inside the U.S. Congress and in certain segments of the "animal rights" movement. As a veteran campaigner on wolf and other wildlife issues that often appear on election ballots, I urge my fellow Boone and Crockett members to be very leery of falling into the emotional traps that these major animal advocacy groups set for the American public.

In 2004, I had the opportunity to work on an Alaska ballot measure campaign to defeat Measure 4 (bear baiting ban). Regardless of how one feels about the practice of baiting, Alaska faces incredible wildlife pressures; and with "problem bears" regularly coming into neighborhoods threatening domestic pets and people, careful science-based management tools such as baiting are essential for protecting our communities.

I will never forget during the course of that campaign, our primary opponent was the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). Their national president, Mr. Wayne Pacelle, kept telling the Alaska media that HSUS was not part of the "YES" campaign on Measure 4. We knew differently, and when a \$25,000 contribution was reported, Mr. Pacelle continued to insist their role was minimal.

The money is not really the point as it relates to this particular ballot measure. What Mr. Pacelle says is what's important. "We are going to use the ballot box and the democratic process to stop all hunting in the United States. We will take it species by species until all hunting is stopped in California. Then we will take it state by state." (*Full Cry Magazine*, October 1, 1990). Nonetheless, Alaska voters were successful in defeating their ill-conceived measure by a 59- to 41-percent margin.

According to its own financial reports, the HSUS spent only 32 percent of its \$130.3 million budget in 2009 on the protection of animals. The rest went to overhead, public relations, and other activities.



In 2008, I had another Alaska campaign challenge in working to defeat Measure 2 (aerial predator control bans). With wolf populations thriving in Alaska, mortality rates of caribou and moose were approaching alarming rates. With thousands of native Alaskans dependent on caribou and moose for their subsistence lifestyles, the need to protect these herds from wolves approached a crisis level.

Defenders of Wildlife spent nearly \$1 million in the campaign to pass Measure 2—all coming from their Washington, D.C. office. Their campaign would make the average voter believe that anyone from the lower 48 could travel to Alaska, hook up with a bunch of blood-thirsty buddies, rent an airplane or helicopter and go shoot wolves from the air.

Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. At the time, the practice of aerial control of predators such as wolves was implemented on only two wildlife management units across the vastness of Alaska. It was managed carefully by the Alaska Department of Fish & Game wildlife professionals—not political activists.

After being out-spent by Defenders of Wildlife by nearly three-to-one, we were still successful in defeating Measure 2 by a 56- to 44-percent margin.

It's interesting to note that Defenders of Wildlife utilized only 27 percent of their \$30.4 million budget in 2009 to "protect" wildlife.

When you combine the activities of the HSUS, Defenders of Wildlife, and PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), you have a potent and powerful political force that is well-funded and highly focused. Make no mistake. Their mission is to end all forms of hunting and resource management.

According to PETA's 2001 tax return, it provided a grant to the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) to "support their

program activities." That same year, ELF set off a firebomb that caused \$7 million in damages at the University of Washington's Center for Urban Horticulture. Three ELF members were found guilty, another suspect committed suicide, and another suspect remained at large until he was captured in China last year.

One recent article reports: "PETA is more interested in killing rather than finding homes for the pets under its control at the Norfolk, Virginia headquarters. Since 1998, PETA has chosen to "put down" 23,640 dogs, cats, puppies and kittens. PETA's "Animal Record" report for 2009, filed with the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services shows that the animal rights group killed 97 percent of the dogs and cats in its care last year. During all of 2009, PETA found adoptive homes for just eight pets out of the 2,366 pets it took in." (www.petakillsanimals.com)

The focal point here is the credibility factor surrounding the country's leading "animal rights" organizations. It's clear that they do not spend their money on actual animal protection or welfare. These are political machines—pure and simple! They spend millions on advocacy, litigation and politics. With a feeling of empowerment from the Obama administration, it only makes sense that their agenda will become even more aggressive.

As the country now begins a discussion over wolf management and how the species relates to the federal Endangered Species Act, all Americans should keep in mind the histories and backgrounds of these groups as they weigh in mightily on the issue of wolf protection.

They hail the federal Endangered Species Act as an "effective tool" when in reality, since the Act's passage in the early 1970s, the "recovery of species" success rate is 1 percent. While the ESA was passed with the best of intentions, the reality shows that

it has been for the most part, a highly ineffective tool in species recovery.

The wolf issue will be presented again, in a dramatic, emotional setting, pulling on the heartstrings of U.S. citizens who do not live around wolf populations and only see them as a majestic, beautiful animal that simply wants to run wild in the wilderness. Adding greater protections on wolf populations is a "freebie" vote for most members of Congress because the issue does not impact them at all. If they vote for more protections—they get more campaign cash and higher League of Conservation Voter ratings. It's a free "animal rights or green" vote for most members.

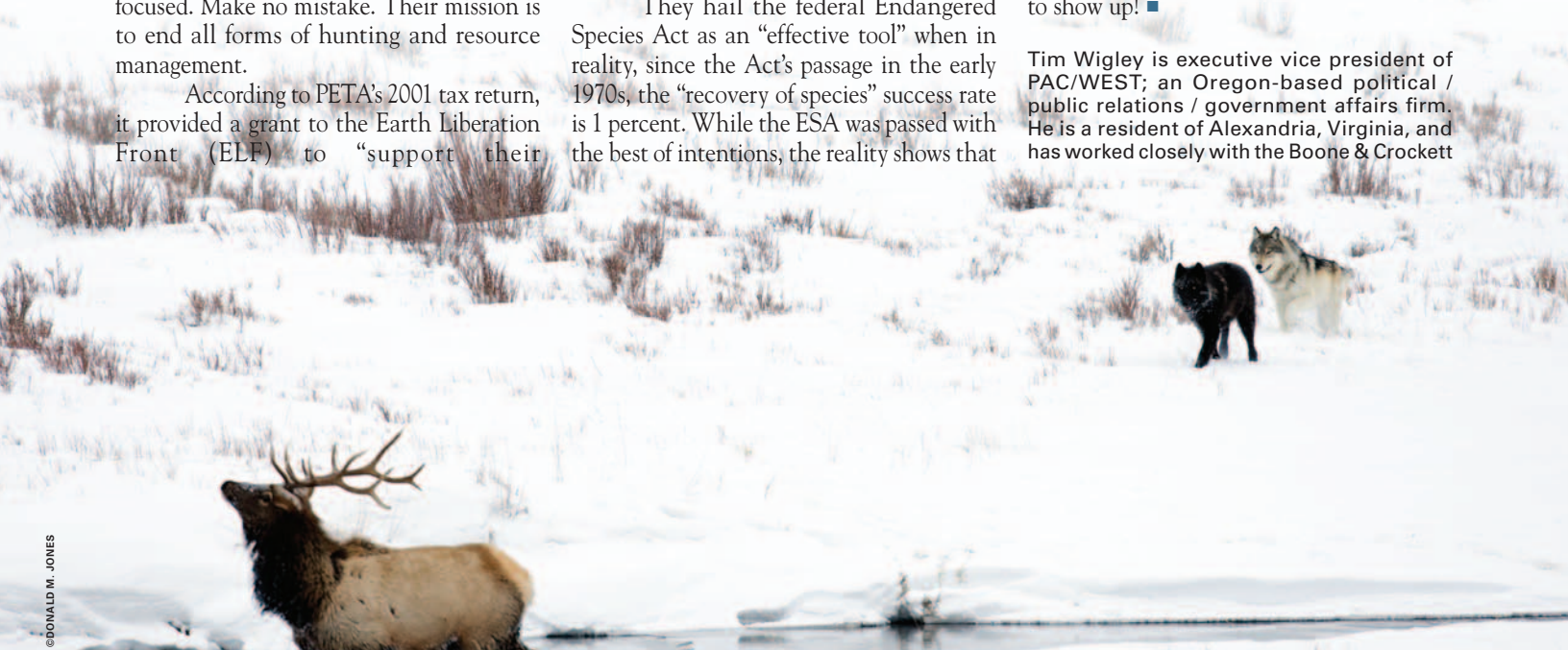
But for those elected officials that do live around wolf populations and hear the daily accounts of livestock kills, and as elk and deer populations decline, this is a real issue!

There can be a balance so long as we allow the professional expertise of wildlife biologists to take precedence over the "political science" of the various advocacy groups; which, as demonstrated earlier in this article, do not focus their efforts on actual, on-the-ground protection of wildlife and animals.

If you care about your hunting rights—pay close attention to the upcoming debate on wildlife management and the overall management of public lands. These issues all intertwine and they will impact your ability to gain access to public lands for hunting, fishing and other forms of recreation.

The next two years will bring a loud and controversial debate. The age-old saying, "the world is controlled by those who show up" is more important than ever. Make plans to show up! ■

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