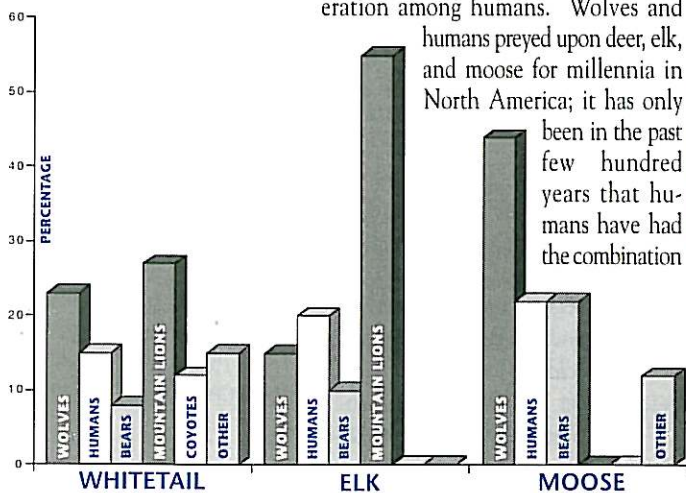


# Wolf Reintroduction POINT

BY DANIEL H. PLETSCHER  
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FIGURE A  
THE CHART BELOW GIVES THE BREAKDOWN OF THE PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL KILL FOR EACH PREDATOR IN GLACIER NATIONAL PARK. THE PROJECT HAS BEEN ONGOING SINCE 1990. THERE WERE A TOTAL OF 26 WHITETAIL MORTALITIES, 20 ELK MORTALITIES AND 9 MOOSE MORTALITIES.



The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) on the reintroduction of the endangered gray wolf to Yellowstone National Park and Central Idaho has created rather strange bedfellows. Opposing the reintroduction are some members of the livestock industry and some members of groups such as Earth First. Most conservation organizations support the reintroduction of wolves; some hunters support reintroduction, others oppose it. As a hunter and biologist, I support this plan to restore wolves to the Greater Yellowstone Area under an experimental, non-essential designation, and describe below why.

The wolf is a symbol to many people. For some, it is a symbol of wilderness or untrammled areas. For others, the wolf is a killer, a species that will cause unconscionable harm to livestock and big game populations. In reality, wolves are one member of our native biotic community.

Predation is the killing and subsequent consumption of one species by another. This natural process has occurred on planet Earth for millions of years. It is this process that led to the speed of the cheetah, the alertness of a herd of red deer, the protective coloration of deer fawns and elk calves, and, some would argue, cooperation among humans. Wolves and humans preyed upon deer, elk, and moose for millennia in North America; it has only been in the past few hundred years that humans have had the combination

of desire and technological know-how to eliminate their most significant competitor for these species, a process that was essentially completed in the western United States about 60 years ago.

Anti-hunters and hunters alike have made the argument that predation is some-

how evil. Anti-hunters have argued that it's okay for wolves to kill and eat deer and elk, but not for humans to do so. Some hunters have argued that it's okay for humans to kill and eat deer and elk, but not for wolves. As a hunter, I reject both arguments. Hunters (who are, after all, predators) should be the first to recognize that predation is not evil. The idea of hunters opposing predation is confusing to the majority of people in North America who are neither hunters nor anti-hunters, but who are concerned about the environment. All predators need the support of this group of people.

Wolves and other predators have the potential to reduce the number of prey available to humans as predators. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided funding to the University of Montana to examine the impacts of a population of wolves that re-colonized Glacier National Park, Montana, and nearby areas on white-tail deer, elk, and moose. We have maintained approximately 30 radio collars on females of each of these species since 1990 (mortalities occur throughout the year, and collars are replaced the following winter). Motion sensitive transmitters have alerted us when mortalities have occurred, and we have then examined carcasses to determine cause of death.

In this study area, wolves killed approximately 7% of the female whitetail deer, 3% of the female elk, and 4% of the female moose annually. (See Figure A for related information) Survival of fawns and calves to recruitment age is, of course, also important; we hope to examine cause-specific mortality rates in this important component of prey populations when funding is available. In other areas in North America, bears are the primary predator of fawns and calves, and this could be the case in Montana.

Wolves will, at times, reduce the number of prey available to humans as predators, though the impact will be variable and somewhat difficult to predict. While stability is something we humans often strive for, it is not common in nature. A long-term wolf-moose study on Isle Royale, Michigan, partially funded by the Boone and Crockett Club, has shown that predator and prey populations fluctuate

widely without the direct influence of humans. With wolves back in the inter-mountain west, managers will need to respond quickly to changes in the prey populations upon which humans and other predators depend, but wolves will not eliminate hunting.

Livestock have been killed by the population of approximately 70 wolves currently occupying Montana, and though the total number killed has been relatively low, the impact can affect some ranchers. Wolves that kill livestock have been removed by managers. The experimental population designation proposed in the DEIS for the Yellowstone area would allow even greater flexibility in dealing with problem wolves. A compensation program for ranchers who have livestock killed by wolves has been set up by Defenders of Wildlife and will continue.

While some extremists on either side of the pro-wolf/anti-wolf debate have objected to the plan to reintroduce wolves into Yellowstone National Park, most professional wildlife biologists have been supportive. The Wildlife Society wrote to support the plan and to congratulate the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on "...excellence in biological and socioeconomic assessment,...the DEIS process has been exemplary in its attention to the public involvement." L. David Mech, the world's leading authority on wolf biology, and 12 co-signers, all wolf biologists, wrote that "We believe it is a practical plan that meets the needs of state governments and local residents while facilitating prompt, effective, and economical wolf recovery." I concur. The Fish and Wildlife Service did an excellent job compiling the available information on wolves and the plan should work.

Recovery of wolves will require humans to again share ungulate populations with the wolf, a situation that existed for most of the last 10,000 years in North America. Yellowstone National Park and the surrounding areas are large enough for wolves. The only question remaining is whether the hearts and minds of humans are large enough to accommodate wolves in this region. I hope the answer is yes.

# COUNTERPOINT

## No-Wolf Option

The NO-WOLF OPTION COMMITTEE is a coalition of concerned Wyoming citizens opposed to artificial wolf introduction into the Yellowstone ecosystem and central Idaho wilderness. Our opposition centers around States Rights, predation, economics and the Endangered Species Act, which impedes multiple use on our public lands.

The public has been duped into believing that wolf introduction is desirable and necessary, when quite the opposite is true.

Our organization, which networks with a host of others throughout the country, has asked for the complete nullification of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement covering the reintroduction of gray wolves to Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho. Some of the reasons follow:

1) Wolves are not endangered or threatened. There are 7,000 wolves in Alaska, 2,000 in Minnesota and 60,000 wolves in Canada. How can the federal government justify the high priority and expenditure (up to \$130 million) for wolf introduction over other more needy species? The federal government has basically ignored its own Endangered and Threatened Species Recovery Guidelines, which specify a priority action for species threatened with extinction or irreversible decline in the foreseeable future. In fact, the wolf is doing quite well in Montana and there have been scores of verified sightings in Wyoming and Idaho.

2) The DEIS does not include a valid compensation program to ranchers who lose livestock to wolves. The Defenders of Wildlife compensation program promoted throughout the DEIS is basically coercion by Defenders to further their own agenda. Their compensation program is subject to the whims of the organization and can be withdrawn at any time. Since proposed wolf introduction is a government sanctioned program, the feds should be footing the bill with just settlements to the rancher or other injured parties.

Animal Damage Control officers have stated that confirmed kills are often 10% or less of what a predator actually kills, meaning that 90% of livestock lost to wolves will never be compensated under any program. The government pays \$400 a head for verified livestock losses in Minnesota. Actual

market value is closer to \$1000 for a mature animal, and the program doesn't take into consideration the cost of purebred stock, including horses or pets.

3) Among many other seriously flawed and selectively utilized reports in the DEIS, Boyce and Gaillard's 1992 study of wolf impacts on ungulates, should be relegated to the circular file. Boyce and Gaillard's modeling didn't factor in big horn sheep, antelope or moose, and did not consider the cumulative impacts on prey by all predators in the Yellowstone ecosystem.

More recent studies concerning the Peace River Bison, indicate that a pack of eight to 10 wolves will readily kill one (150 lb.) bison calf per day. In ten years (1981-1991), the bison population of Wood Buffalo National Park had declined from 5600 to 3300.<sup>1</sup>

The American people deserve an accurate, scientific proposal. The DEIS is scientifically flawed, uses outdated reports and is contradictory in many areas.

4) There is no mandated number for wolves in the Yellowstone ecosystem (20 million acres) or central Idaho wilderness (15 million acres). In fact, 300 wolves are considered the low end of the minimum viable population level. The resultant difference between 300 wolves and 2000 or more wolves (stated by Project Leader, Bangs, as a distinct possibility), brings a myriad of troublesome management problems, raises objective costs and redefines the Environmental Impact Study.

Minnesota papers have published articles and letters detailing the Eastern timber wolf controversy. Because the State has had no control over the timber wolf for the last 20 years, a majority of these letters voiced frustration with over-population, lack of management, lack of funds, the killing of beloved pets and former access areas now barricaded, to protect wolf and eagle habitat.

The Eastern timber wolf will not be removed from the Endangered Species List until the year 2005, and only if Wisconsin, Michigan and possibly three Eastern States have established populations. Meanwhile, Minnesota has roughly 2000 wolves. The recovery plan goal was 1200 to 1400 wolves. We have learned from our neighbor to the East and our Canadian and Alaskan friends.

Need Wyoming, Montana and Idaho suffer the same vexation?

5) We must support common sense amendments to the Endangered Species Act, to better manage existing predators, prior to more wolves becoming a part of the ecosystem. Under current terms of the ESA, Interior Department management decisions will favor the needs of the gray wolf when wolves or wolf habitat needs and other land use values compete.

6) The DEIS was deceptively written with respect to Alternative #3, the NO WOLF ALTERNATIVE. Alternative #3 does not require an amendment to federal law. The Department of Interior has complete authority to de-list the wolf, without any action from Congress.

7) There will be fewer, not more benefits, with wolf introduction. The DEIS reports that wolves will increase visitation to Yellowstone, and bring additional revenue to surrounding areas. This contradicts recent press reports, in which Park officials urge cuts in Park visitation, to reduce ungulate and habitat stress. Further, there will be less watchable wildlife with wolf predation in the Park.

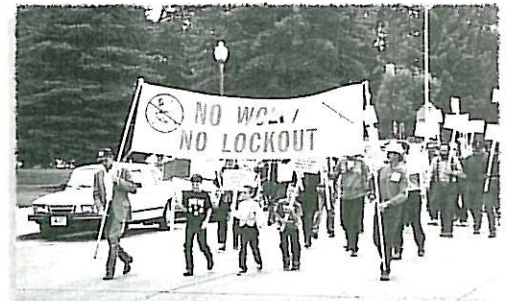
8) Finally, the DEIS does not document the concerns of the people who will be impacted most by wolf introduction, as required under the National Environmental Policy Act, and trivializes the food, fiber and energy industries, which judiciously use and enhance our public lands and wildlife resources. There is no doubt that animal activist groups want to stop all hunting and multiple use on public lands. The wolf, like the spotted owl, is a convenient surrogate to this end.

In conclusion, the NO-WOLF OPTION COMMITTEE, in partnership with other resource users and providers, supports the NO WOLF ALTERNATIVE. It is time we remove predators from the pedestal and get back to the reality of scientific game management, in which the people of Wyoming, Montana and Idaho play a large part.

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PLEASE CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES IN WASHINGTON AND LET THEM KNOW YOUR FEELINGS ON THIS ISSUE. SUPPORT THE GOALS OF YOUR HUNTING ORGANIZATIONS AND BY ALL MEANS, STAY ACTIVE AND INFORMED.

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FOR AN UPDATE ON THE FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT TURN TO PAGE 52.

<sup>1</sup> WOLVES, BISON AND THE DYNAMICS RELATED TO THE PEACE-ATHABASCA DELTA IN CANADA'S WOOD BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK - L.N. CARBYN, S.M. OOSENBURG AND D.W. AHNIONS, 1993.