

LOBO WATCH

Editorial

May 24, 2010

Wyoming Residents Have Had Enough Of Wolves

While the weather may have been cold and blustery in Cody, Wyoming this past Saturday, things got fairly heated up in the city park downtown through much of the day as more than 20 speakers came to share their thoughts on how wolves have impacted wildlife populations, livestock production, life styles and the economy of this very outdoor oriented community. Billed as the **Wyoming Wolf Impact Rally**, the speakers included several gubernatorial candidates, a few other politicians, the head of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, members of the Wyoming Outfitters and Guides Association, representatives of Wyoming Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife, heads of the stock growers and wool producers of the state, outfitters and others. Representing LOBO WATCH, I was also one of those other speakers.

The common theme throughout the 5 hour rally centered on the very negative impact wolves have had on the Greater Yellowstone Area. I was slated to talk early in the afternoon, so I listened to what all the earlier speakers had to say. Most of what was covered has been covered numerous times through the past year in newspapers, during television newscasts, in various press releases, and at other similar public gatherings. The topics included the serious negative impact wolves are having on elk and other big game populations in Northwestern Wyoming, how that loss of game is now causing wolves to feed more heavily on livestock, that outfitters and guides are being forced out of business, lost hunting opportunities for future generations, how wolves are just the first step toward forcing the people of the West off the land, the diseases and parasites spread by wolves, and how continued legal intervention by environmental organizations like Defenders of Wildlife keep moving the "**wolf recovery goal**" numbers to where there are now at least six times as many wolves in the Northern Rockies as originally outlined by the Wolf Recovery Project - and how those groups want still more wolves.

Those attending the wolf rally in Cody on May 22, for the most part, have heard all of this over and over again. The sportsmen, ranchers, outfitters, concerned wildlife watchers, and business owners who attended, which at one point probably numbered close to 300, were there mostly to talk with one another. They were there to share worries and concerns with each other. And they were there with hopes of hearing a few encouraging words on how this wildlife disaster would be resolved.

David Allen, the C.E.O. of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, promised sportsmen and outfitters that the organization would continue to step up its fight against the anti-hunting environmental groups, to reason with a very misdirected U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and to challenge our failed justice system. Likewise, the political candidates who each spent about 15 minutes at the microphone made similar promises.

I was impressed that so many people would stand for hours in the 25 to 30 m.p.h. winds, occasional spit of rain, and colder than normal temperatures. It was encouraging to see those impacted the most by wolves beginning to unite, beginning to organize into a force that's ready to fight back against the lies and deceit that have plagued the introduction of wolves back into the Northern Rockies of Wyoming, Montana and Idaho. When it was time for my 15 minutes at the microphone, I didn't want to waltz up to the podium and repeat the same issues and problems already presented. But, even as I pulled the microphone from the stand, to hold it in my hand, I truly did not know exactly in just which direction I would take my two-cents worth.

When I did open my mouth, here's what came out - ***"Do any of you have any idea where the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service got the money for funding the Wolf Recovery Project here in the West? They stole it. That federal agency dipped deeply into the Pittman- Robertson funds...the excise taxes collected on firearms, ammunition, hunting equipment and fishing gear...money that was supposed to be distributed back to the state wildlife agencies for wildlife habitat and fisheries improvement. Instead, they used your money to unleash this wildlife equivalent of cancer into Northwest Wyoming, Western Montana, and the northern half of Idaho."***

As David Allen of RMEF, Neil Thagard of the Wild Sheep Foundation, gubernatorial candidates Ron Micheli and Colin Simpson, as well as a few others had shared details about upcoming legal battles, I could not help but think to myself that too much effort is being expended to remain defensive, to continue being reactive to the legal actions by the environmental groups to get the gray wolf once again on the Endangered Species List. It's time for a coalition of sportsmen organizations, and the shooting and hunting industry as a whole, to begin filing a few lawsuits against those organizations, agencies and individuals who are responsible for the devastation of

wildlife resources that took three-quarters of a century and hundreds of millions of sportsman provided dollars to rebuild from near total loss.

And I personally believe a great start would be to go after those who initially embezzled between \$60- and \$70-million dollars from Pittman-Robertson funds. I had absolutely no qualms sharing that with those attending the rally.

Jamie Rapport Clark was the director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the time the theft was discovered. Richard Smith was serving as Acting Director of the service at the time the first wolves were released into Yellowstone. Both of these directors were likely involved with the taking of unauthorized funds from the excise taxes collected for habitat and fisheries improvement. Also, the Secretary of the Interior from 1993 thru 2000 was Bruce Babbitt, and if he remained unaware of the USFWS spending upwards of \$70-million on wolf introduction and the construction of a new Regional USFWS Office in California, funding for both of which had been denied by Congress, then he is surely guilty of not doing his job. And if those unauthorized uses of the stolen money aren't bad enough, those running USFWS also used a chunk of those ill gotten gains to pay themselves some huge bonuses.

No one was ever held accountable for the theft of this money, and USFWS never made any attempt to reimburse Pittman-Robertson, nor the state wildlife agencies who would have received that funding. Should these three top level Department of the Interior appointees be held responsible? I and practically every sportsman I've asked that question think they should.

Yep, the USFWS Wolf Recovery Project has been a sham since the first planning stages, rife with unethical and definitely illegal decisions. Even Ed Bangs, coordinator of the Wolf Recovery Project, has been guilty of violating USFWS regulations, which are law when it comes to the transporting of wildlife into this country across international borders. Those regulations require that Form 3-177 be completed and filed BEFORE any wildlife or fish be imported into the United States. That form requires the identification of the species/subspecies, the number of animals being brought across the border, and cost of the project, among other things. According to Jim Beers, a former Chief of Operations for the National Wildlife Refuge system, there is no record of Bangs ever completing or filing the required form. Without that form, there is no record of how many wolves really were brought in and dumped into the Northern Rockies, or how much of that stolen money was spent on the project.

It's time to demand that Congress launch an investigation into the manner in which the Wolf Recovery Project has been funded, how USFWS has manipulated wolf science to bring in an entirely non-native and non-endangered wolf subspecies, and how many other aspects of this fiasco are well outside of the law. Our legal efforts right now

should be to begin taking some of these people out of the wolf equation, and that flimsy house of cards will quickly begin to implode. - Toby Bridges, LOBO WATCH

The "Wyoming Wolf Impact Rally" was hosted by the Cody Country Outfitters and Guides Association, and sponsored by Wyoming Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife

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