

# LOBO WATCH

## Sportsmen Taking Charge of Predator Problems

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### Is The U.S. Government Wolf Experiment A Costly and Disastrous Failure?

What many environmentalists have been claiming to be a "*true conservation success story*" is now showing its very negative side.

Amongst extreme controversy, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service kicked off the Wolf Recovery Project of the Northern Rockies back in 1995 with the release of the first wolves to set foot in the Greater Yellowstone Area in more than 50 years. Or, so that agency claimed. And so began the conflict between residents of the region and a number of environmental "*wolf friendly*" advocacy groups.

Under the auspicious directives of the 1974 Endangered Species Act, USFWS set out to establish a "*recovered*" population of gray wolves along the northern stretch of the Rocky Mountains in northwestern Wyoming, western Montana and northern Idaho. Despite claims by residents who indicated several small pockets of the native wolf (*Canis lupus irremotus*) of the region still existed, that federal wildlife agency decided that in order to accelerate the questionable "*reintroduction*" of wolves into the three states required the transplanting of wolves from elsewhere. In this case, that elsewhere proved to be primarily Alberta and British Columbia, Canada, where wolves were never endangered. However, those wolves were an entirely different subspecies (*Canis lupus occidentalis*), which just threw more fuel onto the growing fire of this controversial project.

The native wolf of the Northern Rockies, often referred to as a "*timber wolf*", typically topped out in weight at between 90 and 100 pounds, with an average weight for adult males somewhere around 80 to 90 pounds. The wolves that USFWS elected to use as replacements were larger "*pack wolves*", with mature males averaging between 110 to 130 pounds. However, in their native northern Canadian habitat, some of the wolves harvested by sport hunters or taken by government hunters to reduce livestock depredation have topped 140 pounds. (The largest on record weighed 175 pounds.) Not only does the added size of the transplanted wolves make it easier for these apex predators to bring down game as large as elk and moose, they are likewise proving to be far more aggressive than the wolves known to have resided in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming. In some areas, the transplanted non-native and non-indigenous Canadian wolves have already destroyed 60- to 80-percent of the elk herds that were here before those wolves were released into this wildlife rich ecosystem. Many of those residents who claimed that the native wolf still existed before the Wolf Recovery Project say that the invasive wolves from far north of the border have completely wiped out any remaining population of the native wolf, which in itself has been a violation of the Endangered Species Act.

***"Were there any native timber wolves left in northwestern Montana? I guess we'll never really know... now. But, I personally know there were!"*** says Billy Hill, a rancher and former backcountry outfitter from Trout Creek, Montana.

During its planning and stage setting for the Wolf Recovery Project, USFWS has been accused of stepping across the line by manipulating wolf science simply for the sake of making their job easier. Prior to the wolf being included on the list of endangered species in 1974, wildlife scientists had recognized 24 subspecies of wolves that either had been previously found or could currently still be found in North America. The USFWS took it upon itself to reduce that number to just 5 subspecies.

Was this simply to cover the fact that the wolves USFWS were bringing into the Northern Rockies were not the same wolf the project was to replace? More and more of those now forced to live with these wolves, and to endure the damage they are dealing wildlife and livestock, believe that USFWS pulled off a real bait and switch. And many are now questioning the legality of the agency dumping a non-native and definitely non-endangered wolf in this country.

Sportsmen and ranchers, who tend to be even closer to the land and wildlife than most Americans, feel that to cover this intentional faux pas, USFWS has done its best to simply make "*Canis lupus*", the gray wolf, "*Canis lupus*" - no matter what their true subspecies may be...or may have been. One rancher, who chooses to remain anonymous, says this is like saying all cattle are the same - whether they're a black Angus or a Texas longhorn. Both are bovines.

Should USFWS have the freedom to alter the intention of the Endangered Species Act, by substituting a different subspecies to supplement, or completely replace, an endangered species/subspecies?

*"That kind of flexibility would certainly make their job of getting wildlife removed from the Endangered Species List a heck of a lot easier,"* says Chuck Kleffner, founder of a new Montana sportsman based organization known as Montana Sportsmen United.

Kleffner goes on to point out that the Sonoran pronghorn of Mexico is extremely endangered, with the remaining population down to less than 800 animals. However, in the state of Wyoming, there are now as many pronghorn, often erroneously referred to as an "*antelope*", as there are people - maybe even more.

*"If it's okay to bring a non-native subspecies of wolf down from Canada, and turn them loose in the Northern Rockies, allowing them to kill or breed out the few native wolves still here...what would be so wrong about trucking down 20,000 Wyoming pronghorns and dumping them in Mexico to 'supplement' the suffering population of Sonoran pronghorn? After all, a pronghorn is a pronghorn. Right?"* adds Chuck Kleffner.

Is this really the true intention of the Endangered Species Act? No it isn't. In fact, the non-endangered wolves which were brought here were a threat to a truly endangered subspecies of wolf. And that does indeed violate the ESA.

**Big Game Forever**, another new sportsman organization, along with the **Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation** and the Utah based **Sportsmen For Fish and Wildlife** are now pooling their efforts to have Congress amend the ESA. In late July, U.S. Congressman Chet Edwards of Texas presented a bill (H.R. 6028) which would effectively remove ESA protection for the gray wolf. And the amendment of the Act

would only require the addition of one short paragraph. That paragraph would read, ***"The Gray wolf (Canis lupus) shall not be treated as an endangered species or threatened species for purposes of this Act."***

With as many as 5,000 wolves now spread out across the Upper Midwest (Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan), and another 3,000 to 4,000 now roaming the Northern Rockies of Idaho, Montana and Wyoming, the gray wolf is hardly endangered in the continental United States, and is especially non-endangered across Canada and Alaska, where another 50,000 to 60,000 are doing quite nicely - to the point that their numbers have to be tightly controlled to contain excessive depredation of elk, caribou, moose, deer and other big game populations. In fact, even where there are ***"shoot on sight"*** harvest opportunities in Canada and Alaska, wolves have destroyed a number of caribou herds. And in the Northern Rockies of Montana, Idaho and Wyoming some elk herds are now in danger of being lost forever. With wolves now spreading rapidly across the upper regions of the Midwest, deer and moose populations are also crashing quickly.

So, why do so-called ***"environmental"*** organizations such as the **Defenders of Wildlife**, the **Center for Biological Diversity** and the **Sierra Club** continue to fight the ESA delisting of wolves in the Lower 48, keeping wolf control tied up in federal court?

***"Wolves are being exploited in an attempt to remove the rights of the sportsmen to have access to and use of renewable wildlife resources. Notwithstanding the experimental nature of wolf reintroductions and repeated declarations that wolf populations have expanded far beyond recovery objectives, these groups continue to make millions of dollars suing the federal government on technicalities within the Endangered Species Act. It has become clear that there will be no end to the litigation despite the unprecedented damage to wildlife, surplus killing of livestock, and attacks on pets and guard dogs in the West and Upper Midwest. Ultimately those most affected by the ongoing litigation continue to be sportsmen and wildlife, including the very wolves the anti-sporting groups proclaim to protect,"*** claims Ryan Benson, National Director for **Big Game Forever**.

One area of the Northern Rockies that has suffered excessive wolf depredation is the Greater Yellowstone Area - right where the first of those non-endangered Canadian wolves were first turned loose by USFWS. Before those predators began to multiply and have a noticeable impact on elk, moose and other big game populations in what *was* America's wildlife wonderland, as many as 25,000 elk called Yellowstone National Park home, along with about 1,200 moose. Today, the overall park elk population is only about 6,000, and this past spring wildlife counters could only come up with 117 remaining moose. And even those numbers do not tell the whole story. Before wolves, the average age of the elk in and around the park was between 4 and 5 years of age. Today, those elk which have managed to survive are getting old, due to the near 100-percent loss of calves to the wolves each spring, and this herd now averages 8 to 9 years old.

When these elk begin to die off from old age, in just the next couple of years, Yellowstone's elk just may become another endangered species. The moose are already.

Robert T. Fanning, the founder of the group **Friends of the Northern Yellowstone Elk Herd**, lives on a ranch near Pray, MT - less than 30 miles from the northern entrance to Yellowstone National Park. He has witnessed the demise of the Northern Yellowstone Elk Herd, from around 19,000 in 1995-96 to only about 2,000 this spring. And while some very questionable wildlife managers try to lay blame for the loss of so many elk on numerous *"other"* factors, including global warming, the only real difference between now and 1995, before the first wolves were released there, is that today the immediate area is home to more than 400 wolves. And each of those wolves will annually kill around 30 elk, moose and deer for food, and nearly as many for sport. Only about 5- to 6-percent of the calves and fawns born in the spring live to see one year of age. These elk are already beginning to succumb to old age. Like the vast majority of Northern Rockies sportsmen, Fanning is livid about the destruction, and this Yellowstone area resident fully intends to file lawsuits against all parties which have caused or contributed to this ecological disaster. He has been fighting the wolf war since Canadian wolves were first released into Yellowstone.

Fanning points out, *"The Northern Yellowstone Elk Herd, formerly the largest migrating elk herd on Earth, has been intensively monitored since 1885. Friends of the Northern Yellowstone Elk Herd, Inc. was formed in August of 1999 in response to forced wolf introduction as an advocacy group for the*

*Northern Herd, and to enforce Congresses original stated intent 'not to hurt hunting or the local economies'. Our group has 3,742 members, mostly sportsmen, ranchers, guides and outfitters who live in the Tri State Yellowstone Ecosystem. For a decade FOTNYEH has worked constantly and closely with state legislatures to sound the alarm that the Northern Yellowstone Elk Herd was being pushed into a predation pit by extreme predator densities, that according to scientists would be ultimately irreversible. Our organization hired three renown PH.D's in predator-prey biology a decade ago, and have strategically aligned ourselves with several other PH.D's to give veracity and credence to our members 'out in the field' observing and reporting for a decade the profound decimation of all the wildlife. For a decade, pro wolf wildlife management 'authorities' who have a financial conflict of interest, have systematically lied and covered up the sterilization of our ecosystem by extreme wolf densities. Now that they have been caught as liars they dismiss their scientific fraud with, 'You're not looking hard enough, prey can be found elsewhere.' With federally protected wolf populations growing at a 30-percent annum rate since 1995 and wolf numbers and densities so extreme, what hope is there for Yellowstone's prey base avoiding extinction?"*

Another concerned sportsman is Jim Hagerdon, of Idaho For Wildlife, who says, *"Bad federal law, bad policies and a green-oriented political judge have converged, along with no leadership or courage from the state of Idaho or our federal government in this wolf disaster. Too bad for elk, moose and deer...too bad for Idaho, Montana and Wyoming residents...too bad for resident and non-resident hunters...too bad for our ranching and farming economy. What a disaster!"*

The ever greater loss of wildlife resources to wolves is now hitting the Northern Rockies hard. The fall hunting seasons not only provide a very outdoor oriented population with a winter meat supply, the money spent by hunters also plays a big role in the economies of many rural communities. Likewise, the hunting permits and licenses purchased have long provided the funding needed to keep state wildlife agencies in operation. In fact, sportsmen who hunt and fish have been the ones who have paid the way for modern wildlife conservation for the past 75 to 100 years - while environmental groups and bird watchers have contributed nothing.

***What kind of economic impact are wolves having on each of these states?***

Montana Senator Joe Balyeat sharpened a pencil and sat down to come up with a reasonable annual loss to his state. And when he figured in the loss of cattle, sheep, ranch & farm dogs, a loss of hunting opportunities that resulted in fewer big game permit or license sales, the replacement value of the game killed by wolves, the revenue loss to small hunting communities, lost business for outfitters and guides, and other closely related factors, he determined that the loss, due to wolves, would easily top \$60-million annually. Next door in Idaho, that state's Department of Fish and Game has realized a similar economic loss.

While new wave wildlife biologists and the followers of the "***green***" environmental groups still like to tout the reintroduction of the wrong wolf into the Northern Rockies as a true "***conservations success story***", the realization of the wildlife destruction and the losses now being born by rural Americans is now beginning to change public sentiment for wolves. Recently, the **Center for Biological Diversity** issued a press release stating their new goal is to see wolves reintroduced from coast to coast, from border to border - until tens of thousands of wolves thrive across America. Most who have been close to the wolf issue for the past couple of decades say that it was always the intention of such anti-hunting groups to eliminate hunting opportunities by destroying big game populations. And the wolf has become their tool of choice.

It is now clear to many that forcing wolves back on the Northern Rockies has had little to do with wildlife conservation. This project, which was deemed "***experimental and non-essential***" from the start, is simply a part of a much bigger picture - known as the "**Wild Lands Project**". This is another pipe dream of the environmental groups, who truly want people removed from the landscape - along with the highways, bridges, power supply lines and buildings. Their goal is to create a wilderness corridor that runs from Alaska, all along the Rocky Mountains, to Mexico.

One individual who has taken up the fight against federal bullying to push people from their lands and homes in the West has been former Chief of Operations for the National Wildlife Refuge System, Jim Beers.

*"The mating of wolves, a truly un-endangered species if ever there was one, with the Endangered Species Act has bred unimaginable harm to rural America. The past 30 years of federally-forced wolf introduction and federal protection have revealed a level of perfidy and Anti-Americanism on the part of environmental and animal rights organizations in league with federal bureaucracies and politicians that has resulted in the demolition of state sovereignty and the subjection of rural communities and families to the manipulated imaginings of urban elites. Big game hunting, ranching, rural economies, dog populations, and natural resource management on or near what are laughingly called 'public lands' are all disappearing as planned, along with rural land values as human health and safety threats from inevitable wolf attacks and infections and diseases from the increasing wolf populations as they spread across the Lower 48 states."* remarks Jim Beers.

In regard to the recently announced plans of one such environmental group, the **Center for Biological Diversity**, to see wolves returned to all of the continental U.S., Beers adds, *"Planned future releases and the disgraceful manipulation of courts to forbid any local say as to wolf locations or numbers all mean that either ESA is repealed or drastically amended to return all authority over wolves to state governments or rural Americans - and all those that love this country need to review the words and actions of our Founding Fathers when faced with the same sort of unjust rule by far away elites in 1776."*

To dump a non-endangered and non-native wolf into the Northern Rockies has likely already cost this country several billion in wildlife, livestock and economic losses - along with the several hundred million dollars that have been spent to keep this very failed project afloat. And with the wolf problem now exploding in the Upper Midwest, perhaps it's time to pull the plug on this ecological disaster, deem this *non-essential experiment* a failure, and save what can be saved. Then and only then, can the rebuilding of our wildlife resources begin. - **Toby Bridges, LOBO WATCH**

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