

The Sociopolitical Dimensions of Wolf Management and Restoration in the United States

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Abstract

This article examines the political cultural context and sociopolitical dimensions of wolf management and restoration in the United States. Drawing on the experiences of various wolf programs throughout the country, including New England, the Northern Rockies, Upper-Midwest, Southwest, and Yellowstone National Park, it documents how wolves are often used as a political symbol and surrogate for a number of socially significant policy issues. It also examines the politics of problem definition in the policymaking process. A “politics” model of public policy is used as an analytical framework to examine the following dimensions that are inextricably tied to the debate over wolf management and recovery: land use and the politics of ecosystem management; wilderness preservation; The Wildlands Project and the role of conservation biology in political decisionmaking; the merits and future of the Endangered Species Act; rural culture, concerns and interests; and the contested role of science and public participation in wildlife policymaking and management. The article ends with a discussion of how these sociopolitical and contextual variables affect political decisionmakers and those responsible for wolf management.

Keywords: *wolves, wolf reintroduction, wildlife policy, endangered species management*

Throughout the United States, wolves (*Canis lupus*) are returning to ancient paths and old landscapes. Whether on their own through natural recolonization, or by human intervention and active reintroduction, wolves are returning to various parts of the U.S. — gray wolves in the Northern Rockies (USFWS 1994), Upper-Midwest (USFWS 1992), the Mexican wolf in the Southwest (USFWS 1996), the red wolf in the Southeast (USFWS 1990), as well as more nascent and exploratory efforts in New England, the Pacific Northwest and the Southern Rockies. Their return, and the debate surrounding it, is one of the most important stories that will be told of wildlife policy and American environmentalism.

Similar to a number of other environmental issues and debates, wolf politics and policy is often about much more than just wolves and their management. The struggle over carnivore conservation is often a surrogate for broader cultural conflicts: “preservation versus use of resources, recreation-based economies versus extraction-dependent economies, urban versus rural values, and states’ rights versus federalism” (Primm and Clark 1996, 1037). In *The Wisdom of the Spotted Owl: Policy Lessons for a New Century*, Yaffee (1994a) documents how the spotted owl controversy in the Pacific Northwest transcended the overly simplistic “jobs versus owls” dichotomy to include a number of more complex sociopolitical and bureaucratic dimensions. According to Yaffee (1994b, 53), “Just as children and owls strongly reflect the environment in which they live, policy and management decisions are shaped by their sociopolitical context. To understand why things are the way they are, professionals and organizations need to understand this context. To ensure that good technical ideas are implemented effectively, they need to be able to deal with, and influence, this sociopolitical environment.” Furthermore, says Yaffee (1994a, 1994b), in the case of the northern spotted owl, as with other endangered species issues, what often appear to be simple conflicts are instead multidimensional ones with serious consequences for public policy and natural resource management.

Yaffee (1994b, 59) notes that the sociopolitical context of endangered species management is vitally important, “making them much more important and symbolic, and more difficult to resolve, than they would be otherwise.” This context has serious implications for wildlife agency organizational and professional behavior, and Yaffee therefore urges organizations and professionals to more seriously consider the sociopolitical dimensions of endangered species management. Yaffee’s work provides an important basis to ask the following: (1) What are the sociopolitical themes of various wolf management and reintroduction programs found throughout the United States? (2) What are the policy implications for decisionmakers, managers and successful human/wolf interaction? This research differs from the

important sociological work done in the area by focusing more directly on the political contours and policy-end of the debate (see, for example, Scarce 1998, Wilson 1997).

A number of research sources and methods were used throughout the "Wolf Policy Project." Document analysis (draft and final environmental impact statements, public opinion polls, transcripts from official proceedings, public comments), participant (stakeholder) observation, attending key meetings, and the use of a written survey questionnaire to gather background information were all used throughout the project. More than 30 formal and informal qualitative interviews, usually lasting for one hour or more, with key participants in wolf biology, policy and management throughout the country, provides the research with an important grounding in real-world concerns and concrete issues of significance. Dozens of other informal discussions have also been conducted. Prominent members of the conservation community, wolf advocates, wildlife managers, scientists and wolf biologists, academicians, ranchers and their representative organizations, hunters, and other important stakeholders were interviewed in 1999-2000. Personal interviews and discussions conducted in Colorado, Minnesota, Montana, West Yellowstone, Washington state, and Wisconsin were supplemented with extensive telephone interviews.

A Politics Model of Public Policy and Carnivore Conservation

There are important political, cultural and legal questions related to carnivore conservation that still need to be addressed. While critical work has been done in the area, social-science related gaps remain. Interdisciplinary approaches to wildlife and carnivore conservation are slowly becoming more mainstream and prevalent in the literature and the sciences (Jacobson and McDuff 1998). Uncovering the human dimensions of carnivore conservation, according to Jacobson and McDuff (1998, 265) involves research into "the beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, and socioeconomic, demographic, and organizational characteristics of the stakeholders involved in natural resource conservation issues." On a broader level, endangered species recovery also requires a more in-depth understanding of human values, public opinion, political and policy processes, agency culture and organizational behavior, and the flow of communication (Clark 1997; Clark et al. 1994). Conservation problems are, at their root, people problems. Whether or not wolves are hunted and trapped by the public in Minnesota after Endangered Species Act (ESA) delisting or successfully reestablished in New England are not fundamentally questions of science, but rather questions founded on values, ethics and politics.

The wolf continues to be an animal symbolizing larger cultural values, beliefs and fears (Hampton 1997; McNamee 1997; Kellert 1996; Kellert et al. 1996; Lopez 1978; Steinhart 1995). The abomination and violence migrating settlers displayed in ridding the frontier of wolves is instructive here — wilderness and the animals within it were interpreted as obstacles to progress (Nash 1967). As Lopez (1978) notes, the wolf not only became an object of pathological animosity but also a scapegoat for larger sociocultural and economic hardships. Values are not immutable however. As Aldo Leopold's (1949) personal transformation — seeing that "fierce green fire" in the eyes of a wolf die on a Southwestern mountain — so poignantly confirms, personal values and attitudes towards wolves and the natural environment can change. So can the values and beliefs of entire generations. While a deeply-seated animosity towards the wolf remains strong among a minority of Americans (Kellert 1996), for others, the wolf and its restoration now symbolizes our last chance to atone and make amends with wildlife and wilderness. The wolf has thus "functioned as a particularly powerful barometer of changing and conflicting attitudes toward wildlife" (Kellert et al. 1996, 978). New generations are interpreting the wolf and other large carnivores using a different set of environmental values in an altogether different historical and sociocultural context (Mech 1996). Both support for, and opposition towards, wolf restoration is thus better understood using a political framework acknowledging the importance of cultural history and political symbolism — two key components in the art of political decisionmaking.

Wolf politics and policy will confound even the most rigorous techno-rational and scientific approach to policy analysis. This is in large part due to the fact that participants and decisionmakers in the debate cannot agree on the debate's parameters or what issues are even being debated. The rational decisionmaking policy model often looks something like this: (1) policy objectives are identified, (2) alternative courses of action for achieving these objectives are identified, (3) possible consequences of each alternative are predicted, (4) each possible consequence of each alternative is evaluated, and finally (5) the best alternative that maximizes the attainment of objectives is selected. It is a framework that is embedded, at least from surface appearances, in most environmental assessments and environmental impact statements. Such an approach to politics and public policy has an important lineage, from the scientific management paradigm put forth during the progressive era to calls made for a "science of administration."

Those immersed in wolf politics and policy, however much they may pine for a more rational, scientific and orderly way of making it, will recognize the over-simplicity of the

rationality model. This rationality project, according to Stone (1997, 17), not only misses the point of politics but also “grossly distorts political life.” While there are certainly stages of policymaking that can be both analyzed and improved, wolf politics cannot be adequately understood using such a mechanistic assembly-line model. Unlike the rationality model, the politics model of public policy recognizes the importance of the following factors often missing from a purely techno-rational analysis: community and conceptions of the public interest; groups and organizations, as opposed to individuals, being the basic building blocks of politics; culture, influence and socialization; the role of history and loyalty; myths and images; cooperation, coordination, coalition-building and strategic alliances; how information is interpreted, imperfect, framed and strategically withheld; and finally, how the essence of policymaking is the struggle over ideas — the “very stuff of politics” (Stone 1997, 32). These ideas, social constructions and competing visions of the public interest are at the heart of wolf politics and policy.

The Wolf Policy “Problem”: The Politics of Problem Definition

Problem definition is the first stage of the policymaking process. How a policy issue becomes “framed,” and a problem defined is critical because it alters the way we think, talk and approach a policy issue. It determines what issues get on the governmental agenda, and how they will be implemented — if implemented at all. The process is a contested one, with competing individuals, interests and organizations trying to sell their preferred definition of the problem. The defining process occurs in a number of ways, but each has major implications for an issue’s political standing, perceptions of legitimacy, and the types of policy solutions that are advanced. Say Rochefort and Cobb (1994, 3), “By dramatizing or downplaying the problem and by declaring what is at stake, these descriptions help to push an issue onto the front burners of policymaking or result in officials’ stubborn inaction and neglect.”

These competitors fully understand that how an issue becomes framed and a problem defined favors some players and solutions over others. Weiss (1989, 116) contends that problem definition relies on “a package of concepts, symbols, and theories” that energizes and empowers some interests while silencing others. And in Stone’s (1997, 154) politics model, “Problem definition in the polis is always strategic, designed to call in reinforcements for one’s own side in a conflict — strategic problem definition usually means portraying a problem so that one’s favored course of action appears to be in the broad public interest.” These problems,

according to Stone (1997, 155), “are created in the minds of citizens by other citizens, leaders, organizations, and government agencies, as an essential part of political maneuvering.” The language and symbols used in problem definition thus legitimate and mobilize some values while discounting others.

Problem definition is an important problem-solving tool as well. One comprehensive assessment of its use with carnivore conservation concludes that “problem definition should be viewed as the key analytic and technical tool for developing effective, practical solutions to carnivore conservation” (Clark et al. 1996, 947). The importance of problem definition in endangered species management is illustrated by the black-footed ferret recovery program in Wyoming. The black-footed ferret — widely considered the most endangered mammal in the United States — was once thought by many to be extinct. In 1981, however, a small population was discovered in northwestern Wyoming. A captive breeding program was soon initiated, and some ferrets were reintroduced back into the wild in 1991. As allowed under Section 6 of the ESA, the federal government gave Wyoming, specifically the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGF), primary responsibility for ferret restoration.

This management program has been extensively studied by Clark (1997) who is highly critical of the way in which WGF defined the ferret problem. According to Clark’s analysis, WGF defined the problem in a number of important ways. It was defined as a states’ rights issue for example. This definition, says Clark (1997, 141), “figured prominently in the agency’s relationships with all other participants and had paramount consequences for how all aspects of the ferret program were structured and carried out.” In short, “WGF would run the show, the federal government would pay for it, and all other participants would be subordinate to this arrangement” (Clark 1997, 142). Closely associated with this states’ rights definition, says Clark, was the agency’s bureaucratic management orthodoxy. Defining the problem this way, “Only a very limited range of structural and operational options was thus deemed plausible, namely, those that maintained or enhanced agency power and constituted the program along bureaucratic lines” (Clark 1997, 143). Scientific conservatism was another dominant problem definition used by the agency. As such, there was the time-honored practice of calling for yet more study and research instead of taking necessary action. Like most recovery efforts since the ESA, says Clark (1997, 147), “the ferret program was thus largely cast as a scientific problem. Even through ferret protection had widespread social, economic, and political implications, the language of ferret recovery remained fundamentally scientific and technical.” Clark also places this problem definition and “package of ideas” in its larger subcultural context:

“the strength of certain political symbols in Wyoming (and the region) — states’ rights, individual and property rights, and scorn for the federal government, environmentalists, and easterners — provided a highly favorable medium for WGF’s definition” (Clark 1997, 157).

Clark’s “ferret problem” sheds important light on how the wolf recovery and management issue has been framed and the problem defined. Many of Clark’s definitional themes are found in various wolf cases as well. What differs perhaps is the extraordinary symbolic quality of the wolf debate and the sheer number of players involved. And of course ferrets do not eat cows, sheep or elk. Nonetheless, various interests have attempted to define the “wolf problem” in a way that advances their vision of the public interest and their hand in the game. Wolves and wilderness, wolves as science and management problem, wolves and ecological restoration, wolves as federal Trojan horse, and wolves and the urban exploitation of rural communities are but a few of the ways in which participants have tried to define the problem. If the public and political decisionmakers accept that the wolf problem stems from too many cows and not enough wilderness, then both wolves and wilderness go forward. If, on the other hand, the issue is one of federal intrusiveness, then wolves, the ESA and the FWS are on trial. While not all of these symbol and surrogate issues have been used in problem definition, many of them have with serious implications for how we approach “the wolf problem.”

The Sociopolitical Dimensions of Wolf Management and Restoration

The following are some of the more prominent sociopolitical themes and cultural contours that together provide the context of the wolf management and restoration debate.

Land Use and the Politics of Ecosystem Management

Wolves are an important political symbol not only because of what they may do, but what some feel they may preclude others from doing. Questions and controversies pertaining to land use dominate this debate. Many in the wise use movement believe that wolf recovery, especially reintroduction in the American West, is a ruse and political ploy for more regulatory federal lands management, therefore posing a serious threat to rural communities, extractive industries, and the sanctity of private property and individual freedom. Despite promises made to the contrary, some fear that traditional uses of public land and private property will be jeopardized by more wolves in more places.

Nowhere are the divergent meanings and varying social constructions of wolves more apparent than in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE). This important ecosystem

has provided the arena in which environmentalists and wise-users debate not only wolf reintroduction but also the future of land use and land use planning on the public domain, shifts in economic power, the meaning and balance of nature and the human role in it (Cawley and Freemuth 1993). Says Wilson (1997, 454), “This is not really a story about wolves, but a story about people and their struggle to define the future of land use in the American West — it is within this highly charged political context that the wolf in Yellowstone must be understood as a symbol, ‘a biopolitical pawn’ in a much larger conflict currently being waged between the activists of two social movements — environmentalism and wise use.” Scarce (1998) finds the Yellowstone wolf debate even more complex, with a number of different socially constructed factors being played out in themes of control/power and self-determination/freedom.

The shift from a multiple-use resource-based paradigm (resourcism) to a more wholistic and participatory ecosystem management paradigm is often central in the debate over wolf recovery. Ecosystem management (in theory and sometimes in practice) is a dramatic break from the traditional resource management paradigm (Lackey 1997). According to Cortner and Moote (1999, 37), “Traditional resource management is pragmatic, seeing in nature a collection of resources that can be manipulated and harvested, with humans in control. Ecosystem management, on the other hand, views nature with some reverence and respect for the awesome complexity with which its components are interwoven. Protection of ecosystem attributes and functions, particularly biodiversity, is critical.” Ecosystem management accentuates the intrinsic values and natural conditions of the environment, seeks ecological sustainability as a management priority, and is considered more flexible, adaptive, inclusive, participatory, and decentralized than traditional resource management.

Key participants in the wolf debate see this potential paradigm shift in much different ways. Environmentalists frame their arguments for wolves in the context of healthy, balanced and well-functioning ecosystems — wolves are a key component of any attempt at serious ecosystem management. Wolves and other predators are but one part, although an important one, of these larger natural processes. It is not just about wolves, but about such things as unchecked ungulate populations, native flora under pressure from these populations, and other complex biological relationships and ecological cycles we do not yet fully understand. They therefore urge public land agencies to move away from a strict utilitarian (“multiple abuse”) model towards one with more well-balanced management principles.

Many living within the GYE see this shift in management as a potential threat however. One survey shows that nearly two-thirds of rural community residents in the GYE

fear that ecosystem management will result in greater government control, and some 70 percent believing that it represents an attempt by government to control development of lower elevation lands (Reading et al. 1994). Wolves remain inextricably tied to the debate over ecosystem management. It is a step in the right direction say environmentalists, indicative of what needs to be done in other ecosystems with other species, from lynx to grizzly bears. For others, however, it is symbolic of a radical biocentric environmentalism becoming formally institutionalized in land management and wildlife agencies, and done so at the peril of traditional customs, cultures and rural communities.

Wilderness Preservation, The Wildlands Project and the Role of Conservation Biology in Political Decisionmaking

Wolves can survive outside of formal wilderness areas (Mech 1995). Due to a range of factors, however, including the willingness of humans to live with the animal, the wolf's future has been inextricably tied to the fate of American wilderness. Long-term and large-scale carnivore conservation is thought by many to require the existence and enlargement of either officially-classified wilderness areas or at least sparsely populated environments in which human/predator conflict can be minimized (Grumbine 1992). The wolf figures prominently in the fight over wilderness preservation and the enlargement of either federally classified wilderness or additional roadless areas. For many wolf advocates, the wolf symbolizes the virtues and necessity of wilderness — how close we have come to losing it and the possibility of safeguarding its future.

The political relationship between wilderness and wolves has been recently documented in the case of Mexican wolf reintroduction in the American Southwest. The Center for Biological Diversity believes officially classified wilderness is absolutely essential for successful wolf recovery in the Southwest. The Center, among dozens of other environmental groups, contends that wolves were released in Arizona's non-wilderness Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area (BRWRA) instead of the official Gila wilderness of New Mexico because of New Mexico's powerful livestock industry. The Center advocates that the Blue Range be designated as formal wilderness and that a second primary recovery zone be used further east in the Gila/Aldo Leopold wilderness complex. The Center believes that the Gila/Leopold offers a safer haven for wolves than does the Blue Range. The group also believes that the BRWRA and the Gila/Leopold wilderness complex should be connected by biological corridors allowing for easier wolf travel, that the U.S. Forest Service should begin closing unnecessary roads within the entire

recovery area, and that all grazing permits within the primary recovery areas and travel corridors should be phased out (Center for Biological Diversity 1998).

The political wolf-wilderness relationship is also evident in New England and will likely become even more so in the future. RESTORE: The North Woods, a visionary conservation organization in New England, made a conscious and deliberate attempt to tie the fate of wolves to that of wilderness as a way to get the public thinking of the two as synergistic, inseparable and complimentary. Instead of a perceived myopic concentration on one single species, they work in a more wholistic fashion to bring back biodiversity and the evolutionary process to New England. A psychological shift is needed, they say, to get the public thinking of the North Woods as an ecosystem — wilderness and wolves — and not just as a woodlot and "working forest." They thus wage simultaneous battles to bring back the wolf to the Northeast while also proposing the controversial Maine Woods National Park.

The Wildlands Project (TWP) is also unmistakably interwoven into the story of wolf management and restoration. The mission of TWP is both simple and sweeping,

to protect and restore the natural heritage of North America through the establishment of a connected system of wildlands — To stem the disappearance of wildlife and wilderness we must allow the recovery of whole ecosystems and landscapes in every region in North America — we live for the day when grizzlies in Chihuahua have an unbroken connection to grizzlies in Alaska; when wolf populations are restored from Mexico to the Yukon; when vast forests and flowing prairies again thrive and support their full assemblage of native plants and animals; when humans dwell with respect, harmony, and affection for the land; when we come to live no longer as conquerors but as respectful citizens in the land community (The Wildlands Project 2000, 4).

Although considered radical in its scope and mission by its opponents and the wise use contingent, TWP has been endorsed by several scientific luminaries including E.O. Wilson of Harvard University. Many of its ideas, albeit watered down, have also found their way into formal planning measures such as Florida's plan to protect the Panther. The now common use of terms such as "The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem" is also an example of how many basic tenets of the project have become mainstream. The scientific basis of the TWP is based largely on the work of conservation biology (Soule and Terborgh 1999). Both recognize the same basic features of "rewilding:" large, strictly protected core reserves, connectivity and keystone species.

These are the three C's of rewilding: cores, corridors, and carnivores. TWP and many conservation biologists focus on large predators like the wolf for a number of reasons: the diversity and resilience of ecosystems is often maintained by top predators, they require habitat connectivity for their long-term viability, and they often require large core areas and thus justify bigness.

Wolves are important focal species according to TWP because their requirements for survival also represent factors important to maintaining ecologically healthy conditions. According to the TWP, "If native large carnivores have been extirpated from a region, their reintroduction and recovery is central to a conservation strategy. Wolves, grizzlies, cougars, lynx, wolverines, black bears, jaguars, and other top carnivores need to be restored throughout North America in the natural ranges" (Foreman et al. 2000, 20). While advocates of wolf reintroduction are not necessarily proponents of TWP, wherever there have been ideas or plans of wolf reintroduction, there are also ideas or plans for rewilding — the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, The Southern Rockies Ecosystem Project, the Greater Laurentian Wildlands Project, the Appalachian Restoration Campaign, and others. In Southern Colorado's San Juan Mountains, for instance, the struggle over wilderness and reintroducing large predators like the wolf seem at times indistinguishable. The Wild San Juans wildlands network advocates restoring natural carnivores to the area; protecting and expanding large, wild core habitats; securing critical landscape corridors, and "rewilding the San Juans" in the process.

Safeguarding roadless land within core areas is a major goal of the project. From this point, it is easy to see why TWP is so controversial. Many of those opposed to wolf recovery see wolf reintroduction as one part of a much larger and more radical and restrictive environmental agenda. Terms such as "wildlife highways" and "biological corridors" are not only understood by opponents of wolf recovery but are also used as evidence "that these environmentalists want a lot more than just wolves."

As can be surmised from above, there are various pillars of conservation biology that reappear in the debate over wolf recovery. Among other principles, conservation biology accentuates the importance of large areas of interconnected wildlands for predators and biodiversity in general, the perils of habitat loss and fragmentation, the importance of greater ecosystems, and the need for biological corridors for wildlife movement and genetic diversity. The political struggle over wolves, wilderness and larger wildlands is often based on the assumptions, concepts and tools of this conservation-based science. In parts of the conservation community, however, its proper role is contested.

In Adirondack Park of New York, for example, there are important questions pertaining to the biological and ecological feasibility of a persistent wolf population due to such factors as habitat fragmentation, lack of biological corridors and connectivity, and the general risks of wolves being reintroduced into a human-dominated landscape. One controversial biological assessment of reintroducing wolves into the Adirondacks recommended against it due to these basic tenets of conservation biology. Commissioned to study the biological feasibility of Adirondack wolf reintroduction, the Conservation Biology Institute concluded:

we do not believe gray wolves can be permanently reestablished in the AP [Adirondack Park]. Though our analyses suggest that the AP comprises sufficient habitat to support a small population of gray wolves, regional conditions are not conducive to sustaining wolves over the long term (e.g., 100 years) — a small population might exist for, say 50 years. However, we should not confuse existence with persistence. The latter implies perpetuity, which we believe is the unstated objective of most reintroductions (Paquet et al. 1999, 40-41).

Given this regional isolation, the Institute believes that reintroduced gray wolves would face the typical problems associated with island species and small populations. Consequently, in the Adirondacks, any serious discussion of wolf reintroduction also includes a concomitant discussion of conservation biology — what it is and what role should it play in political decisionmaking. While conservationists have been quite receptive to a science verifying the importance of their agenda, when that science cuts the other way, some of the assumptions and tools of that science suddenly become up for debate.

The Merits and Future of the Endangered Species Act

Essential to understanding both wolf management and reintroduction programs underway throughout the United States is the ESA of 1973 (Keiter and Holscher 1990). As the pace of unprecedented extinction quickens, the ESA — its potential and failures — become more evident as well as politically manipulated. Since 1973, only eleven species have been removed from the endangered species list due to successful recovery (CRS 1998). This number is used by both supporters of the act, whom want it either strengthened or better funded and implemented, as well as by opponents, whom use it as evidence that the act is unworkable and should be modified or repealed. The wolf has become once

again an important political symbol. This time, it either represents political validation of the much-beleaguered ESA, or yet another example of the act's social and economic costs.

Successful wolf recovery is beginning to be used as an example of the act's potential and fulfilled expectations. Delisting the gray wolf in the Upper-Midwest, for instance, would certainly be one of the act's most symbolic achievements. With little national attention and fanfare, gray wolves in Minnesota, Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan have been successfully restored with approximately 2,500 wolves in Minnesota (estimated at 750 in 1970), 200 wolves in the Upper Peninsula (estimated at six in 1973, and with an additional 29 on Isle Royale) and 250 in Wisconsin (zero in 1973) (see, for example, Michigan DNR 1997, Minnesota DNR 1999, Wisconsin DNR 1999). Perhaps more politically important, their recovery, while certainly not free of controversy, has taken place without many political fears and apprehensions being legitimized: deer and moose populations have not been devastated, extractive industries such as timber and mining have not been threatened; and the livestock industry, while experiencing some wolf depredation, has not been ruined.

Wolves have also become entangled with what some see as too much compromise and capitulation in implementing the ESA. The most controversial aspect of wolf recovery in the Northern Rockies and Yellowstone National Park, for example, has proven to be the designation of reintroduced wolves in central Idaho and Yellowstone as "nonessential, experimental" populations. This designation was proposed as a way to give the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) greater flexibility in the management of wolves in these areas. The designation has been used with different species as a way to facilitate management and lessen state, local and industry concerns over various land use restrictions. Concerned about the few number of species successfully removed from the ESA list, and the belief that people were often more afraid of the law and its restrictions than the animals themselves, Congress amended the ESA in 1982. Pragmatic political representatives believed that by providing the FWS more managerial flexibility, species recovery could be facilitated in a less controversial political climate. In the ranching country of the Northern Rockies, this designation was chosen as the "preferred alternative" in order to appease local landowners and livestock operators, and to ensure them that wolf reintroduction would not unduly jeopardize regular ways of doing business. Unlike wolves that are protected as "endangered" in northwest Montana, wolves in central Idaho and Yellowstone could be killed or removed from an area in certain circumstances, such as evidence that there has been livestock depredation.

Believing that human-induced mortality is one of the greatest barriers to successful wolf recovery in this region, the FWS attempted to demonstrate, with the experimental designation as its primary tool, that federal agencies would act quickly to alleviate depredation problems (FWS 1987). Broadly stated, this debate pits the legislative intent of the original ESA versus the ability of a bureaucracy to effectively and flexibly implement this legislation. It is a conflict that is hardly unique in politics and public administration. With this statutory clause, Congress has given the FWS an ability to maneuver in a complicated and divisive political and cultural environment. From the perspective of the FWS, like that of many other agencies, this type of managerial flexibility is essential if wolves are to have more than just paper support and protection. In other words, some believe that protecting wolves on paper is different than protecting wolves on the ground. To do the latter, many managers believe that state, local and community concerns must be seriously and honestly dealt with, and if they are not, successful wolf recovery over the long-term is improbable.

On the other hand, this type of compromise and capitulation seriously divided the nation's conservation community and this rift is still apparent in many circles.² In the Northern Rockies and Yellowstone, the debate over wolves is politically loaded with these important questions pertaining to "selling out" versus "getting things done." Again, the debate here goes well beyond wolves. It is also about appropriate political strategy, the ethics of compromise and the difficulties of coalition-building.

Rural Culture, Concerns and Interests

Wolves, like a number of other threatened and endangered species, have provided another opportunity to discuss and debate the role and future of rural places and communities. Often bound with the fate of unpredictable commodity markets and extractive economies, some see the wolf, and the danger it poses to livestock, as yet another assault on rural communities. Some rural citizens also view wolf support as being a largely urban phenomenon. For instance, while wolf support is generally favorable in both urban and rural areas, urban residents (those in the Twin Cities of Minnesota and Albuquerque, New Mexico for example) are also generally more supportive of wolves and their reintroduction than are residents of rural areas (Duda and Young, 1995; Kellert 1999).

Rural places throughout the nation are facing a number of daunting challenges. As Renee Askins (1995, 115), executive director of the Wolf Fund, a Moose, Wyoming-based organization that worked for the return of the wolf to Yellowstone, emphasizes in an often repeated quote:

If I were a rancher I probably would not want wolves returned to the West. If I faced the conditions that ranchers face in the West — falling stock prices, rising taxes, prolonged drought, and a nation that is eating less beef and wearing more synthetics — I would not want to add wolves to my woes. If I were a rancher in Montana, Idaho or Wyoming in 1995, watching my neighbors give up and my way of life fade away, I would be afraid and I would be angry. I would want to blame something, to fight something, even kill something.

Some believe that if such a hearing and public outreach does not take place, wolf restoration will be seen as yet one more example — from the move towards corporate agriculture to falling beef prices — of what little regard the government has for a quickly disintegrating culture. As one rancher informed me, while international markets and corporatization can be quite complex, wolves are relatively simple and can fit straight into the scope of a rifle.

Throughout the U.S., wolves have provided a lens through which to evaluate the power and political strategies of various rural industries, interest groups and organizations. Like the northern spotted owl and the timber industry, wolves are similarly intertwined with ranching culture and the livestock industry. This industry and its political representation have largely structured the basic parameters of both wolf management and restoration efforts. Wolves are being reintroduced, for example, in Idaho, Yellowstone and the Southwest under the ESA's nonessential, experimental designation because of pressure placed on political representatives and the FWS by the livestock industry. For critics of this industry, wolves provide the latest opportunity to attack the economic and ecological costs of the Western ranching culture, as well as what is perceived as the "captured" nature of the FWS. Says Goble (1992, 101), "The wolf represents a threat — both philosophically and economically — to the industry's entrenched subsidies. In attempting to placate this politically powerful industry, the agency charged with protecting the wolf has itself violated the Endangered Species Act."

Tribal Participation and Management Authority

Wolf recovery and reintroduction in various regions of the country has provided an opportunity for many in the debate to reexamine the role of tribes in wildlife policymaking and management. First Nations play an important but confusing role in the story of wolf recovery. First of course, there is no one tribal role. Instead, there are literally dozens. To confuse matters even more, there are often different rules

and regulations pertaining to fish and wildlife management that are specific to a particular band, not the tribe as a whole. For example, in northern Minnesota, northern Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, the eleven bands of the Chippewa (often referred to as Ojibwe or Anishinabe), could in theory have eleven different sets of wolf management rules and regulations. While the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC), an intertribal organization, helps ensure that off-reservation hunting and fishing rights guaranteed by various treaties are protected, there is little they do pertaining to fish and wildlife policy on the various reservations. These reservations are not as large as those found further west. Nevertheless, it does illustrate the managerial complexity faced here, as well as the need for meaningful intergovernmental (international) communication and cooperation. Wolves will increasingly find themselves in a complicated federal, state and tribal legal landscape, many with different management guidelines, cultures and values.

Idaho's staunch political resistance to the FWS reintroducing wolves into central Idaho opened the door to tribal participation and wolf management responsibilities. The Nez Perce tribe acquired the role, as outlined in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), the state of Idaho did not want. As the Idaho House voted down the revised state wolf management plan, with one member contending that the issue had "little to do with wolves and lots to do with state sovereignty," the Nez Perce and FWS worked out a cooperative management and recovery plan (Wilson 1999, 553). This five-year agreement gave the tribe responsibility, with FWS funding and oversight, over tracking and monitoring, disseminating information, and public education. Unlike the state of Idaho, the Nez Perce — a member of the EIS advisory team and wolf recovery planning participant — actively sought out an important role for the tribe in wolf recovery. In the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, for example, the tribe stressed that it wanted to be a participant in program management and that whatever alternative was chosen, the tribe "should be 'a' or 'the' major player in wolf recovery" (Wilson 1999, 554).

The symbolic importance of Nez Perce wolf management is hard to miss. According to Jaime Pinkham (1999) of the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee, their wolf recovery effort put a spotlight on the tribe for a couple of reasons. First, this was the first time that an Indian tribe had taken the lead role in the reintroduction of an endangered species under the ESA. And second, "It highlighted the fact that a tribe has the scientific capability as well as the political savvy to take on a project such as this" (1999). Despite the historic role that the Nez Perce have played in wolf recovery in Idaho, an important question lingers: what happens, and what role does the tribe, in relation to the state of Idaho, play upon

future delisting and state wolf management? While the tribe would like to continue playing a role, it also understands the state's traditional wildlife authority and management responsibilities.

Unlike the Nez Perce in Idaho, the San Carlos Apache and White Mountain Apache (or Fort Apache), both located immediately to the west of the BRWRA in Arizona, initially adopted resolutions opposing Mexican wolf recovery in the BRWRA (USFWS 1996). For both tribal governments, livestock depredation and budgetary constraints were important concerns. Also significant, however, both reservations generate significant revenue from non-tribal member game hunting. For the San Carlos Apache, for instance, trophy elk hunting by non-members provides approximately \$500,000 in hunting revenues annually. Significant revenue is also generated by small game hunting, trapping and fees from guiding. It is much the same for the 1.63 million acre White Mountain Apache who generated approximately \$1 million in non-member hunting revenues in 1995, and annually sell trophy elk permits at \$11,000 each (USFWS 1996). The impact of wolves on game species migrating onto the reservation is therefore a major concern. For the San Carlos Apache, as with other Anglo populations near the BRWRA, wolves are often seen as another threat to an insecure rural economy. Not only do multiple-family and tribal cattle operations exist on the San Carlos reservation, but these families, as do other tribal members, face numerous economic hardships.

Science and Public Participation in Wolf Management and Policymaking

While questions regarding the "what of wolf policy" are indeed controversial, questions regarding the "how and who of wolf policy" are often as equally contentious. Who should be the primary decisionmakers — elected representatives, trained wildlife biologists and scientists, residents of affected areas, the national public-at-large? Who are the direct and indirect stakeholders — rural local citizens, ranchers, environmentalists? How much weight should their voices be given? How should decisions be made — top-down, executive order, participatory and discursive design, by initiative and referendum? The role of science and scientists and that of public participation has been, and will continue to be, a central theme in the debate over wolves and their management. This issue is related to calls made for making wildlife agencies more open to individuals and groups outside of government and as a way of promoting cooperation (Clark et al. 1994b).

Wolves are being managed and reintroduced during an unprecedented trend in the use of stakeholders, collaboration

and consensus-building in environmental management and decisionmaking (Cestero 1999; Chess et al. 1998; Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000). Constantly seeping into the debate over wolves in various regions and states are issues pertaining to who should be making wolf-related management and policy decisions. For example, as states in the Northern Rockies and Upper-Midwest prepare their state wolf management plans for FWS approval (after possible delisting from the endangered species list), each state agency is giving careful thought to the role and weight that stakeholders should have in the process. Deciding on how decisions should be made — from the proper balance of scientists and stakeholders to deciding on who should be invited to the decisionmaking table — have often been as controversial as questions more specifically related to wolves and their management.

Wolves are among the most studied species in the world. With such knowledge, along with the significant strides made in wildlife monitoring and management, some scientists believe that they should have primary responsibility for managing wolves. Others, however, noting the significant sociopolitical, economic and cultural elements of wolf recovery, as well as the lack of consensus in some areas of wolf science, believe that the public, in one form or another, should have a preeminent role in setting management objectives and guidelines.

The FWS has allowed states flexibility in how they devise their wolf management plans, insofar as they ensure the survival of the wolf at or above recovery levels. Minnesota's first Wolf Management Plan (subsequently rejected by the Minnesota state legislature), for example, was created using a series of public meetings followed by an eight-day stakeholders' discussion (Minnesota Wolf Management Roundtable) that led to a consensus agreement on state wolf management. The roundtable was comprised of representatives from environmental, agricultural, hunting, trapping, and wolf advocate organizations, government agencies, and other affected citizens and stakeholders. The purpose of the roundtable was not perfunctory nor merely advisory: the commissioner of Minnesota's Department of Natural Resources pledged support of the roundtable consensus, whatever that may be, as long as it assured the survival of the wolf and the recommendations were "biologically sound."

Local citizen input regarding wolves and other large carnivores such as the grizzly bear is often criticized by environmentalists in the American West who most often fear that domination by cattle and extractive industry interests will be disguised under the pretense of "public participation." Wolf managers in Minnesota, however, struggled with quite a different problem: what happens when the public, as represent-

ed by the wolf roundtable, advocate more wolves than many federal scientists and managers want or think they can effectively manage? Along with a number of other important recommendations, the roundtable agreed that wolves in Minnesota should be allowed to naturally expand their range in the state, and in order to assure their continued survival the minimum statewide winter population goal was set at 1,600 wolves with no maximum goal or ceiling. The numbers recommended by the roundtable were above those stated in the 1992 *Recovery Plan for the Eastern Timber Wolf* placing optimal populations in the 1,250-1,400 range in wilderness and semi-wilderness locales. The 1992 plan justified such recommendations as a way to both ensure wolf survival in the state, produce enough dispersers to help repopulate adjacent states while at the same time minimizing human/wolf conflicts.

One of the most consequential developments in Minnesota's imminent wolf management was thus the disparity between scientific and public management of the state's wolves. Prominent wolf biologist David Mech, for example, an ardent and long-time wolf advocate and chair of the World Conservation Union's (formerly IUCN) Wolf Specialist Group, feared that roundtable recommendations regarding the wolf population would likely lead to increased livestock depredation, exacerbated human/wolf conflicts (especially as they disperse outside of wilderness and into agricultural areas), and public backlash (Mech 1998). Furthermore, Mech was concerned that once wolf numbers got as high as those recommended by the roundtable, attempts at controlling wolf populations would become more difficult, time-consuming and expensive, if even possible (Mech 1998).

Mech is quite critical of various interest groups having such an important voice in the management of Minnesota's wolves. Not only does he believe that biologists should be making these decisions rather than stakeholders, but that political decisionmakers in other wolf reintroduction projects are watching Minnesota, and if they see that once wolves are reintroduced, management is taken out of the hands of professionals, they will be much less likely to move forward with the reintroductions. Mech believes that wolf reintroduction is contingent upon proving to local communities, the public-at-large and policymakers that the animal can be successfully and scientifically managed, and if such management is taken away from the wildlife professional and given to special interests in whatever guise, global wolf restoration will be halted. Furthermore, says Mech, provisions for strict population control was the premise to wolf restoration in the Northern Rockies, the Southwest and North Carolina.

Conclusion

Similar to the case of the northern spotted owl, wolf management and restoration transcends issues strictly pertaining to wolf behavior. This examination of the sociopolitical dimensions of wolf management and restoration builds upon the work of others whom earlier recognized that species endangerment cannot be separated from context for "they are inextricably intertwined," and that by "attempting to restore species by ignoring everything but the species' biology invites failure" (Clark et al. 1994b, 419-420). From owls to grizzlies, "Many obstacles to species restoration are rooted in the valuational, economic, or political dimensions of the situation" (Clark et al. 1994b, 420). Such contextual mapping and wholistic approaches, moreover, are important to those responsible for wolf management and reintroduction programs. As noted by Yaffee (1994b, 70-71) in the case of the spotted owl, "The success in future efforts to protect biological diversity will depend in large part on how well agencies and professionals understand and act within this sociopolitical context." Those closest to wolf management and restoration now recognize the growing importance of these human dimensions (see Bangs et al. 1998, 797).

As the debate over wolves (and the next step of state wolf management) proceeds, it is important to recognize these larger cultural and sociopolitical issues and concerns. From the possibility of wolf reintroduction in New England to the more established programs of the Upper-Midwest, Northern Rockies and Southwest, wolves will continue to be about more than just wolves. These sociopolitical dimensions and competing problem definitions certainly make wolf conservation and restoration complicated and acrimonious. On the other hand, they also provide another opportunity to better understand and more fundamentally address these important issues. There is little doubt why the wolf remains such an important symbol and surrogate — in facing the future of the wolf, we are unmistakably facing our own.

Endnotes

1. mnie@d.umn.edu
2. The debate over how the ESA should be implemented, and whether or not it should be implemented at all, culminated in litigation over wolves in Yellowstone. The original litigation first began by a lawsuit filed by the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) who were represented by the Mountain States Legal Foundation (a wise-use oriented organization opposing wolf restoration). This lawsuit claimed that the nonessential, experimental status of reintroduced wolves threatened the health and protected status of wolves that were possibly already in the area, as well as those that would disperse there, therefore jeopardizing naturally recolonized wolves that were claimed to already be in Yellowstone. The AFBF used the experi-

mental clause as a way in which to halt active reintroduction, and force newly reintroduced wolves to be removed. A few environmental organizations also found themselves uncomfortably sided with their traditional adversaries in this lengthy legal battle. Unlike the AFBF, however, these organizations opposed the use of the experimental designation because they believed it not only endangered naturally recolonized wolves, but that reintroduced wolves should be afforded the maximum protection allowed under the ESA. These cases were later combined into a single case and heard by the Federal District Court in Wyoming in 1994. In a controversial ruling, the court claimed that the experimental designation did reduce protection of "endangered" wolves from northwest Montana that may naturally disperse into the experimental area of Yellowstone. This ruling was later overturned by the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver.

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