



**OREGON
WILD**

Wolves – Misunderstood

Wolves & Humans (pg. 2-5)

- 1) Wolves are not a serious threat to humans.
- 2) Wolves are not a serious threat to the ranching industry.
- 3) Wolf recovery has positive economic benefits.
- 4) Wolves affect game species. They do not wipe them out.
- 5) Wolves are a native species.
- 6) Hunting wolves does not reduce conflict.
- 7) Wolves are already heavily managed.
- 8) Wolves and humans can coexist.

Wolves & Politics (pg. 6-7)

- 1) Oregon has a wolf management plan.
- 2) Oregon's wolf plan allows the state to kill "problem wolves".
- 3) Oregon's wolves are not currently protected as a federally endangered species.
- 4) Anti-wolf interests are actively trying to undermine Oregon's wolf management plan.
- 5) Current wolf recovery numbers are too low and the result of political compromise.

Wolves & other animals (pg. 8)

- 1) Wolves have a positive impact on the landscape.
- 2) Wolves do not "kill for fun".
- 3) Wolves do not decimate game herds.
- 4) Wolves have not introduced new diseases in the west.

Oregon Wild & Wolves (pg. 9-10)

- 1) Oregon Wild supports wolf recovery in Oregon.
- 2) Oregon Wild supports the Oregon Wolf Plan.
- 3) What happens in other states matters in Oregon.
- 4) Oregon Wild is not opposed to hunting.
- 5) Oregon Wild and other conservation groups are not "getting rich" by advocating for wolves.

Works cited – page 11-13



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Wolves & Humans

1) Wolves are not a threat to humans.

Wolves have the tools to kill animals much larger than humans and should be respected. However there have been a total of two deaths attributed to healthy wild wolves in North America since before 1900. So, what should you do if you see a wolf? Grab your camera! ^{1, 2, 3, 40}

2) Wolves are not a serious threat to the ranching industry.

Wolves are opportunists and, like us, sometimes eat livestock. However, they have a relatively small impact on the ranching industry. Declining meat prices, increased land prices, disease, weather, and even human thieves are much bigger threats ⁴.

Much like shark attacks, wolf depredations can make for startling photos and grisly stories, so the threat of wolves to livestock is greatly magnified. Some studies have even indicated that in some circumstances wolves may actually decrease livestock losses by keeping smaller predators like coyotes in check ²¹. An article recently published in the journal of Ecological Economics found that wolf depredations account for less than 0.01% of the annual gross income of ranchers in Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana. ⁴

- Since wolves returned to Oregon in the late 1990's, they have killed 29 lambs, 7 calves, and 1 goat. By comparison, in 2005 alone 700 sheep were killed by domestic dogs and 200 were killed by eagles in Oregon. ⁵
- In 2005, human thieves took 5 times as many livestock as wolves in MT, ID, and WY. ⁴
- In Minnesota, a state with nearly 300 times as many wolves as Oregon, they were responsible for 0.65% of cattle losses in 2005. ⁹
- A single Montana storm in the spring of 2009 killed 2,260 sheep and calves. In all of the preceding year, 188 were lost to wolves. ^{7, 8}

We sometimes hear that wolf losses are underrepresented or attributed to other predators. Here are some interesting cattle loss numbers from Idaho in 2005 (when the state had a wolf population about 55 times that of Oregon's current number) that take that possibility into account.

- **All** non-human predators (including wolves, dogs, & unknowns) – 1.0% ⁹
- Poisoning – 1.2% ⁹
- Injury – 6.2% ⁹
- Calving (not including calf losses) – 7.9% ⁹
- Respiratory, digestive, and other diseases – 37.0% ⁹
- Other & unknown **non**-predator – 46.7% ⁹

Furthermore, it's not inevitable that wolves will kill livestock. There are lots of things ranchers can do to protect their livestock that don't involve bullets ²². Behind many of the horrific stories of livestock losses trotted out by the anti-wolf folks is an untold story of poor animal husbandry. Oregon's first wolf depredation in over 60 years were by a pair of young wolves who had been enticed to a flock of sheep being kept next to a 2-acre open carcass pit where ranchers had been throwing their dead cattle for years.



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3) Wolf recovery has positive economic benefits.

Wildlife watching in the US in 2006 generated \$122.6 billion¹⁰. A study by the University of Montana in that same year found that wolves had a positive economic impact of \$70 million in the greater Yellowstone area¹¹. In Idaho, wolf-watching tours have been credited with buoying some businesses through the recession. In Minnesota, wolf-driven tourism and howling trips have been a staple of the Northwoods economy for years.

4) Wolves do affect game species. They do not wipe them out.

For survival, wolves eat many of the same species that humans also like to hunt. The presence of predators changes the behavior of prey animals often making them more difficult to hunt. However, it's not in their best interest for wolves to wipe out their own prey. It didn't happen in the millennia before humans began managing wildlife, and it isn't happening now^{58, 59}.

Many hunters complain that hunting with wolves on the landscape is hard. That may be true, but it doesn't mean wolves are decimating game herds. Having predators on the landscape does mean that prey animals are more alert and wary – and, sometimes less abundant than they were without their natural predators. They also spend less time congregating in open and riparian areas which is beneficial to a host of other plants and animals (see below)^{12, 13}.

According to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, elk numbers have increased over the last 25 years in every state with wolves – including Oregon¹⁴. The fall 2009 edition of the Bugle states that over the last 15 years while Montana's wolf population has grown from 48 to 497, elk numbers have increased from 94,000 to 150,000. Meanwhile, the success rate of elk hunters increased from 16.7% to 21.5%^{23, 14!}

Wolves are opportunistic and therefore much more likely to harvest the weakest animals and in turn increase the overall fitness of prey species. Trophy human hunters on the other hand are more likely to kill the biggest, fittest animals¹⁷.

Wildlife populations are dynamic and affected by many different factors. Arguments that wolves are decimating elk or other game animals almost always focus on individual areas where elk numbers have decreased while ignoring others that have increased. Even in those areas where elk have declined, many researchers are skeptical that wolves are the cause^{56, 58, 59}. One thing is clear - when looking at the full landscape, elk are doing just fine with wolves¹⁴.

5) Wolves are a native species.

Until we started exterminating them, wolves were the widest ranging non-human land mammal on the planet. In North America that range was continuous from above the Arctic Circle to southern Mexico and included the entire state of Oregon¹⁵. After being extirpated from most of the lower 48 United States, wolves gained protection under the Endangered Species Act. Under those protections, wolves naturally began to expand their range. To speed their recovery, wolves were reintroduced in some places by the same government that had once sponsored their extermination. Those populations are now intermingling.



After the wolf hunts of 2009, evidence was gathered that conclusively showed wolves currently inhabiting the West were no bigger than those that lived here before their extirpation ²⁴.

Wolves evolved alongside all the other plants and animals with which they shared the landscape. Their removal was detrimental to many of those species, and their return has had positive impacts (see below) ^{12, 13, 21}.

6) Hunting wolves does not reduce conflict

Agencies and wildlife managers that rely upon active management often promote wolf hunts as a way to reduce wolf-livestock conflict, protect prey animals, and increase social tolerance. However, research has begun to show that hunting wolves disrupts pack structure and instead often increases such conflicts ^{37, 54, 55}.

When older wolves are killed, packs structures are often disrupted. Territories become less defined and younger wolves may be left to fend for themselves too soon. Without the guidance of more experienced wary adult wolves, they may not learn to avoid livestock and humans. Full-sized packs with a natural distribution of age groups, and intact social systems will not resort to killing livestock as often as packs that have been hunted, nor will they kill as many wild elk or deer ³⁷.

Sadly there is little evidence to back up the specious claim that allowing predator hunts increases human social tolerance of the species. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest otherwise ⁵⁷.

7) Wolves are already heavily managed.

Even when they were listed as an endangered species, wolves were heavily managed. In fact most wolf deaths in the west are caused by humans – about half of them authorized by the government.

According to a 2009 presentation in Oregon by the Wolf Recovery Coordinator for the US Fish & Wildlife Service, more than one-fourth of the Western wolf population dies each year. Only 3% die of natural causes. 3% are accidentally killed by humans. Of the remaining 20%, half are killed by authority of the government and half are killed by poachers. That means that one out of every five wolves in the west is killed each year – On purpose – By humans.

That was *before* Montana and Idaho began their sport wolf hunts. Idaho has the stated goal of reducing their wolf population by half, and in 2001 passed a law calling for the eradication of wolves “by any means necessary” ⁴¹.

In Oregon, the first few wolves to return were killed by cars and poachers. In August of 2009, with a population of around 15 wolves, the state authorized the killing of 2 of young wolves in response to their repeated depredation of lambs.

Going back a little further in history, wolves were extirpated from almost the entire lower 48 United States including Oregon. As current Oregon Senator Whitsett likes to remind wolf advocates, the first meeting of the Oregon State legislature was called in part to “eradicate marauding wolves” (he thinks that was a good idea then, and an even better idea now) ¹⁶.



8) Wolves and humans can coexist.

Mollie Beattie, the first woman to head the US Fish & Wildlife Service said, “What a country chooses to save is what a country chooses to say about itself”. Though humans have little to fear from wolves, the biggest, and perhaps only, threat to wolf recovery comes from humans. It’s been said generally that all wolves need to survive are big wild places with a sustainable prey base and for people not to shoot them.

We’ve altered the landscape enough such that wolves can’t thrive everywhere they once roamed. However, living with wolves and wildlife is part of living near the big wild places of the rural west. There are many examples around the country and world of enlightened ranchers, farmers, hunters, and others peacefully coexisting with wolves and the natural world ^{22, 25, 42, 43}.



Wolves & Politics

1) Oregon has a wolf management plan.

Anticipating the eventual return and federal delisting of wolves, the State of Oregon wisely completed a wolf conservation and management plan in 2005. The plan came out of a collaborative process that involved many stakeholders, including conservation groups, ranchers, scientists, and other stakeholders, including the general public (of which over 70% are in favor of wolf recovery) ^{18, 26}.

The plan is imperfect, and included major compromises from conservationists and others. However, it is much better than those of other states like Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. Oregon Wild continues to support the plan – most of which has been approved by the state—and has actively worked to defend, clarify and strengthen it ²⁷. However, some parts of the plan have not been approved due to opposition by anti-wolf interests like the Oregon Cattleman’s Association.

2) Oregon’s wolf plan allows the state to kill “problem wolves”.

In 2009, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife made it brutally clear that Oregon’s wolf management plan gives the agency more than enough tools to protect ranching interests.

The first loss of livestock to wolves since wolves returned to Oregon occurred during the spring of 2009. After successfully deterring the wolves using non-lethal methods during the summer, the young wolves returned in August. In response, the state of Oregon authorized a kill order for the pair of wolves. Those wolves (which represented nearly 20% of the states known population at the time) were killed by Federal officials on September 5, 2009 ¹⁹.

3) Oregon’s wolves are not currently protected as a federally endangered species.

As it currently stands, Oregon’s wolves are not protected by the Endangered Species Act. In some states, wolves have retained or regained that status. However, that is not the case in Eastern Oregon or neighboring states.

Western wolves were delisted by the Bush administration in the summer of 2008. That delisting was quickly thrown out as illegal, and wolves regained their protections. In 2009, the Obama administration attempted the same delisting, but left protections for Wyoming wolves. Oregon Wild and other conservation groups have again challenged the delisting in court. The judge hearing the case has indicated this delisting is also likely illegal ^{28, 44}. We expect to prevail in the case ⁴⁵.

Until then, wolf management is left up to individual states – which is why our state’s management plan is so important. Without federal protections, wolf-reduction efforts in Idaho and Montana began almost immediately. Under Oregon’s wolf plan, the state’s 17 or so wolves are currently protected by *the state* as an endangered species.



4) Anti-wolf interests are actively trying to undermine Oregon’s wolf management plan.

Immediately following the first depredation of livestock by wolves in the spring of 2009, the Oregon Cattleman’s Association (OCA) and Farm Bureau lobbied in Salem to change the wolf management plan to say that:

“a person may ‘take’ a wolf seen ‘attacking, biting, molesting, chasing, or harassing livestock, herding and guarding animals, working and sporting dogs, and family pets”.

That may sound reasonable, but it amounts to cutting wildlife managers and biologists out of the decision-making process and allowing ordinary citizens to shoot any wolves they determine to be a threat. It also means prosecuting poachers would be nearly impossible. Taking into account the violently negative attitudes of a minority of folks, the history of wolves in Oregon and America, and the current number of wolves in our state, this is inappropriate ²⁹.

OCA and the Farm Bureau were unsuccessful in their bid to have their arguments heard on the statehouse floor so the effort wasn’t widely known. Since that time, they have indicated they plan to try again ^{30, 53}.

5) Current wolf recovery numbers are too low and the result of political compromise.

For the Northern Rocky Mountains region, which includes Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, and the eastern portions of Washington and Oregon, the recovery goal that would lead to the delisting of wolves is 300 ^{38, 28}.

This goal of 300 wolves was set out in 1987 and is severely outdated. Even at that time, it was the product of political compromise. The field of predator ecology is a very young one. If the past 200 years have taught us anything, it is that the management of endangered species like wolves be guided by the best available current science – not emotions or political and social compromises.

The most current science suggests that recovery numbers should be closer to 2,000 to 2,500 wolves, and that historically, there could have been as many as 380,000 wolves spread across the western United States and into Mexico ¹⁵. Furthermore, for the long-term survival of the species, it is critical that social structures be left intact, connectivity between habitat is restored & maintained, and that genetic exchange can continue to occur across the landscape ²⁸.



Wolves & other animals

1) Wolves have a positive impact on the landscape.

Wolves are a native species ²⁴. As a wide-ranging keystone species, wolves have a disproportionate effect on the rest of the ecosystem. By protecting wolves, we in turn protect all of the living things with which they share the landscape.

Where wolf populations have recovered, peer-reviewed science has overwhelmingly showed them to have had a positive impact on the landscape. Nowhere has that been demonstrated more clearly than in Yellowstone National Park where human interference has been limited, and wolf populations have naturally leveled off. There they have had a positive impact on everything from aspen, frogs, and songbirds to beavers, raptors, and beetles. Admittedly, it's been a bit tougher to be a coyote ^{12, 13, 21}.

2) Wolves do not “kill for fun”.

Unlike humans, wolves do not kill for sport from a safe distance. However, like humans, wolves do often harvest more food than they can eat in one sitting.

Scientists call this “surplus killing”. It happens occasionally when wolves prey on domestic animals and extremely rarely with wild prey. To understand why this happens, it's important to remember that wolves are opportunists. Wolves need to eat meat to survive and they can not depend on the grocery store for a reliable next meal if they fail in the hunt. Opportunities for meat are unpredictable and often dangerous. When those opportunities present themselves, it is wise for a wolf to take full advantage.

According to scientists, the higher rate for domestic livestock is the result of an opportunistic predator taking advantage of slower, less savvy, often penned-up animals that are often poorly looked after – all making them more vulnerable.

Wild prey tend to do a better job of avoiding and deterring wolves. They are more aware, they defend themselves and each other better, and usually know enough to run away. A partially-eaten wolf-killed elk (or sheep) carcass isn't necessarily a pretty sight, but it's not evidence of a wasteful wolf. If left alone, chances are the wolf will be back, and in the meantime, the wolf has provided lots of food to ravens, eagles, badgers, chickadees, beetles, and all the other wildlife that benefit from a kill ^{31, 46, 47}.

3) Wolves do not decimate game herds.

Wolves eat meat. Landscapes overpopulated with deer and elk may see a decrease in those numbers, and prey species will change their behavior in the presence of wolves. But wolves and their prey have been working it out for millennia. All of that may make hunting more of a challenge, but it's not in a wolf's best interest to wipe out their own prey and it doesn't happen - it's called dynamic equilibrium. See number 4 from the first section for more ^{14, 23, 47, 56, 58, 59}.

4) Wolves have not introduced new diseases in the west

Wolves, like all animals, carry diseases. Of particular note to many is the Hydatid Tapeworm which anti-wildlife interests have attempted to highlight as one of most recent scare tactics. The parasite is nothing new and is at most a very small threat to humans that can be avoided by the most basic of precautions (don't eat wildlife scat and wash your hands after touching it). This tapeworm is native to the west, carried by many species and can be found worldwide ^{20, 32, 33, 34}.



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Oregon Wild & Wolves

1) Oregon Wild supports wolf recovery in Oregon.

Oregon Wild works to protect our state's wildlands, wildlife, and waters as an enduring legacy for future generations. As part of that mission, Oregon Wild supports healthy populations of all native species from elk and salmon to wolves and spotted owls. Advocating for wolves and wildlife has been part of Oregon Wild's work since our first days in 1974.

2) Oregon Wild supports the Oregon Wolf Plan.

Oregon Wild took part in the genesis and development of Oregon's wolf conservation and management plan alongside thousands of our supporters, other conservation groups, ranchers, farmers, scientists, hunters, and more. The plan is imperfect and was a compromise, but it should be given a chance to work and certainly should not be weakened. Ever since we testified on it in December of 2004⁴⁸, Oregon Wild has worked to ensure the plan is enacted, fully funded, and properly carried out²⁷. When it has been necessary, we have stood up and defended the plan from those who seek to weaken it³⁵.

In 2010, when ODFW and Wildlife Services violated the wolf conservation plan as well as state and federal laws, we took them to court and insisted they follow the rules. The lawsuit resulted in Wildlife Services voluntarily suspending its wolf hunt. The state case is ongoing^{36, 49, 50}.

3) What happens in other states matters in Oregon.

Wolves are wide-ranging animals. With less than 20 animals in the state, Oregon is still dependent on healthy wolf populations in neighboring states to repopulate and mix with Oregon's. For long-term recovery of wolves, populations need to be interconnected and healthy^{51, 52}. If wolves are being mismanaged in neighboring states, it jeopardizes recovery here.

What happens in Oregon also matters in other states. 70% of Oregonians support recovery²⁶, and though our wolf recovery plan isn't perfect, it is much better than those in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming. By supporting a plan at least as strong as Oregon's we can show that wolves and humans can coexist.

4) Oregon Wild is not opposed to hunting.

Oregon Wild traces its origins to 1974 when a group of conservationists including 3 elk hunters and a former logger gathered around a campfire and decided something needed to be done to protect the places they loved. Our conservation work and advocacy for native species benefits all outdoor enthusiasts who rely upon healthy intact ecosystems from hunters and hikers to photographers and fishermen. Many of our members, supporters, staff, and board members count hunting and fishing among their pursuits.

We maintain that wolves are an endangered species in Oregon and endangered species should not be hunted. Oregon Wild believes conservation efforts should be directed first and foremost to those native species that are endangered, under threat, misunderstood, or face active opposition. Where active management of wildlife is needed, it should be focused towards restoring functional, intact ecosystems. As the regretful former wolf hunter, Aldo Leopold once said, "the key to intelligent tinkering is to first keep all the parts".



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5) Oregon Wild is not “getting rich” by advocating for wolves.

We need funds to do the work we do, but Oregon Wild’s mission isn’t to make money; it’s to keep our state a great place to live, work, and raise a family. Most of our money comes from individual members who support our work. That money is used for everything from keeping the lights on to paying very modest staff salaries, leading hikes, and advocating for the state’s wildlands, wildlife, and waters.

We do highlight campaigns so people know what they are funding - and that includes our wildlife work. Like most non-profits, Oregon Wild publishes our finances in our annual report. We run a lean operation, and no one is getting rich at Oregon Wild.

We plan to continue to grow our capacity to advocate for wildlife. So, if you care about healthy populations of native wildlife like wolves in Oregon, and want to keep our state a great place to live, work, and raise a family, your financial support is greatly appreciated and goes a long way.



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