

*BEASTS OF WASTE AND DESOLATION: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMANS,*

*WOLVES, AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS IN AMERICA*

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## Introduction

Humans and wolves share a complex history in America. Canines and humans are both highly social, family-oriented animals at the top of the food chain, so it makes sense that their complex histories have been closely intertwined. Wolves hold a special place in the human psyche. They have been respected and admired as well as feared and vilified. Fear and hatred of the wolf is particularly ingrained in Western culture. Wolves have been problematically entangled in the construct of wilderness. Settlers demonstrated an instrumental view of nature, and valued the vast American wilderness only as a canvas for civilization. Though it was the platform on which to create civilization, wilderness also symbolized all that stood in the way of building a great empire. Since wolves symbolically represented wilderness, they were also construed as an obstacle to the human cause, and became a victim of the process of replacing wilderness with civilization.

As civilization expanded across the continent, so too did human-wolf conflict. By the middle of the 20th century, extermination efforts drove wolves to local extinction in the lower 48 states. Over the course of the last century, attitudes toward wolves have gradually shifted from unanimous loathing to an assortment of different positions. As wolves became more scarce, their absence yielded nostalgia as well as a better understanding of their important role in ecosystem vitality, which in turn generated protective and restorative efforts from lobbyists and policymakers. However, animosity toward wolves runs deep within American culture, particularly in the ranching and hunting communities, so federal protection and reintroduction efforts have faced considerable opposition.

The political battle that has dictated the fate of wolves in America has continued into the 21st century, with lobbyists from each side pushing their agendas. Historically, wolf policy has been heavily influenced by economic factors, and it continues to be so. The ranching and hunting industries have a great deal of economic power, so they have substantial leverage in the political world. Though roughly 5,000 wild wolves have been restored to the lower 48 states, that population is still continuously threatened, and the federal agencies responsible for their restoration are still limited and influenced by money. Since wolves cannot advocate for themselves in the political field, they must rely on people to fight for them if they are to make a comeback. Advocacy groups, wildlife sanctuaries and education centers, and other private organizations have taken up this fight. However, these privatized wildlife organizations have positive and negative implications.

In the last few decades, numerous privatized wildlife organizations that care for wolves in captivity have sprouted up around the country, and they operate under various sets of ethics. Some of these places rescue, rehabilitate, and potentially relocate their wolves to the wild, while other places breed in captivity or purchase their wolves from other breeders. Some places orient their focus toward restoration, some toward public outreach and education, and some toward creating a profit off of a public attraction, though it is not so clear cut, as these focuses often overlap. The ethical implications of such places are extremely nuanced. Many of these privatized wildlife facilities play an educational role in changing public attitudes, thus paving a brighter future for wolves, yet many also utilize wolves as profit-making tools, thus perpetuating an instrumental treatment of wildlife.

The wolf's battle in America continues to be complex. Environmental ethics and politico-economic forces shape each other, and wolves are caught in the middle of that duality. This essay serves as an analysis of the dynamic struggle between wolves and humans throughout historical and contemporary America. I have drawn upon the literature of Barry Lopez, Bruce Hampton, Rick McIntyre, and other scholars to build my historical analysis. In this essay, I will explore how wilderness symbolism played into the vilification and persecution of the wolf and laid the groundwork for its eradication. Then I will examine how attitudes toward wolves have shifted over the last half-century, and the power dynamics regarding the protective and restorative efforts made on both the state and federal level. Drawing upon my experience working at the Colorado Wolf and Wildlife Center and *Mission: Wolf*, I will conclude by discussing the complex effect that privatized wildlife enterprises have on the persisting struggle between humans and wolves in America.

Ultimately, our history with wolves serves as a prime example for examining America's changing notions of wilderness and the ethical considerations humans must give toward their environment and its non-human agents.

**Part 1) The Basis for Conflict: Livestock Predation and European Folkloric Tradition Builds the Framework for Human-Wolf Interactions in America**

“Ever since man first began to wonder about wolves... he has made a regular business of killing them” (Lopez 1978, p. 139).

Humans had a long history with wolves well before European contact with North America. That history can be characterized by fear that stemmed from misunderstanding, and a historical hatred that stemmed from protecting domesticated livestock. People’s ill regard for wolves was exacerbated by folklore and other cultural forms that propagated misconceived notions and ensured the endurance of fear and hatred of the wolf over many generations.

Humans see in the wolf the same that they see in wilderness: a reminder of their own primitive origins and their own bestial nature (Lopez 1978). Being a symbol of wilderness, wolves have fallen victim to the same antagonistic, domineering ethos with which Westerners have treated the wild.

This section will introduce the foundation underneath human-wolf conflict in America. I will explain how the image of the wolf was constructed and propagated through European folklore, planting the seed of wolf hatred for centuries to come. I will also discuss how being entangled in the Western world’s difficult construct of wilderness has, over time, affected the wolf, and set the stage for centuries of human-wolf conflict in America.

*i. Livestock Industry Creates Context for Early Interactions*

Humans and wolves are similar; they are both highly social, family-oriented apex predators at the top of the food chain. They are also both social hunters that often seek

the same prey in the same locations (Lopez 1978). Thus, contact between the two species was inevitable. The livestock industry facilitated increased contact between the two, and humans perceived a threat when wolves began to prey on their domestic animals.

In *Animals and Why They Matter*, Mary Midgley writes, “creatures are in competition if they use the same limited resources, and the competition is keen in proportion to the limitation... If nothing else changes, one of any two competing species will eventually vanish” (1983, 24). By replacing wild animals with domestic animals, humans limited wolves’ resources, thus forcing them to compete with the livestock industry to survive. However, the competition between the two species is not enough to adequately explain why wolf hatred runs so deep within the human mind, and is certainly not enough, I would argue, to justify the complete eradication of wolves in the United States of America.

Strained coexistence between humans and wolves programmed our hatred of wolves historically. Civilization rendered the need to raise livestock in order to sustain a growing population’s economic and subsistence needs. The livestock industry propelled the basis for human-wolf conflict. As humans began to replace wild game with domestic animals, wolves’ options became limited, and they began to prey on their livestock, thus threatening human livelihoods. Humans took this threat seriously, and treated it like a competition. In the face of interspecies competition, “the natural preference for one’s own species does exist... [And] it tends to operate very strongly” (Midgley 1983). It is no surprise that humans demonstrated preference toward their own species, but their response to livestock predation was emotional, and reflected the anthropocentric notion that Earth and its other inhabitants are subordinate subjects to the human cause. More

specifically, it reflected a long-standing antagonism towards predators, and particularly toward wolves.

Humans exhibited a historically understandable disregard for wolves as a species. Wolves fell victim to the “speciesism” of humans, who were so angered by the threat wolves posed that they viciously condemned the entire species with unrelenting hatred. Midgley recognizes patterns of anger manifest in competition, and the way that anger creates “changes in the kinds of action which seem reasonable... Actions of others which would normally appear harmless now seem like attacks” (1983, 132). Humans demonized wolves because they were angry, and because they conceived of wolves as highly conscious beings that killed livestock deliberately, which in turn created the perception that wolves were deliberately attacking human livelihoods. Humans’ anger obscured their ability to relate to wolves and understand their motivations, and it led them to conclude that wolves were deliberately on the attack. The notion that wolves were deliberately causing problems for humans, combined with their elusive mysteriousness, led to their vilified construct.

Prior to livestock predation, interactions with wolves were limited, but they added to the mystery surrounding the wolf. Wolves typically maintain a healthy distance from humans. Wolves are most active around dawn and dusk, seldom seen, but often heard in the eerie twilight (Lopez 1978). This space inspired a fearful curiosity of wolves, and they were shrouded in a sort of dangerous, yet intriguing, mystery (Coleman 2004). In defining the wolf, given the lack of experiential and observational evidence, humans had to fill in a lot gaps themselves, and they did so through their imagination. Since the wolf

was this unknown, presumably dangerous creature shrouded in eerie mystery, humans defined the wolf by their greatest fears of what the wolf *could* possibly be, and that, in turn, became the dangerous construct the wolf was to people.

*ii. The Big Bad Wolf: Constructing A Villain Through Folklore*

The wolf became a demonic figure in folklore and fairytales that always represented evil. The wolf was associated with evil trickery and schemes, and often thought to be the Devil in disguise, “red tongued, sulfur breathed, and yellow eyed” (Lopez 1978, 145). This “wolf lore” generally cast the wolf as such, “a devilish beast, an incorrigible ravager lurking in the forest eager to devour lost travelers” (Jones 2002). In medieval Europe, wolves were sometimes seen stalking battlefields to feast on human corpses (Jones 2002). Though a modern perspective may render a sounder explanation as to why wolves did that, medieval Europeans concluded that wolves must have a thirst for human blood, which understandably incited fear. Wolves, like coyotes, dogs, and other canines, will scavenge a meal from carrion, even human carrion, but wolves are not known to hunt humans. However, medieval Europeans’ lack of observational knowledge, they understandably inferred that wolves ate humans.

The only information people had regarding wolves came from the cultural folklore inherited from medieval Europe. Since definitions of the wolf were primarily derived from these mythical stories, people accepted those characterizations as true to the wolf’s real character. These tales were passed down through generations of Europeans, and the further the stories traveled, the more twisted people’s understanding of the wolf became and the more ingrained the stigma against the wolf became in European culture. Tales

like *Little Red Riding Hood* and *The Three Little Pigs* and countless others feature the villainous Big Bad Wolf, and they were passed down from generation to generation, strengthening this ill-conceived notion of the wolf. Though relatively little was known about the nature and behavior of wolves, their observable characteristics became a representation of a mysterious evil:

Storytellers took the biological attributes of wolves — their distinctive almond pupils, sharp incisors, and heightened sensory perceptions— and transformed them into villainous chimeras. A razor-sharp bite marked the wolf as an arch-predator while his penetrating gaze emerged as a salient indicator of the alien wilderness, the ‘other’ (Jones 2002, 6).

The wolf was seen as the natural and ominous “other,” but just as humans often conceive of a newly encountered culture as such, the perceived traits of “otherness” are embodied behind the eyes of the beholder. In this case, humans conceived of the wolf as the “other” because it represented the wilderness they saw in themselves.

### *iii. Fear of the Beast: Constructing Wilderness and the Anthropomorphic Wolf*

Lopez used the concept of *theriophobia*: fear of the beast. “At the heart of theriophobia,” Lopez writes, “is the fear of one’s own nature” (1978, 140). Humans feared the beast that they saw in themselves, and they projected that beast onto the wolf. This is particularly comprehensible with the concept of the werewolf, a man who has lost his human inhibitions and become possessed by his inner beast. The wolf was “the lust, greed, and violence that men saw in themselves” (Lopez 1978, 145). Humans took their own negative traits and projected them onto the wolf, and thus the wolf became the

symbol of everything wild, and therefore contemptible, within human nature.

Humans saw within the wolf their own inner beast, the presence of which they have avoided and rejected while attempting for centuries to tame it. Much of what humanity saw and strove to rid itself of in the wolf they also saw in wilderness. To humans, wilderness has functioned as a reminder of that inner, primitive beast from which they originated. The wolf became a symbol of that wilderness, a reminder of humans' primitive origins and the remnants of their bestial nature from which they have not entirely departed.

Humans have long contrasted the concept of "wilderness" with themselves. Nature and wilderness have represented an "otherness" to humanity in Western culture.

Wilderness serves as a reminder of humankind's primitive origins and bestial nature which it has continuously attempted to transcend. At its root, "wilderness" is just the natural world that has not been paved over with civilization, but as a concept, wilderness represents an "other" to humanity. The concept of wilderness embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural (Cronon 1995). By perceiving themselves as separate from nature, humans created an opponent, and thus humankind's dominion over the natural world developed.

Fear of wilderness and humankind's desire to distinguish itself from it has Judeo-Christian origins. The Bible depicts wilderness as an innately dangerous, Godless place where it is "all too easy to lose oneself in moral confusion and despair" (Cronon 1996, 2). This condemnation of wilderness is evident in the stories of Moses and Jesus. Moses led his people through the wild desert for forty years, where their faith was greatly put to the

test. Similarly, Jesus wandered the wilderness for forty days and forty nights resisting the Devil's abundant temptations. The Bible defines wilderness as "the place without God—a sere and barren desert" (Lopez 1978, 141) full of sin and rank with evil. Wilderness was where "one came only against one's will, and always in fear and trembling" (Cronon 1996, 6).

Wilderness was associated with the devil and Godlessness. It symbolized the primitive origins of humans' inner bestial nature, which contradicted everything that the civilized human was supposed to represent. It represented the antithesis of human progress, yet it served as a platform on which to achieve it. Cronon writes, "whatever value [wilderness] might have arose solely from the possibility that it might be 'reclaimed' and turned toward human ends" (1996, 6). Thus, wilderness was decidedly subordinate to the human cause; it was simply a means to human ends. Since wilderness was constructed as a Godless place, a reminder of man's bestial nature, humans sought to eliminate it and replace it with valuable civilization.

The symbolic link between wolves and wilderness and what they represent to humans became more evident as Anglo-Europeans conquered America, where roughly half a million wolves roamed a vast expanse of untrodden wilderness.

## **2) Kill the Big Bad Wolf: Relations Between Wolves, Wilderness, and Humans Through 19th Century America**

This antagonistic, exploitative relationship with wilderness spans across millennia, but it was particularly robust in the context of westward expansion in America, during which wilderness was seen as a desolate wasteland devoid of intrinsic value and decidedly subordinate to the human cause. It was a place to be feared that held nothing to offer humanity except a canvas on which to paint its civilization. As symbolic images representative of wilderness, wolves were seen as obstacles to the expanse of civilization, and wolf killing escalated in scale and ferocity during the age of westward expansion.

### *i. Conceptions of Wolves and Wilderness in Colonial America*

The way in which early settlers of America thought about nature reflected this notion of a wilderness devoid of intrinsic value, serving only as a ground on which they could establish civilization. Wilderness was seen as a desolate, barren waste (Cronon 1996), and it was seen as humankind's God-given right and even its obligation to make something out of that wasted space (Lopez 1978). After colonists arrived in America, John Adams wrote:

The whole continent was one continued dismal wilderness, the haunt of wolves and bears and more savage men. Now the forests are removed, the land covered with fields of corn, orchards bending with fruit and the magnificent habitations of rational and civilized people (as quoted by Lopez 1978).

This excerpt demonstrates early settlers' feelings regarding wilderness and their efforts to

tame it. Those feelings toward wilderness paralleled settlers' feelings toward the wolf, which became an analogous symbol for wilderness, particularly when the livestock industry once again created strife between them.

Early Euro-American settlers had limited interactions with wolves. Wolves had a "ghostly" presence in colonial America; humans and wolves feared each other, and, therefore, they kept their distances (Coleman 2004). Colonists had inherited a long tradition of horror tales through their European ancestry, but wolves remained a subject of curiosity in the new, mysterious world that they had settled (Mighetto 1991). However, the livestock industry narrowed the gap between humans and wolves.

Colonists "settled in historic wolf territory and their subsistence needs inevitably clashed with resident lupines" (Jones 2002, 7). As settlers civilized the east and established an economy, they allocated a lot of property to the livestock industry. Wolves are naturally intelligent animals, and were "undoubtedly curious about two-legged strangers, and inquisitive animals entered campsites, killed tethered animals, and raided food caches" (Jones 2002, 4). Being the opportunists that they are, once the wolves discovered that domestic cattle and sheep make for easy prey, they began to cause problems for ranchers and herders (Lopez 1978). Domestic animals were viewed as property, and wild wolves were not; therefore settlers treated livestock predation as an assault on personal property. The fearful curiosity settlers once had towards wolves turned into a fearful animosity.

With increased predation came increased anger and hatred. As is a common human response to anger induced by perceived competition, the settlers interpreted the wolves' killing of domestic animals as a deliberate attack upon their livelihood. Settlers drew

upon the folkloric tales of wolves they knew, and identified the American wolf with the European villain from those tales. Since human encounters with wolves mainly revolved around livestock depredation, humans conceived of wolves as irredeemable murderers, even though no attacks on humans by healthy wolves have ever been authenticated in America (Jones 2002).

Humans understood wolves to be highly conscious, and bestowed upon them accountability for their actions equal to that of humans. This anthropocentric notion of wolves' autonomy is congruent with how humans historically considered predators. Humans favorably considered domestic animals and non-predators, which was problematic because it obscured wild predators' true purpose and place in the natural world.

People believed that domestic animals, being unable to defend or avenge themselves, were innately good, and that the wolf, a cognizant killer, was innately evil (Lopez 1978). This notion that the wolf was innately evil corresponded with conceptions of wilderness. Both were feared, and both were thought to lack any value whatsoever. Furthermore, wolves ruled the wilderness; therefore, wolves became the symbol of wilderness and, thus, a contemptible figure because they ostensibly embodied the same demon qualities and represented an opponent to the expansion of human civilization. Because replacing the wilderness with civilization was largely the settlers' prerogative, anything that stood in the way of that goal was to be eliminated. Since it was viewed as synonymous with wilderness, there was no room for the wolf in this new vision for the landscape (Lopez 1978).

Settlers in the east made a habit of killing wolves; they were mostly eradicated from

the eastern United States long before the actual eradication campaign at the turn of the 20th century. By the turn of the 19th century, more and more explorers were venturing west. After establishing civilized colonies in the east, settlers pioneered westward to explore the vast wilderness with the same intentions of civilizing it. The American pioneer's agenda largely included civilizing the continent's untamed wilderness, replacing it with cities and pastures (Lopez 1978). The frontier era is characterized by this ideology, often referred to as Manifest Destiny. However, settlers would find that the wilderness, and with it wolf territory, expanded further than they could have imagined.

*ii. Replacing Wilderness with Domestic Animals Across the Western Frontier*

The age of westward expansion proliferated the symbolism between wolves and wilderness and intensified the negative attitudes toward both. Since the pioneers' agenda was to pave over the wilderness, and since wolves symbolized wilderness, killing wolves was as much about taming the wilderness as it was about protecting livestock. The pioneers' prerogative reflected lingering notions of wilderness as a place of evil, and a reminder of their bestial nature; so paving wilderness with civilization was as much about conquering the land as it was about conquering humanity's inner beast. The wolf became the ostensible symbol of wilderness because "of all creatures, wolves best embody the essence of the wilderness: alien, disordered, and beyond the control of man" (Mighetto 1991, 75). The wolf represented all that stood in the way, an impediment to the settlers' goal to civilize the continent and distinguish themselves from its wilderness. Thus, destroying wolves became a crucial priority during the era of westward expansion:

The wolf became the symbol of what you wanted to kill—memories of man’s primitive origins in the wilderness, the remnant of his bestial nature which was all that held him back in America from building the greatest empire on the face of the earth (Lopez 1978, 142).

Throughout the 19th century, civilization advanced across the continent, and America was well on its way to becoming a great empire. Civilization was the divine goal, and wilderness, and therefore the wolf, was the ostensible impediment. Lopez writes, “to celebrate wilderness was to celebrate the wolf; to want an end to wilderness and all it stood for was to want the wolf’s head” (1978, 140). Given the inextricable link between concepts of wilderness and the wolf in the human mind, the 19th century American mission united both of their fates. However, ridding the country of its wolves proved a more achievable task than entirely ridding the country of its vast wilderness.

Prior to European contact, wolves reigned as an apex predator across North America. Roughly half a million wolves roamed the lower 48 states, and the settlers in the east only encountered a fraction of those wolves. However, as pioneers moved west, they encountered even more wolves, and narrowed the gap between themselves and wolves by disrupting the homeostasis of their environment.

Obviously, the rapid growth of settlements out west required more food and land to sustain the increasing populations of humans. Thus, settlers turned even more of the wilderness into ranch land to accommodate the booming livestock industry.

Furthermore, settlers crossing the Great Plains encountered large herds of game animals, the likes of which they had never seen. Bison and ungulate populations plummeted due to overhunting; bison were hunted so heavily that by the end of the 19th century, they had

been nearly driven to extinction (Lopez 1978).

As the livestock industry grew and their natural food sources were depleted, wolves became more and more dependent on domestic livestock animals for their subsistence needs. As livestock predation escalated, so too did people's anger toward wolves, and the settlers' passive resentment of wolves escalated into full-blown retaliation (Hampton 1996). In response, communities across the American west organized wolf hunts to rid their civilizations of the vermin, and protect their livestock (Coleman 2004). However, the need to safeguard domestic livestock was simply a justification for the killing of wolves. It justified an act that held much more cultural and social significance due to the symbolism between wolves and wilderness, and the stigma created by centuries of anger derived from strained coexistence and folkloric construction.

### *iii. The Wolfer Era: Extermination of Wolves by the Masses*

Wolf hatred escalated in the latter half of the 19th century. Americans boosted their efforts to rid the country of wolves, which birthed a new lucrative occupation: a "wolfer," which was essentially a wolf bounty hunter.

The "wolfer" era took place between the 1850s and the 1880s, and it saw "the greatest mass slaughter of wolves in world history" (McIntyre 1995, 53). The average wolf hunter in the 17th and 18th centuries killed twenty to thirty wolves in his lifetime, while a so-called "wolfer" in the late 1800s could kill four or five thousand wolves in just ten years, and make a handsome profit doing so (Lopez 1978). Wolf killing was further justified as ideas regarding human enterprise and the need to defend one's property matured (Coleman 2004). Not only was it a lucrative profession because people paid a

lot of money to have their land rid of wolves, but also because wolf pelts became an asset that could be sold at a high price.

As the demand for wolf fur increased, more people were allured by the prospect of wolf trapping. Wolf killing during this era escalated not only in volume, but also in brutality. Wolfers killed wolves with pathological dedication and reckless cruelty that exemplified the pure hatred people felt toward the creatures.

Trappers often used steel leg-hold traps. When a wolf's foot was caught in the teeth of the trap, it was immobilized. Once immobilized, the wolf had a variety of inhumane outcomes. Some trappers would beat the immobilized wolf to death; some would set the wolf on fire; and some would cut tendons in the wolf's hind legs, preventing it from running, and tear out its jaws before releasing it to be torn to shreds by their pack of dogs (Lopez 1978). The ones who were lucky enough to escape these traps were still not all that lucky. Wolves, who are notoriously neophobic, panicked once caught, and were sometimes known to chew their own paw off to escape (McIntyre 1995). There was no humane outcome for a wolf caught in a steel leg-hold trap, not that any of the other killing methods were more humane.

Ranchers and hunters often set out with their horses and guns to find a wolf pack, hoping to hit wolves with non-lethal shots. Then they would lasso the wounded wolves and drag them to death.

Other accounts document the use of fishhooks. People would throw a baited fishhook into a wolf den, wait until it was swallowed and imbedded into a wolf pup's stomach, and then yank it out and kill it.

Even trappers hired by the federal government were known to practice such cruelty.

They would trap male wolves, and then wrap wire around their penises so tightly that they could not urinate. After some time, they would kill the wolves, cut out their bladders, and use the urine to attract other wolves to traps (McIntyre 1995, 20).

People did not just kill wolves to protect livestock, nor did they do so just for economic gain; wolf killing was an angry, vengeful act of dominance, and a horribly inhumane exercise of irrational hatred. The killing of wolves became increasingly more gruesome yet increasingly more acceptable, and as the wolf trapping business grew, the methods became more decisively effective.

The popularity of wolf pelts “made the demand steady and profitable to the fur dealer and the wolf trapper, so that new and more systematic ways were devised to destroy wolves for their fur value” (McIntyre 1995, 56). As bison populations plummeted, it became easier to track wolf packs, and although bison populations were dwindling, wolfers shot and killed bison on the outskirts of the herd to use as bait. Then, they laced the carcasses with poison and set it out for the wolves. This was a huge methodological shift in the tactics used by wolfers from their preceding wolf trappers. The wolfer prepared himself with “an outfit [like] that of the hunter or trapper with the exception of traps and baits. In the place of these, he supplied himself liberally with strychnine poison” (McIntyre 1995, 56). The use of poison instead of traps is an emblematic characteristic of the wolfer era, and it allowed wolfers to exterminate wolves by the masses. While a baited trap could only catch one animal at a time, each poisoned bison carcass would kill three to a dozen wolves (McIntyre 1995). At that rate, it’s no surprise that wolfers could kill four or five thousand wolves in a decade.

Although the use of poison made for more efficient wolf killing, it had a much

more profound ecological effect than trapping. Wolfers used poison “on such a scale that *millions* of other animals—raccoons, black-footed ferrets, red foxes, ravens, red-tailed hawks, eagles, ground squirrels, wolverines—were killed incidentally in the process” (Lopez 1978, 139). The reckless cruelty that wolfers demonstrated in killing wolves is a testament to how thoroughly America sought the elimination of the wolf. The American people hated wolves so much that they were willing to sacrifice millions of other animals, including American bald eagles, in their campaign against wolves.

However, wolfers were certainly efficient when it came to wolf extermination, and after seeing the economic success that they achieved from the fur trade, many more joined the eradication effort. Wolf eradication progressed westward across the American Frontier, and its number of victims increased exponentially as the 19th century progressed. In studying the territory of Montana alone, during the 1870 to 1877 period, historian Edward Curnow estimated that wolfers killed 100,000 wolves and coyotes each year (McIntyre 1995, 53).

By the end of the 19th century, the vast majority of the wolf population had been exterminated. However, conflicts between ranchers and wolves did not subside, and neither did extermination efforts. As the last of the bison herds across the Frontier were destroyed, the remaining wolves were further limited to domestic livestock. With conflict between ranchers and wolves persisting, livestock lobbyists urged the federal government to take further action. The United States Biological Survey presented the end-all solution to the problem of livestock predation by wolves: a federal extermination program to eradicate all remaining wolves from the lower 48 states (McIntyre 1995, 17).

### **3) From Unanimity to Ambiguity: Evolving Concepts of Wilderness, Wolves, and Environmental Ethics in 20th Century America**

Around the turn of the 20th century, the birth of environmentalism and conservationism initiated a momentous shift in ideas regarding wilderness and environmental ethics. As civilization expanded and wilderness became scarcer, people gained appreciation for it, and conservation of the environment became a widespread concern for the first time in American history. However, consideration for the environment did not improve the wolf's situation.

#### *i. Conservationist Perspective: No Room for Wolves in the Ark*

The instrumental view of nature embodied during the Frontier Era continued into the conservationist movement. Though the vision for the landscape changed, it still did not include the wolf. By the early 20th century, wolves posed a relatively minute threat to the livestock industry because their population had been so thoroughly decimated. Yet ranchers still wanted the wolf dead, and the eradication campaign prevailed, despite the birth of conservationism, with a continued mixture of utility and vengeance. The instrumental view of nature embodied during the Frontier Era continued into the conservationist movement.

As a concept, wilderness gradually morphed from a place of waste and desolation to an awe-inspiring retreat worthy of celebration. Cronon writes, "Wilderness had once been the antithesis of all that was orderly and good—it had been the darkness, one might say, on the far side of the garden wall—and yet now it was frequently likened to Eden itself" (1996, 7). However, this romanticized appreciation of wilderness was still

problematic.

While the conceptual transformation birthed positive attitudes towards wilderness, the preservation efforts it yielded perpetuated the instrumental view of nature exhibited during the Frontier Era. Early conservationists conceived of nature as something they could capsule in time—a place that, without human interference, would remain unchanging. Preservation efforts strove to keep the idyllic wilderness pristine, and protect certain areas from human interference. Throughout the early 20th century, the federal government, compelled by the conservationist movement, devoted large portions of land toward establishing National Parks and other protected wilderness areas. Yet the purpose for preserving wilderness was for human enjoyment; it was preserved not for the sake of its inherent value, but for human exploitation and recreation. The continued anthropocentric utilitarianism was further exemplified by the ways in which chose what was worth protecting. Humans began to recognize the existence and importance of animal rights, but subjectively determined the value and validity of those rights, and therefore determined which animals deserved ethical consideration. Unfortunately, there was “no room in conservationists’ ark for wolves” (Hampton 1996, 129).

Among those early conservationists that condoned wolf extermination was Theodore Roosevelt. Prior to his presidency, Theodore Roosevelt had spent time as a rancher in western North Dakota, and wrote a number of books documenting his experiences. In *Hunting the Grisly and Other Sketches* (1902), he included a chapter on his experiences with wolves, during which Roosevelt condemned the wolf as “the archetype of ravin, the beast of waste and desolation” (as quoted by Mighetto, 74). The fact that the federal wolf eradication campaign coincided with the conservationist

movement of the early 20th century further reflects the priority of the human cause over other forms of life; thus, humans preserved natural surroundings that played a part in fulfilling the human agenda, but continued to eliminate wilderness that stood in the way.

*ii. The Beast of Waste and Desolation: All Wolves Must Go*

In the early 1900s, stock owners put enormous pressure on the federal government to eradicate wolves. Millions of acres of federal forests served as public grazing grounds for livestock and wild game, yet they also hosted copious wolf populations. Stock owners complained that wolves were a “curse upon their enterprise” and demanded that government provide safe pasturage for the lands they leased for grazing (Hampton 1996, 131). In 1906, in response to stock owners’ demands for wolf eradication, the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of the Biological Survey met with President Roosevelt, and together they began “devising methods for the destruction of the animals” (Hampton 1996, 131).

Rangers began killing wolves in federal lands, and by 1907, just a year later, “a record kill of 1,723 wolves was reported by forest rangers in 39 western national forests, then estimated to be about one-tenth the total area still inhabited by wolves in the United States” (Hampton 1996, 132). The government’s response to wolf eradication on federal lands encouraged stock owners, whose voices only grew louder. The public sided strongly with the stock owners and reverberated their plea, and “momentum began to build for the federal government to assume responsibility for the control of wolves” (Hampton 1996, 132). Pressure on the federal government to take charge of the issue grew when the United States went to war. Food production became a top national

priority, and the federal government took over predator control in order to protect livestock and maximize agricultural profit. In July 1915, Congress allocated \$125,000 (one-third of its entire budget) to the Biological Survey specifically for the destruction of wolves and other predators (Hampton 1996). The federal government “now embarked on an official program of wildlife destruction unparalleled either before or since that time by any nation in the world” (Hampton 1996, 135).

The Biological Survey created a subsidiary division called the Predator Animal and Rodent Control (PARC). The wolf eradication campaign was no longer in the hands of “vengeful farmers with their pit traps or local nimrods with their hounds and axes,” but instead in those of “degree-toting bureaucrats [who] hired professional wolf hunters” (Coleman 2004, 193). PARC hired roughly 300 experienced hunters and trappers who, by the end of the year, had killed 424 wolves. In 1918, Congress doubled their funding to PARC. By 1920, PARC had over four hundred federal hunters. (Hampton 1996). The agency further aided the already successful hunt by mass-producing strychnine and distributing over one million poison baits across the West (Hampton 1996). PARC agents continued killing wolves, and by 1931, nearly all of the wolves in the United States had been exterminated (Hampton 1996).

Not only did wolves pose a threat to livestock, albeit a relatively minute threat considering the population decline, but they also killed ungulates that were desirable to human hunters. Conservationist John Burroughs justified the killing of wolves, saying, “the fewer of these there are, the better for the useful and beautiful game” (as quoted by Mighetto 1991, 74). This indicates how people valued wildlife only for its benefit to humankind, and thus manipulated the natural order to suit human purpose.

*iii. Predator Control: Meanness, Treachery, and Cruelty*

The early conservation movement also reflects the antagonistic view of predators that is indicative of the time. During the early 20th century, “much of the population took a dim view of predators” because “animals were increasingly viewed as being responsible for their actions” (Mighetto 1991, 78). The fact that humans began to recognize that animals have autonomy, motivations, and decision-making skills slightly narrowed the gap humans perceived between themselves and other animals. The Humanitarian sect of the conservationist movement made a considerable contribution to the vilification of predators. Humanitarians were more concerned with preventing animal suffering than species maintenance. Since predators caused the suffering of prey species, humanitarians gave them little sympathy (Mighetto 1991, 74). However, the ethical considerations humans gave animals further obscured human understanding of animals “because ethics were defined in terms of man, [and] those animals who did not live by human principles were condemned” (Mighetto 1991, 79). Humans saw predators as evil and murderous simply because they killed other animals that people deemed defenseless and innocent. Yet the condemnation of predators was hypocritical given humans’ aptitude for killing the same creatures; therefore, predator control reflects humankind’s prioritization for their own species. Mighetto writes:

“The purpose of government-supervised ‘game management’ was to control wildlife populations for the benefit of man. Ridding the West of immoral and inconvenient animals thus became a means of imposing order and rectifying what was ‘wrong’ in nature.” (1991, 84)

America's vilification of predators demonstrated a gross hypocrisy, since humans perpetrated the same "wrongs" as predators. Early naturalist John Muir illuminated why this hypocritical persecution of predators existed, declaring, "none of our fellow mortals is safe who eats what we eat [or] who in any way interferes with our own pleasures" (as quoted by Mighetto 1991, 84). Thus, the stigmatization of predators was the result of their likeness to humans, and the threat that they posed to our preferences.

Of the many stigmatized predators, wolves received the worst treatment, for the killing of wolves was "fundamentally different because [it] shows far less restraint and far more perversity" (Lopez 1978, 139). Demonization of the wolf certainly did not end with the birth of ethical consideration for animals. In regards to wolves, conservationist William T. Hornaday, director of the New York Zoological Park, declared, "there is no depth of meanness, treachery or cruelty to which they do not cheerfully descend" (as quoted by Lopez 1978, 184). This attribution further demonstrates humans' hypocritical projection of their own wickedness onto wolves; humans fully embodied this attribution of meanness, treachery, and cruelty in their gruesome extermination of the wolf.

It wasn't until the 1930s that the public began to recognize the consequences of this form of predator control. As predators grew scarcer, the abundant populations of prey species became more destructive, and Americans gradually grew aware of predators' role in regulating the ecosystem (Mighetto 1991, 74). However, this realization occurred too late, and it progressed too gradually. By that time, nearly all of the wolves had been eradicated from the lower 48 states, and it wasn't until the 1970s that the recognition of their importance finally translated into legislative action that reformed America's wildlife policy.

Yet it was not purely logical consideration of their ecological role that prompted the shift in public attitude toward wolves. It was also an emotional response to their decimation. As wolves grew scarcer, the last remaining wolves were elevated to legendary status; they were given names and persecuted yet revered and glorified like famous outlaws. However detrimental the extirpation of wolves was, it also was an essential in shifting public attitudes toward the creatures.

*iv. The Legendary Wolves: Scarcity Yields Nostalgia*

As wolves became more scarce and their fate more hopeless, people began to echo the wolves' plea for mercy. The last surviving wolves were elevated to celebrity status, given names such as Old Whitey, Old Three-Toes, Old Lefty, and Old Rags the Digger, whereas the wolves in previous legends remained anonymous (Coleman 2004). The fact that these wolves were named by the people is a testimony to the bittersweet romanticism surrounding their demise. The hunt for these last remaining wolves proceeded with a tinge of nostalgia from many who saluted the "doomed-yet-heroic outlaws" (Coleman 2004, 195). Just as conservationists of the early 20th century began to appreciate wilderness in the face of its depletion, the scarcity of wolves spawned a yearning for them. However, not everybody felt that way. It is not as if the entire public shifted its attitude toward wolves, but rather the unanimous loathing the public previously held gradually fractured into mixed feelings. Despite the general public's shift toward ambivalence or even nostalgic admiration, and despite the scientific community's increasing comprehension of the wolf's vital role in the ecosystem, federal agencies and ranching communities continued to vehemently oppose protective or restorative actions

and still sought the total elimination of wolves.

The last remaining wolf populations were killed off during the 1940s and 1950s, and it wasn't until the 1960s that wolf killing slowed down. This deceleration coincided with the environmentalist movement of the '60s, which should not be understated, but the biggest reason wolf killing slowed down is because there weren't many wolves left to kill. By the 1960s, most of the Mexican gray wolves had been extirpated from the Southwestern states; red wolf populations in the Southeast were hardly existent; and gray wolves had been driven out of each of the lower 48 states, with the exception of Minnesota which hosted a small population of fewer than five hundred wolves. However, it wasn't until the mid-1960s that the public began to realize that wolf populations were essentially nonexistent, along with America's "wolf problem," because federal agencies like the Bureau of Predator and Rodent Control (PARC), a subsidiary branch of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), had been fabricating the existence of healthy wolf populations (Hampton 1996, 170).

For instance, the PARC declared that red wolf populations were thriving in the southern-central states, claiming that they were still killing red wolves by the thousands when in fact they were really killing coyotes. Red wolves do bear closer resemblance to coyotes than their gray wolf cousins, so the PARC was able to get away with this claim for a while. The red wolf's likeness to the coyote has been a continued aspect of the tedious contemporary political battle as well, which I will discuss later on in Section 3.ii.

The PARC very well knew that they were killing coyotes, but if they admitted that the red wolf was actually facing extinction, they would be forced to cease their predator control efforts over a significant portion of the country. It wasn't until 1962 that

investigations of these “wolf” skulls revealed that nearly all of red wolves they reported killing were actually coyotes (Hampton 1996, 171). The Predator and Rodent Control Division gained increasing heat from the growing environmental movement and from larger wildlife management branches. In 1971 it was reviewed and reformed, and determined to be a program “in which there is substantial public cost and very little if any public benefit,” and among many other changes, it was renamed the Animal Damage Control agency (Hampton 1996, 174).

The 1960s was the decade in which the tides began to turn for the wolf, largely because of the environmentalist movement that influenced such reformations as the deposition of the PARC and eventually the establishment of the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The idea that the environment and non-human animals possess intrinsic value and are due their own rights just as humans are became more widely accepted. By the 1960s, the environmentalist sect of the conservationist movement arose; environmentalists embraced the new, yet very old, concepts of ecological conscience and environmental ethics (Mighetto 1991, 106). For the first time, white America adopted from many Native American cultures the concept of land and animals not as commodities or property to be owned, but as coexisting entities with intrinsic rights.

#### **4) Slowly Changing Tides: Protection, Preservation, Restoration, and Contemporary Political Battles**

The rebirth of environmentalism in the 1960s laid the foundation for the reformed wildlife management ethics of contemporary America, and paved a drastically better future for wolves. This shift in wildlife ethics not only enabled the federal protection of wolves and other endangered species, but also the restoration of wolves to their natural habitat, an endeavor that has proven to be a huge ecological success. This shift has not been universal, however, for hatred and fear of the wolf runs deep; coalitions formed between livestock lobbyists and government agents continue to take opposition on the political battlefield, and hunters still kill wolves at a rate that threatens their revival. That being said, those in favor of protecting and/or reintroducing wolves in the wild should remain optimistic. Just half a century ago, the American wolf's future appeared tenuous if not entirely nonexistent. Humans have so much control over their surrounding environment and its inhabitants that the wolf's battle for survival has essentially become a political battle. Wolves obviously cannot fend for themselves on the political battlefield, but they finally have a substantial number of human advocates fighting the battle for them, and their fate has drastically improved. The extreme shift in public attitude toward wolves over the last half century is certainly encouraging, especially given the immense scale at which wolf hatred has operated over the last few centuries, so there are positive takeaways from the contemporary political battle. America's wolf policy has shifted from total eradication to protection and controlled restoration. However, the battle is far from over, and there is still much to be done to secure a bright future for our wolves. In this section, I will briefly illustrate the policy framework that

has shaped the contemporary political battle regarding wolves in America.

*i. Protecting the Endangered Species*

The mid-1960s to mid-1970s were a transformative time for wildlife and environmental policy. The American public's increasing environmental consciousness influenced political action, and allowed for the enactment of the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the President's Council on Environmental Quality in 1970 (Hampton 1996, 176).

The Wilderness Act of 1964 signaled a crucial shift in how people considered nature. For centuries, wilderness reminded people of the hardship and dangers of their primitive origins. During the Frontier Era, wilderness was seen as a vast void to be filled with civilized communities. At the turn of the 20th century, conservationism gave rise to a new concept of wilderness as a holy retreat from the civilized world, worthy of preservation but subject to manipulation because its primary purpose of existence is so that humans could enjoy its splendor. The Wilderness Act, however, strives to mitigate human imprint and preserve natural ecosystems of designated wilderness areas. Thus, the act represents a shift in the notion of wilderness as something worthy of preservation for the sake of humans to the notion that wilderness is worthy of preservation for the sake of its own inherent value, which is so grand and pure that it should, furthermore, be protected from human manipulation. This shift in the concept of wilderness was vital in changing the fate of the wolf in America, but of all the wildlife conservation efforts, the Wilderness Act itself did not directly affect the survival of the wolf as much as others.

In 1973, a team of wolf experts from all over the world gathered to form the Wolf

Specialist Group of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. One of their utmost functions was to devise a blueprint for wolf conservation and encourage governments to abide by it. They declared that strife between wolves and humans was inevitable, but that wolves, nonetheless, have the right, just like all wildlife, to coexist with man as a part of natural ecosystems. The best hope for the species, they argued, was to reach a practical accommodation to the fact that the presence of wild wolves would in some cases conflict with human interests. Thus, the committee “adopted specific guidelines that encouraged governments to protect wolves, while still allowing for their control where they conflicted with human interests” (Hampton 1996, 176). They understood that the tactic of compromise was the best way to get the government to be amenable to their blueprint for wolf protection.

Later that year, the United States Congress passed the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) by an overwhelming majority. The act was devoted to protecting species that were considered close to extinction, and bestowed the responsibility of protecting those species onto the federal government, rather than state governments. For the first time in American history, the interests of nonhuman species were prioritized over private enterprises such as timber, mining, ranching, and other industries. A revision to the act made the following year instilled even more comprehensive safeguards for endangered species that “established stiff penalties for anyone harming such species, set aside ‘critical habitat’ for their maintenance, and allowed the government to acquire land in order to protect ecosystems that endangered species depended upon” (Hampton 1996, 177). Furthermore, Congress declared that endangered species must be returned to their former ecosystems wherever possible.

The Endangered Species Act was a momentous occurrence for the survival of wolves, and also for the transformation of wildlife policy. Not only did this ensure wolves' protection under federal law, but it also initiated the efforts to return them to their home in the wild. The same government that had spent countless dollars to eliminate wolves was about to spend even more to bring them back. Though this certainly reflected a shift in public and government attitudes towards wolves, there remained a significant portion of society that was still consumed by prejudice, fear, and hatred. In response to the enactment of the ESA, residents of Minnesota "choked timber wolves to death in snares to show their contempt for the animal's designation as an endangered species" (Lopez 1978, 139). The road to wolf protection and recovery would prove to be an uphill battle.

*ii. Reintroducing a Keystone Species: Recovering Wild Wolves*

The restoration of endangered species is an arduous task. Each species must be selected for inclusion and a protection and recovery plan had to be developed and approved before it could be implemented. Once implemented, those plans take years to actually materialize into restored wild populations.

The USFWS decided that of all the endangered mammals, the red wolf had the most urgent need for help, and thus became their first target for recovery. The largest population of red wolves lived in the swampy forests of Galveston, Texas, which hosted rampant parasites that took their toll on the surviving animals. Thus, the USFWS declared it poor wolf habitat. Furthermore, much of that land was also privately owned by cattle ranchers who weren't fond of the red wolves, and were even less enamored by

the idea of a larger population of them, which exemplifies some of the sociopolitical obstacles that the USFWS had to work around in their restoration efforts. Since restoring the red wolf population to the Galveston wilderness was unfeasible, the USFWS began removing all red wolves from the wild and transporting them to captivity in order to commence a captive breeding program to save them from extinction (Hampton, 1996 179).

This was no easy task. Over the next six years, they only found seventeen red wolves, which demonstrates just how scarce their population had become. Of the seventeen they captured, fourteen successfully reproduced during the initial stage of the breeding program (Hampton 1996, 179). It would take years, however, before captive reproduction would generate the numbers necessary to restore a healthy population to the wild. Moreover, it would prove even more difficult to find a suitable location to reintroduce them because the red wolves needed a space without many coyotes in order to keep their gene pool pure, and because the reintroduction efforts faced vast opposition from private landowners and sport hunters.

In 1984, after Kentucky and Tennessee, where the red wolves were initially set to be restored, withdrew their support, federal officials finally agreed upon the newly opened Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge in North Carolina as the best site for reintroduction. The 1982 “nonessential experimental population” amendment to the ESA provided that endangered species raised or bred in captivity could be reintroduced to an area where the species previously existed, as long as the loss of the reintroduced animals didn’t jeopardize the species’ continued existence. This allowed for greater flexibility in designing a site-specific reintroduction plan, but most importantly it garnered less local

opposition (Hampton 1996, 180). Four pairs of captive-born red wolves were released into the wildlife refuge in 1987, and by 1995, the site hosted a population of roughly sixty red wolves. However, that red wolf population was far from safe, as old sentiments regarding wolves and property would prove to continue and threaten the red wolf's comeback.

In January of 1995, in response to the wishes of a number of private landowners as well as some biologists, North Carolina passed a state law that permitted the killing of wolves on private property, and within a few months, the red wolf population began to decline (Hampton 1996, 181). The killing of red wolves, however, was still a federal crime, but instead of prosecuting the individuals who did so, the USFWS attempted to relax its regulations in an attempt to smolder the opposition to their presence. However, the opposition and the deep-seated resentment of wolves still persist, and red wolf recovery is still very much a back and forth battle.

Today, the fate of red wolf seems nearly as dire as it did prior to reintroduction. At its height, the wild red wolf population reached roughly 120. However, shootings have increased over the last decade, and the red wolf population is now estimated to be around fifty. Given the red wolf's likeness to the coyote, it's likely that many were shot by mistake. But this is not the only way in which the red wolf's similarity to the coyote has negatively affected its survival.

In 2013, USFWS biologists discovered that the wild red wolves contained no distinctly unique DNA of their own, but instead contained both gray wolf and coyote DNA. This called into the question the red wolf's classification as its own species, and indicated that it is perhaps just the result of hybridization between gray wolves and

coyotes. The USFWS and the ESA operate under the notion that hybrids cannot be considered a distinct species. Under this operative, if the red wolf cannot be deemed a species, it cannot be given federal protection under the Endangered Species Act.

Although the red wolf is still listed as an endangered species, its numbers are steadily dwindling as consideration for its protection dwindles in the light of the discovery that it is a hybrid. A large portion of the public deems the red wolf too impure to be worthy of preservation. As the article mentions, in the face of such opposition, the Fish and Wildlife Service has lost much of its will to protect these animals; it even authorized a local resident to shoot and kill a lone red wolf that wandered onto his property, despite it still being listed as endangered and given federal protection. Furthermore, the U.S. Defenders of Wildlife have abandoned the Red Wolf Recovery Team altogether, essentially deeming it a lost cause. Despite the fact that the red wolf is arguably the most endangered wild canid on the planet, its chances of recovery are looking ever more slim.

The story of red wolf recovery exemplifies how indefinite and pliable legislature regarding wildlife policy can be. The ESA and the red wolf recovery efforts definitely reflect the ethical paradigm during the 1960s and 1970s, when environmentalism fueled wildlife policy. However, as this case proves, legislature is far from concrete, and is subject to changes that reflect the motives and values of a given time period, which are far from concrete. The truth of the matter is that money often times holds the biggest influence over political action. The red wolf recovery efforts have cost millions of dollars, and the main source of revenue it could potentially generate would be in the form of increased ecotourism. But given their small population and the scarcity of sightings, the red wolves of the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge have not generated as

much revenue from ecotourism as, say, the gray wolf restoration in Yellowstone, which I will discuss next. Given the high cost and low economic return of red wolf restoration, the economic incentive was there for politicians and hunting lobbyists to contest and abolish red wolf recovery, and classifying the red wolf as a hybrid further justified their stance. Why put so much effort into protecting a species that is not even pure?

This notion raises a lot of ethical questions regarding how we define a species, and what considerations we owe them. Pretend for a moment that this case regarded humans rather than red wolves. Deeming the red wolf unworthy of protection because it is a hybrid rather than a pure species would be like arguing that biracial humans are less worthy because they lack racial “purity.” Furthermore, why should it matter that red wolves are hybrids? If they perform the integral role of an apex predator in maintaining ecosystem health, then why should they be denied that opportunity just because they are a hybrid species? Though I am not going to delve into the robust biological discussion of species classification in this essay, these are important questions to raise because they illuminate areas in which our definitions and our ethical considerations regarding wild animals and the environment may need to change moving forward.

The red wolf recovery efforts enjoyed some success for roughly twenty years or so, but its main success was that it proved that reintroduction can work, and paved the way for subsequent restoration efforts for the gray wolf and the Mexican gray wolf. Red wolf recovery did not achieve nearly the same success as the reintroduction of gray wolves into Yellowstone National Park and other areas across the upper west. Not only did the reintroduction of gray wolves garner greater ecological success, but the presence of gray wolves in Yellowstone also generated a lot of revenue from increased ecotourism, which

in turn generated public and political support for their reintroduction. However, that is not to say that gray wolf reintroduction has been met with no opposition; it, too, continues to be a tedious, back-and-forth battle.

By the early 1990s, wolves had been sighted in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming, as some individuals had migrated south from Canada and begun to reproduce. Wolves were naturally returning the Rocky Mountains. The USFWS and Defenders of Wildlife had been developing a plan to reintroduce wolves to the Rocky Mountains that was already “sixteen years and over one million dollars in the making,” but it seemed the wolves were already initiating it on their own (Hampton 1996, 210). This, however, had both positive and negative implications.

Wolf recovery plans were typically viewed, particularly by proponents of state governance, as federal bureaucratic intrusion on states’ rights and private liberties. Thus, if natural restoration were to occur, opponents would have no political grounds for their opposition. That is not to say, however, that those wolves would be safe.

By 1992, Montana’s wolf population had grown to four packs of roughly forty wolves each. Those wolves began to migrate into Idaho and Wyoming as well, and as wolf sightings increased, so did reports of wolves that had been shot or poisoned. The report that received the most public attention was regarding a black wolf that had been shot and killed in the Tetons. This report sparked curiosity into exactly how many wolves the northern Rockies hosted. If a healthy wolf population was found in the northern Rockies, then the reintroduction efforts would have to be scrapped. Under the “nonessential experimental population” amendment to the ESA, if a healthy wolf

population was found, those preexisting wolves would strict protection as endangered species, and the government could not release wolves where other ones already existed (Hampton 1996, 210). This would be an issue for the USFWS because they would prefer the planned reintroduction to natural recovery; they would be able to keep a closer eye on an experimental population than a naturally occurring population, and thus better mitigate hunting of wolves. Furthermore, given wolves' propensity to disperse over great distances, the discovery of a healthy, breeding population would make it difficult to reintroduce experimental populations anywhere else in the northern Rocky Mountains.

The USFWS determined that in order to constitute a legitimate wolf population, a state must have at least two breeding pairs that have successfully raised at least two pups for two consecutive years (Hampton 1996, 213). Under this criterion, neither Wyoming nor Idaho qualified as having a wolf population, and the USFWS proceeded with their reintroduction plans. Fortunately the plan to reintroduce wolves into Yellowstone and other portions of the northern Rockies prevailed, but all of this points to the many obstacles that wolf recovery efforts must push through in order to materialize.

In 1995, the USFWS released an experimental population of roughly fifteen wolves to Yellowstone Park and an additional fifteen to Idaho. This of course caused significant uproar. Within the first month, one of the alpha males wandered north of the Yellowstone boundaries into Montana and was illegally shot and killed. Fortunately, the culprit was caught, and received a prison sentence and a fine (Yellowstone Park). This was the first of many illegal wolf killings that have proved to be one of the biggest threats to wolf recovery.

Since reintroduction in 1995, the Yellowstone wolf population has made a

substantial comeback; in 2016, ten wolf packs consisting of a total of roughly one hundred wolves called Yellowstone home (National Parks Service). Though these numbers are not what they used to be, the recovered Yellowstone wolves have had a profound effect on the ecosystem. The Yellowstone reintroduction has demonstrated why wolves are so crucial to ecosystem vitality, and has confirmed the realizations of biologists and naturalists like Aldo Leopold that predators control ecosystems.

### *iii. Ecological Benefits of Wolf Reintroduction*

The last of the Yellowstone wolf packs were eradicated by the 1930s, and in the decades since, the ecosystem had been adversely affected by their absence. Without wolves, the elk had no apex predator to control their population. Though cougars, black bears, and grizzly bears preyed on elk, wolves had been responsible for the most predation. In the absence of wolves, the abundance of elk threw off the balance of the ecosystem. Furthermore, with no apex predator to keep them mobile, the elk herds became more dormant, so rather than staying active and alert, the elk would remain in one general location and graze until the ground cover and trees were barren and gone. That means that all of the other species that rely on that ground cover or trees were driven out of the ecosystem. Elk graze heavily on aspen, cottonwood, and willow trees, so many bird species that rely on those trees struggled in the absence of wolves. But most importantly, perhaps, was the toll that overgrazing took on beavers.

Beavers rely on trees, particularly the willow stands by the riverbanks, not only for food, but also to make dams. Since those riverside willow stands were in such poor shape, the beavers suffered, and were unable to sufficiently dam the rivers. Thus, the

entire flow of the rivers changed, and therefore the river ecosystem changed. Dams create natural pools along streams, and deeper water tends to be cooler, so these pools provide cold, shaded water for fish to dwell. Without beaver dams to create those pools, the river became shallower, which means that the overall temperature of the river increased. The warmer waters caused the fish to slow down, making them easier targets for birds of prey. So the absence of beaver dams also caused fish populations to plummet.

Once wolves were restored to the Yellowstone ecosystem, they began to manage the elk populations. In the presence of wolves, the massive elk herds began to break up into smaller, more manageable herds. Wolves maintain healthier elk populations; not only did they cut the elk population down to a size that was more beneficial to the rest of the ecosystem's species, but since they go after the weak, sick, and older individuals, wolves make elk herds predominantly healthier. The elk herds also began to retreat from the open, grassy meadows they occupied in the wolves' absence to the denser timber forests. Thus, they stopped overgrazing the aspen, cottonwood, and willow stands by the riverbanks, so the songbirds returned and the beavers were able to make dams again. With the beavers able to make their dams again, the flow of the river reverted to its natural state, and fish populations made a comeback as well.

Not only have the wolves helped beavers, birds, fish, and plant life regenerate, but they have also helped the other predator species that were struggling in their absence. Elk can reach a top speed of around 40 miles per hour, which is faster than that of the wolf at 35 miles per hour. The reason wolves are successful in hunting elk is because of their teamwork and endurance. Other predators, like the grizzly bear, are not as well

equipped for hunting elk as wolves. Grizzly bears cannot run as fast as wolves, and they certainly do not have the stamina that wolves do. Since grizzlies cannot hunt elk as successfully, they actually rely on wolves to do the killing for them. Grizzlies will often let the wolves do the killing, and then come challenge a group of wolves for the meal. If you have ever heard the term “wolfing down your food,” that is where it originates. A grizzly bear typically knows when wolves have made a kill within just a few minutes of that kill, and if it challenges the wolves for that meal, they will surrender their kill more often than not. So wolves have only a few minutes to eat as much as they can, with enough to spare for the pups back in the den that eat the meat in regurgitated form.

In the absence of wolves, the grizzly bear, one of Yellowstone’s most emblematic creatures, suffered greatly. Though they are omnivores, grizzlies do rely on elk meat for a large portion of their diet, and without wolves to do the hunting for them, many of them were unable to get enough elk meat. It is not just grizzlies that rely on wolves to do the hunting for them; ravens, eagles, magpies, and coyotes, species mainly known for scavenging, found it harder to survive in the absence of wolves. Once wolves were restored to Yellowstone, they resumed their role as a food distributor, and helped many species make a comeback, including the grizzly bear, whose circumstances were looking tenuous by the end of the 20th century.

However, it is not just bears, beavers, songbirds, fish, ravens, eagles, magpies, and coyotes that have been positively affected by the wolves’ return; the entire ecosystem, from top to bottom, has benefitted from the presence of wolves. This top to bottom effect is called trophic cascade, and the Yellowstone reintroduction has proven that wolves are a keystone species whose presence is crucial to ecosystem maintenance. Yet despite the

copious ecological benefits, wolf restoration continues to be a point of contention; although the gray wolf population in the lower 48 states has grown from essentially zero to roughly 5,500 over the past two decades, policy changes and hunting, legally and illegally, have stunted the wolf's comeback.

*iv. Running in Place: The Back-and-Forth Sway of Contemporary Political Battles*

In 2003, the USFWS reclassified gray wolves in the lower 48 as "threatened" rather than endangered, and began working toward delisting them entirely, thus granting states the power to manage their wolves on their own terms (Earthjustice). The USFWS accepted Montana's and Idaho's proposed wolf management plans, but rejected Wyoming's, which would have allowed indiscriminate killing of wolves. Since the USFWS needed to approve all three states' management plans in order to delist wolves in the Northern Rockies, they were unable to, at this point, delist them. However, in 2005, the federal government instituted the 10(J) amendment to the ESA, which allowed livestock owners in Montana and Idaho to kill wolves without a permit if they were seen chasing livestock. This of course painted a large gray area over the legality of wolf killing because of the difficulties of disproving an alleged attack on livestock.

Over the course of the next two years, Wyoming appealed courts' rejections of its wolf management plan several times. In December 2007, the USFWS finally accepted Wyoming's proposal, which allowed anyone to kill wolves that wandered out of the Yellowstone region (Earthjustice). This, too, created a lot of legal ambiguity. Hunting wolves was still illegal within Yellowstone National Park boundaries, but wolves obviously do not recognize jurisdictional boundaries. Many wander outside the park

boundaries in search of food, and once they did so, they were fair game. After their protection outside the park boundaries was removed, the Yellowstone wolf population dropped 27% (Earthjustice). Yet the delisting was once again challenged and reversed the following year, and wolves were placed back under ESA protections.

In April 2009, gray wolves were yet again delisted in the Northern Rocky Mountains, with the exception of Wyoming. Furthermore, Montana and Idaho authorized a wolf hunting season. By the end of the hunting season in March 2010, more than 500 wolves had been killed in Montana and Idaho. Later that year, a federal judge restored protections for wolves in both of the states, declaring that the removal of protection did not comply with the ESA (Earthjustice).

In April 2011, this decision was reversed again, and federal protection was once again removed in Montana and Idaho. That year's wolf hunting season rendered 166 wolves killed in Montana and 379 killed in Idaho (Earthjustice). Appeals to restore protection to wolves in Montana and Idaho were rejected, and the delisting was upheld.

Wyoming yet again put forth a proposal for wolves to be delisted in August 2012. This time their proposal was approved, and the USFWS removed its protections over wolves in Wyoming. Furthermore, the USFWS proposed a plan to entirely delist gray wolves in the lower 48 states the following year. A coalition of some of the nation's most prominent conservation groups, including the Biological Center for Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, and Earthjustice, urged the Interior Department to cancel the plans to delist gray wolves. The USFWS then commissioned a scientific peer review to determine whether national delisting was an advisable decision. The study, conducted by the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis, unanimously concluded that

national delisting was not a scientifically sensible decision, and the USFWS cancelled its national delisting plans (Earthjustice).

By the end of 2015, wolves regained protection in Wyoming and the Great Lake States after two federal court decisions deemed those states' management plans unacceptable. However, during the period in which they were delisted, hunting took its toll on the wolf population in the lower 48 states, and continues to take its toll in Montana and Idaho, where wolves are still delisted.

During the two year period in which they were delisted in Wyoming, 219 wolf kills were reported (Earthjustice). According to wolf kill statistics the Humane Society released in 2016, Idaho reported 1,590 wolf kills since 2011. In Montana over those five years, 1,362 wolves were killed. In Minnesota from 2012 to 2014, the years in which wolves were delisted, 922 wolves were killed. During that same time period wolves were also delisted in Wisconsin, and 528 wolves were killed. Michigan held one legal wolf hunt that took place over the 2013-2014 hunting season that rendered 22 wolves killed (HumaneSociety).

The total wolf kills over the last five years amount to roughly 5,000. The last tally taken by the USFWS estimates a population of roughly 5,500 gray wolves in the lower 48 states (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). That is roughly 1% of the population that occupied the lower 48 states three centuries ago.

The most important takeaway from this section is that the road to wolf recovery is an uphill battle, and wildlife policy is a tumultuous, ever-changing structure. Although the ethics of wildlife policy have certainly grown over the course of the last half-century,

we still have a long way to go. The wolf population will never return to what it was prior to European contact, but the fact that legal wolf hunting resumed after just one percent of its original population was recovered reflects America's anthropocentrism and lack of consideration toward wildlife, and especially toward wolves. The numbers at which wolves are being killed make it very hard for them to make a comeback, and despite the tremendous ecological benefits they present, wolves still face formidable opposition on the political battleground. This reflects two notions above all: the wolf is still a subject of deeply-ingrained fear and hatred; and America's wildlife policy still operates under an exploitative, instrumental view of the environment that reflects anthropocentric prioritization.

Although the value that humans give to wilderness and wildlife has certainly increased, wilderness and wildlife are still utilized to best benefit humanity. Not only is this evident in America's wildlife policy, but it is also evident in the industry of privatized wildlife organizations. Since it is a private industry, the ethics of it vary between establishments. Some organizations are more geared toward selfless aid, while others exploit the animals they harbor for personal benefit. Many, however, fall somewhere between the two ends of the spectrum. In this section, I will discuss how the moral ambiguity in the industry of private wildlife enterprises perpetuates the wildlife ethics discussion.

### **5) Ethical Complexity of Privatized Wildlife Industry**

The complexity of wildlife ethics is certainly embedded in the industry of privatized wildlife sanctuaries, and since wolves are often featured as a primary subject of these sanctuaries, the industry is extremely relevant to the contemporary ethical discussion regarding wolves. Because it is largely comprised of privately owned establishments, many of which subsist on donations rather than government funding, the industry is not uniform in its ethics nor its goals, as whoever owns a particular establishment can operate it how they please, and are not confined to an agenda imposed upon them by the government. Some of these establishments are rescue oriented; some are oriented toward public outreach and education; some are profit oriented; and many fall under a combination of any or all of the three categories. The ethics of this industry are ambiguous; some privatized sanctuaries embody the preservation and conservation ethical reformation of the late 20th—21st century, while others maintain the instrumental view of wildlife as a subject to exploit for profit. Yet it is not so cut and dry, as there can be a lot of overlap between the two. Many of the establishments that fall under the latter category would identify with the former, and in some cases they would not necessarily be wrong to do so.

If a sanctuary maintains an exploitative relationship with its animals yet they exploit them for the purpose of educating the public on the importance of wildlife conservation, where do they fit within the spectrum of wildlife ethics? If a wolf sanctuary makes a tourist attraction of itself by relying on the wolf's wild exoticism to lure in its visitors, does it exploit the same "Big Bad Wolf" stereotype that the federal government used throughout its extermination campaign? Yet if it relies on that premise

only to deconstruct it and demonstrate that the wolf is not the “Big Bad Wolf,” then it utilizes the classic imagery in a manner that is actually constructive for the wolf’s reputation. However, if profit exists as the foundational, underlying objective beneath these other goals, then where does such an establishment fit within the ethical discussion? If a sanctuary effectively deconstructs the harmful stereotypes of wolves and educates the public on their ecological vitality while making a handsome profit, how can we assess the ethical grounds on which it stands?

The ethical discussion surrounding this relatively new industry is complex, and it raises more questions than empirical answers. For this section, I rely on the ambiguity that I have witnessed while working in this industry. I do not claim to know the answers; I simply aim to illuminate the industry’s nuanced ethical implications. Drawing on my own personal experience, I will compare and contrast two wolf sanctuaries in Colorado at which I have worked, the Colorado Wolf and Wildlife Center and Mission: Wolf, in order to demonstrate the complex ethics of the wildlife rescue organizations. Ultimately, this section aims to further the discussion of wildlife ethics regarding wolves and point out that it is a discussion that still needs to be had because the political battle between humans and wolves (and the broader philosophical conflict between mankind and nature) is far from over.

*i. About the Organizations*

The first privatized wildlife establishment I will discuss is the Colorado Wolf and Wildlife Center, where I worked as a wolf caretaker as well as a public educator for roughly six months, first as an unpaid intern and later as a paid staff member. During

those six months I learned more than I could have ever fathomed.

The Colorado Wolf and Wildlife Center (CWWC) is a nationally renowned organization that was founded in 1993. It provides a home to wolves, coyotes, and foxes, and is dedicated toward educating the public on the importance of wolves and wildlife conservation. It is located on a 70 acre lot in Divide, Colorado. The CWWC's eighteen wolves are split into various 1-2 acre enclosures with typically two wolves per enclosure. The animals are fed five days per week, and eat between three and six pounds of meat per day, which is mostly expired beef, chicken, or turkey donated to the Center by grocery stores. Wolves can eat meat that would be considered long expired for human consumption, so this is a pretty fair way to feed them. The CWWC is not necessarily a wildlife rescue; a handful of their animals come from rescue situations, but most have been purchased from breeders or taken in from other wildlife sanctuaries. It does not claim to rescue wild animals, but rather to provide the best captive home to animals already born into captivity. The CWWC receives all of their animals at a young age and begins socializing them immediately. Socialized wolves are able to interact with humans, which is mutually beneficial for both the organization and the animals themselves. Given that these wolves live in captivity and do not have the same means of mental and physical exercise that they do in the wild, human interaction is stimulating and mentally enriching, and the wolves enjoy it. Plus, socializing the wolves allows the CWWC to offer its visitors an interactive experience with a wolf. A hands-on interaction with a wolf is also a profound experience for visitors, and it is one of the best educational tools available for shifting people's opinions regarding wolves. Plus, wolf interactions generate a lot of income for the CWWC.

The CWWC is privately owned and operated, and it subsists primarily on public and private donations, which, given its status as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, are entirely tax-exempt. The CWWC team is comprised mostly of unpaid volunteers, and a few staff members who are paid \$30 to \$50 per workday, which usually lasts ten to twelve hours. Employee duties include taking care of the wolves, landscaping and ground maintenance, answering phones and checking in guests at the visitor center, and running the gift shop, which offers a large variety of wolf paraphernalia at a fairly steep price. The CWWC also offers several different experiences, which are also fairly pricey.

The general information tour costs \$15, and it is an hour-long educational tour that focuses both on the resident animals' stories as well as the larger issues in wolf conservation. When tours are fully booked, the additional guests that show up are offered an abbreviated Walkabout tour, which costs \$8 per person and lasts ten to fifteen minutes. The Interactive Alpha tour allows a handful of visitors to experience a fifteen minute interaction and photo session in a wolf enclosure of their choice. The alpha tour costs \$200 for one or two people, and an additional \$75 for each additional guest. The Ultimate Alpha tour is an upgraded version, allowing guests roughly 45 minutes in three different enclosures. The Walk on the Wild Side gives visitors the chance to take a wolf on an on-leash walk. The CWWC bans the use of professional cameras during the standard tours, but they do offer a professional photography tour.

The CWWC runs like an organized business; it offers a variety of experiences, none of which are cheap, and its advertising and outreach are effective enough to draw hundreds of visitors each week. At face value, it seems like a much more legitimate

organization than the more relaxed, simplistic operative style of Mission: Wolf.

Mission: Wolf is a more remotely located wolf refuge near Westcliffe, Colorado. It too is a 501(c)(3) wolf sanctuary whose focus is outreach and education. It embodies the conservation ethics it preaches. Mission: Wolf operates on solar panels and all of the enclosures and buildings are built purely from recycled materials, making it a highly sustainable organization. Aside from the core staff, Mission: Wolf's team is primarily comprised of unpaid volunteers that cycle through on weekly or monthly stints. Mission: Wolf also often hosts school groups and other organized groups that volunteer for a few days at a time. All of the volunteers and staff members live on site, either in tents or teepees, which creates the social and work atmosphere of a commune.

Mission: Wolf offers tours every day of the year from 9 AM to 5 PM. There are no scheduled tour times, and the tours are free, so your arrival is your price of admission. The general information tours last around an hour. At some point during the day, whenever the most guests show up or whenever it is convenient, Kent, the founder and director, takes the entire group, which could range from five people to thirty people, into an enclosure with his two ambassador wolves and one ambassador wolf-dog hybrid. Kent explains to everybody how to properly introduce themselves to a wolf — look the wolf right in the eyes, open up your mouth and show him your teeth, and don't budge when the wolf proceeds to lick around your face and inside your mouth. Kent firmly believes that wolves themselves are the best educators. An interaction with a wolf is the most profound educational tool available, and it is the only way to really shift people's attitudes toward wolves and incite activism.

Kent Weber's dream began in 1984 when he was licensed to care for a captive wolf

in need of shelter. By 1988, Kent had accumulated 52 wolves and formed Mission: Wolf on the 200 acre lot that it occupies today.

Mission: Wolf is more rescue oriented than the CWWC, as most of their wolves and wolf-dogs come from rescue situations. Though the facility itself does not attract even close to the number of visitors as the CWWC does, Mission: Wolf is very active in public outreach and education. Every year, Kent travels the country with his ambassador wolves, which are wolves that are socialized and comfortable with large crowds of people, to teach people about the value of wild wolves. From the classrooms to the politicians he has visited, Kent holds that introducing people to a wolf is the best way to get people to support wolves and join the fight to help them make a comeback.

At face value, Mission: Wolf and the Colorado Wolf and Wildlife Center are certainly very different places. Further examination of the places reveals even more differences. Now I'd like to highlight some of the benefits and drawbacks of each.

### *ii. A Closer Look Inside the Industry*

Mission: Wolf certainly embodies the purest of motives. However, that sometimes comes at a cost. Kent definitely dreams big, but he lacks the involvement that he used to have, and he lacks the structure and oversight to make Mission: Wolf a more effective organization. Most of the employees are volunteers that work for brief periods of time, anywhere from a week to a couple months, and most volunteers only serve one of these stints. Mission: Wolf's staff rotates frequently, and that lack of prolonged unity and employee ambition makes it difficult for them to grow or achieve much as a group. Volunteers perform a variety of duties: they give tours, prepare meat for the wolves, and

perform various landscaping tasks. The work day lasts from 9 am to 5 pm, which is shorter than the work day at the CWWC, but since everyone who works there also lives on site, the lines between work and leisure are somewhat blurred. During my time there, I witnessed a whole lot of standing around, walking around, and people playing Pokémon GO when they were supposed to be working. That sort of indolence would never be tolerated at the CWWC; even when all the day's tasks had been completed, they would find something else for us to do. That being said, it is more difficult to incentivize people to work harder when they are on volunteer status with a timeframe and not much to lose.

Perhaps if the core staff were better qualified they would be able to instill a better mentality in the volunteers, but unfortunately, the core staff members demonstrated inadequacy as well. With the exception of Kent's tours, the tours at Mission: Wolf are drastically less professional than the tours at CWWC, and are not nearly as informative. Aside from lacking a lot of crucial information, the tour guide pamphlet given to the volunteers contains some information that is simply incorrect. For instance, the pamphlet claimed that red wolves resulted from interbreeding between gray wolves and red foxes, which is genetically impossible. The misinformation is largely due to Rachel, the head of education, who lacks the knowledge and experience necessary to be qualified for her position. She owes her position to the fact that she is dating the animal caretaker, Mike. This sort of nepotism is common in the private wildlife industry, perhaps because it is such a new industry without much of an established pool of interested prospective employees. Many of these organizations prefer to hire from within the existing staff because it is easier than finding someone from the outside who may be more qualified.

The tours at Mission: Wolf do address the ecological importance of wolves, but the

tour guides mostly just talk about the individual wolves that are there: their backgrounds, their personalities, and fun, anecdotal stories about the wolves. This certainly has its merits, since it gives the wolves a sense of personhood that can draw emotional interest from the visitors. However, given the remoteness of Mission: Wolf and the limited number of visitors it attracts, it is important for the visitors to learn more about the historical and contemporary political battle regarding wolves so that they may be inspired to take action and join the cause, rather than just fall in love with the individual wolves they saw on the tour. Furthermore, the “meet and greet” sort of vibe of the tour seems slightly contrived from an insider’s perspective because the volunteers at Mission: Wolf hardly even get to interact with the wolves, so they don’t really get to know the wolves as well as they think they do.

Mission: Wolf tries to maintain the wild qualities of their resident wolves. Thus, they do not socialize their wolves, with the exception of the three ambassador wolves. Here is an example of how pure motives can conflict with practicality. Mike, the animal caretaker, is the only person, except for Kent, who is allowed to go into the wolf enclosures. By the end of a one month stint, a volunteer at Mission: Wolf may get to go into an enclosure with other wolves (i.e. not the ambassador wolves) a few times, but it is more of an opportunity to sit in a wolf enclosure than an interaction with the wolves because Mike is very strict about what a volunteer can and cannot do in a wolf enclosure. I heard many volunteers tell tales of how profound it was to have a wolf come within five feet of them to check them out while they sat on their hands in the enclosure. I sort of scoffed at these stories because within the first week at the CWWC I had already been allowed into all of the wolf enclosures and felt a hundred pounds of wolf jump on my

shoulders and lick my face.

The employees at Mission: Wolf don't get to know the wolves on a personal level like the CWWC's employees, so their anecdotal tales about the wolves during the tours don't resonate as well. But most importantly, the lack of human-wolf interaction at Mission: Wolf is detrimental to the wolves.

It is easy to understand the desire to keep the wildness of their resident wolves in tact, but how wild can an animal in captivity really be? The wolves at Mission: Wolf are in one-acre enclosures that they usually only share with one other mate, and they are fed raw meat that has already been butchered for them. Thus, how much of their wildness is really kept in tact? Given that they are bound to live in captivity the rest of their lives, it makes more sense to provide them a fair amount of stimulation and mental enrichment. Wolves are curious, social creatures, and they are built to trek dozens of miles each day alongside their fellow pack mates. If they are bound to live in enclosures alongside humans, they would benefit from interacting with those humans, as it would mitigate the boredom inherent when a highly intelligent animal is confined to an enclosed acre.

As a result of the lack of socialization, the wolves at Mission: Wolf exhibit a shy, tentative curiosity when they see humans, whereas the wolves at the CWWC get so excited when they see people that they resemble the happiness of a domestic dog thrilled to greet its owner who just came home from work.

Socialization is one of the most integral components to the CWWC's ethics regarding care for captive animals. However, the CWWC certainly exhibits some ethical ambiguity. Although socialization is beneficial to both the animals and the visitors, the CWWC socializes their animals in an exploitative manner that contrasts the selflessness

of Mission: Wolf's motives.

I tend to agree with Kent's assertion that interacting with a wolf is the most effective educational tool around. The CWWC provides more people with this opportunity than Mission: Wolf does. Not only do the wolves seem happier to have these interactions, but the visitors also are more likely to care about wolves' wellbeing after this rich experience. However, when the interactions cost upwards of \$200 and include a photo session, this educational tool seems less genuine.

First of all, some of the guests who choose this option may simply be doing so in order to have a cool new photograph with a wolf to add to their Facebook profile so that they may be the envy of their hundreds of online friends. This can generate mixed effects. When these people's Facebook friends see them smiling next to a hundred pound wolf, it could serve to deconstruct the whole "Big Bad Wolf" image. Yet it could also give people a false notion that wolves are just like big dogs, which could inspire them to seek to own a wolf or wolf-dog hybrid as a pet, which is a growing problem in America, where 80 percent of the 250,000 wolves and wolf-dogs bred to be sold as pets end up being euthanized because the owners realized they were more than they could handle. Also, people may see a Facebook friend with a wolf in their profile picture and say, "Wow! I want to go there so I can get a photo with a wolf!" Then you have people flocking to the CWWC with \$200 in their pocket so that they can also be the envy of their Facebook friends, and so on and so forth. That is not to say that all of the guests who choose the Interactive Alpha photo session do it for the photo; many of the guests do it for the experience of interacting with a wolf, and take away all of the positives that the educational experience has to offer.

Offering the photo session along with the interaction certainly draws more visitors to choose this option, but that is not necessarily a good thing. The guests who are in it for the learning experience would still choose this option regardless of the photo session, and the guests who are in it for the glory would likely not choose it. Yet if the purpose of the interaction is education, then who cares about providing that opportunity to guests who will not take away from it what they should?

Thus, offering a photo session along with the interaction seems to simply be a ploy to make more money. Furthermore, charging \$200 or more for an interaction limits the educational opportunity to those who can afford it, which seems contradictory to the whole purpose of shifting public attitudes. If money is the true incentive behind offering these interactions, then the CWWC is certainly exploiting their wolves for financial gain.

The Colorado Wolf and Wildlife Center has a reputation around the industry for being “all about the money.” As one of the biggest tourist attractions in the Pikes Peak region, the CWWC certainly hauls in a lot of money. Despite the fact its status as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, some people around the industry suspect that it generates a substantial profit. After working there for six months, I have ample reason to agree with that claim. Bear with me while I crunch some numbers.

During its busiest months in the summer, all of the general information tours book out at 45 people. There are four standard tours per day, which cost \$15 per person, and one feeding tour, which costs \$20 per person. If all tours are fully booked, which they usually are during the summer months, that is \$3,600 per day from those tours. In between each tour, they offer the Alpha Tour. I would estimate that an average of twenty guests choose this option each day in the summer. It’s difficult to determine how much

money alpha tours bring in each day; a single group of six would pay \$500, whereas three groups of two would pay \$600, or two groups of three would pay \$550. So out of twenty guests, if ten of them are included in the \$200 charge, and the other ten are additional guests at \$75 a piece, then alpha tours generate \$2,750 each day. So between the standard tours, the feeding tour, and the alpha tours, the organization hauls in \$6,350 per day, excluding the extra donations that individual guests may be inspired to give, or the income from the gift shop sales. The CWWC is open six days a week, so at that rate they haul in \$38,100 per week. From May 17th to August 14th, the beginning and end dates of my original internship, the CWWC made \$495,300. Once again that total excludes extra donations made by guests or other organizations; it excludes the gift shop sales; it excludes money hauled in from less common tours like the Walk on the Wild Side, the ultimate alpha tours, professional photography tours, and the walkabout tours; and it excludes the money generated from special events like the Full Moon Feeding Tour or the Singles Mingle Night, both of which generate a substantial amount of income.

To sum it up, the CWWC makes over half a million dollars in just the summer. Now, I can't claim to know its total expenditures, but I can assure you that staff wages hardly make a dent on that total. Staff members are not paid on the hour, but are paid \$30-\$50 per day, and given that each work day is ten to twelve hours, the CWWC pays grossly under minimum wage, which is illegal even for a non-profit. The main reason they are able to keep the place staffed is because the employees love the opportunity to work with and for wolves. At the very least, the CWWC fosters an exploitative relationship with its employees, and I can attest to this based on my experience there. Just like any other professional field, strong personalities and individual egos infiltrate

the work atmosphere and cause employees to butt heads. At both Mission: Wolf and the CWWC, I witnessed this hinder the quantity and quality of work that was able to be accomplished, and detract from the real focal point of each organization, which is the animals. Egos operated with particular strength at the CWWC, which made the workplace a fairly toxic environment.

At this point you may be thinking, “if their net income is so high, and they only pay their staff between two and four dollars an hour, then their expenses must be too high to pay them more.” Perhaps so. Like I said, I do not know exactly what their total expenses are. However, I have good reason to believe that the owner enjoys a handsome profit from that income.

My suspicion that the owner was profiting from the CWWC was strengthened one evening when a few coworkers and I were tracking a young black bear that had been seen wandering around the unoccupied back side of the 70-acre lot. We did not find the bear, but we found something much, much more interesting.

We found two black plastic trash bags poorly hidden in a bush between the back of one of the enclosure fences and the perimeter fence where nobody really had any reason to be. Given the physical weathering of the trash bags, they had been there for quite some time. Each trash bag contained three metal ammunition boxes; each ammunition box contained dozens of envelopes; and each envelope contained thousands of dollars in cash and donation checks made out to the Colorado Wolf and Wildlife Center. We had found a stash of money that easily reached six figures.

One of my coworkers called the owner, and she came down and collected the boxes and money and swept it all under the rug, so to speak. She nervously played it off like it

wasn't her money, and said that she was just hiding it for a friend. However, the donation checks made out to the CWWC in the envelope labeled "My Tropical Hut Fund" that dated back to 2004 made her vague explanation doubtful. It is no secret that the owner loves Costa Rica, as she also has a donation jar in the visitor center that funds trips to Costa Rica to spay and neuter stray dogs, and she has since purchased a house there that she frequently visits. A couple weeks after this incident, she conveniently took an impromptu trip to Costa Rica, and while I was getting some supplies from her garage one day at work, I noticed several empty ammunition boxes.

This incident was certainly startling, and it thrust me into a tremendous ethical dilemma regarding what action I should take. If the owner is exploiting the employees and the wolves for self gain, then that certainly isn't right. I could have alerted the authorities, but then again, was there substantial incriminating evidence? The CWWC has been around for over two decades; perhaps the owner has not been profiting the entire time, but given the dates on the envelopes, the owner has been potentially making a profit for at least a dozen years. Given that she has gone this long without her potential profiting being discovered, she has probably taken all the right steps to conceal it. Was it feasible to think that I had enough evidence to expose such an operation? Even if I did, would it be the right thing to do?

If I were to effectively expose potential illegal activity, then the CWWC would almost certainly be shut down. Then what would happen to the resident wolves? They could be relocated from the only home they knew, and separated from their lifelong mates. If the CWWC treated the wolves poorly, this would not be such a complicated

decision, but I cannot claim to have any big qualms with the lives these wolves were provided, and any forcible change of habitat would only detriment them. Furthermore, assuming some of that money goes toward helping wild wolves as well, as the CWWC claims it does, then shutting down the organization would also mean taking out a considerable contributor to the protection and restoration of wild wolves.

Even if the CWWC does not make as much of a financial contribution to the political battle as it could, it is hard to argue against the non-financial contribution it makes. Based on my estimates the CWWC attracts over 200 visitors each day in the summer. If it were to shut down, the public would lose access to one of the largest public educators on wolves, and important information that is vital the transformation of attitudes toward wolves would go unheard. It is crucial for visitors to hear this information because much of the public has no idea that wolves were persecuted to extinction, nor that their continued survival is still consistently threatened to this day.

There is yet another point to consider. The Colorado Wolf and Wildlife Center is one of the most reputable wildlife sanctuaries in the country, and if potential fraudulent activity were to be discovered by the public, then other similar organizations would be drawn into greater scrutiny. It is tough to say whether this would be beneficial or detrimental to the industry. It could have a positive effect because tighter regulations could perhaps be imposed upon the industry, making it more difficult for other organizations that may be exploiting their animals for financial gain to get away with it. However, this could detrimentally affect good organizations that are run without corruption. First of all, tighter regulations could unduly tie these organizations' hands behind their backs, which could limit what they are able to do and render them less

effective. My bigger concern, however, is how the media would handle such an exposure. If one of the most reputable wildlife organizations were to be shut down due to fraudulent activity, it would lead people to question the ethics of the entire industry. People may jump to the conclusion that other organizations practice the same tactics. Better organizations may fall victim to undeserved accusations, and if media sources were to jump on that bandwagon for the sake of a juicy story, it could ruin those better organizations. Given that mainstream media is the most common medium through which the public receives information, this undue slander of wildlife organizations could worsen their reputation in the public eye. If the public were to distrust the entire industry based on the ethical corruption of a few organizations, then fewer people would be inclined to support the better organizations, in which case the animals would be the ultimate victims. Without public support, organizations would be less able to care for their resident animals. Furthermore, if these organizations were to attract fewer visitors, then they would lose the opportunity to educate the public on the importance of protecting and preserving wild animals. Given how fickle and economically driven political action regarding wildlife has proven to be, public support is extremely crucial to the survival of wolves and other wild species whose survival is under threat. Without the support of human agents and activists, the government will not be as inclined to protect endangered wildlife, especially when it has to economic incentive to adhere to the demands of the hunting and agriculture industries.

Thus, it is crucial that effective educational wildlife organizations continue to attract visitors so that they can generate public support for wildlife preservation. Despite the potential financial corruption, there is no getting around the fact that the CWWC

effectively educates its visitors and plays a critical role in shifting public attitudes toward wolves. Granted, the information tours tell a few white lies, mainly regarding the stories of where the CWWC got their animals, since many of them come from breeders which the tours specifically preach against. But what is more important is that the tours teach visitors a ton of vital information regarding the ecological significance of wild wolves and the atrocities wolves have suffered through historical and modern times.

Ultimately, public education is one of the most important functions of a wildlife organization. Both Mission: Wolf and the Colorado Wolf and Wildlife Center perform this function well, each in their own way. Although Mission: Wolf may be less effective at educating its visitors, it is only because the staff lacks experience and organization. Mission: Wolf embodies the beautiful vision that Kent had for a wildlife refuge: a sustainable organization on a vast, secluded plot of land that can be operated far from the reaches of society. Kent is a great educator, but as a director he is fairly unwilling to try new approaches that may bring Mission: Wolf up to speed with the modern world. Not only is public education hindered by its remote location, but Mission: Wolf also lacks in the public outreach department, which could help draw in more visitors or educate people who are unable to make the journey. However, Kent's trips around the country with his ambassador wolves make up for it. By visiting classrooms and congressmen, Kent targets the people whose opinion really matters. Educating children about the importance of wolves helps secure a more hopeful long-term future for wild wolves, and shifting the attitudes of policymakers helps for their more immediate future.

Where Mission: Wolf lacks in attracting and educating its visitors, the Colorado

Wolf and Wildlife Center picks up the slack. The CWWC is located roughly 45 minutes west of Colorado Springs, making it fairly accessible to both locals and tourists visiting the Pikes Peak region. All across the Pikes Peak region the CWWC has brochures in convenience stores, billboard advertisements, and advertisements on bus stop benches that read “Wolf Tours” and feature a pair of exotic yellow eyes, so the CWWC does a good job enticing people to come take a wolf tour.

The CWWC also has a significant presence on social media, which helps attract visitors. The CWWC posts a weekly wolf blogs to their Facebook page, which is a smart move in many ways: it spreads awareness about their organization to people who may not have previously known about it; it expands their educational audience; and it makes their Facebook followers and fans feel closer to the organization, and keeps them interested so that they may be more likely to lend their support.

The CWWC also offers more to its visitors than Mission: Wolf. Not only do visitors have the chance to interact with a wolf if they can afford it, but the general information tour is much more exciting than the tour at Mission: Wolf. Tour guides carry around bags of raw meat treats that they toss in the enclosures so that the wolves come up to the fence, guaranteeing visitors a better look at them. Though tours vary some between tour guides, the tours at the CWWC are fairly consistent in their structure and the information they give. The tour is also physically structured much better than at Mission: Wolf. The tour takes place on circular trail that allows visitors to get up close to the enclosures. The tour guides also have more interesting personal stories with the wolves, and the wolves are much more personified, so by the end of the tour, the visitors feel more emotionally connected to the wolves they saw. That makes it much easier to

shift people's attitudes toward wolves. Mission: Wolf avoids personifying their wolves as much because they try to keep their wildness intact. Yet by emphasizing the individual personhood of each wolf, the Colorado Wolf and Wildlife Center does a better job at drawing an emotional response from its visitors, and the guests who respond emotionally are often the most likely to lend support to the cause. Thus, the CWWC may actually be doing more to ensure the longevity and bright future of wild wolf populations than Mission: Wolf, despite its financial corruption.

Certainly, the differences between the Colorado Wolf and Wildlife Center and Mission: Wolf highlight the ethical complexity of the wildlife industry. It is not black and white; individual organizations are not simply reducible to terms like "good" and "bad." The industry is littered with organizations that have both positive and negative qualities. Ultimately, it is difficult to say what is more important: the moral fiber that fuels an organization, or the outward appearance and effectiveness of an organization. The ideal organization would have impeccable morals and pure ambition along with major success. Yet from my own personal experience and the people with whom I've spoken, it seems like the majority of organizations in the industry have some key flaw that inhibits them from achieving the best potential effect they could have on the animals in which they specialize. Those flaws vary, but they all demonstrate one consistent characteristic: the difficulty humans have with putting something else before themselves. Wildlife organizations should theoretically place their animals at the top as the central focal point. Yet wildlife organizations are run by humans, and human egos inevitably infiltrate the workplace, and often detract from the altruistic energy and focus that can be

put toward the animals. As far as ethics go, it is most crucial that the wildlife industry places its animals first. After all, humanity's exploitative, selfish relationship with the environment and other animals is the reason wild animals need protection, rehabilitation, and reintroduction simply in order to avoid extinction, and that is why the industry exists in the first place.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The history of humans and wolves is fascinating, and there is a lot to be learned from it. This history is a lens through which one can examine the changes in environmental ethics over the course of American history. The case of humans and wolves not only provides a clear, evolutionary progression of concepts regarding the environment and ethical considerations for it, but it is also a great platform for contemplating the future of people's relationship with wildlife and the environment. Our ecological awareness, and, moreover, our aptitude to choose ecologically beneficial actions over self-serving ones, directly correlates with the future we choose for wolves. Mass human civilization has altered our surrounding environment to an unprecedented extent, and humans are finally becoming aware of the harmful effects of our disruption and denaturalization of naturally balanced systems. Humans have displaced many species from their natural existence, and the disruption of ecological balance that has followed their absence has proven the vital role they play in maintaining a balanced system.

Our custodianship of the environment reflects a tremendous lack of knowledge regarding the environment to which we are custodians. Humans are able to dominate and manage the environment in a profound way, yet our preferential treatment and managerial approach has long been geared toward making human lives easier. Prior to contemporary ecological knowledge and awareness, the way in which humans treated wildlife and manipulated the environment is less condemnable. However, given that humans now have a better understanding of the environmental consequences of certain actions, it is less excusable to make self-serving decisions that negatively impact our

surrounding environment. Moreover, given how long humans have dictated ecosystems and environments in a deconstructive manner, it is our duty to change the way we manage our planet, and hopefully reverse some of the damage we have done. Yet in order to accomplish such a feat, humans must overcome many inhibiting qualities responsible for our poor environmental management in the first place, which brings me to my next point.

Humans' history with wolves also says a lot about human nature and rationality, or lack thereof. The vilification of wolves exemplifies the irrationality of human fear. Of course fear can be an entirely rational emotion, yet the response to that fear is what reflects irrationality. Fear of the wolf is fear of the unknown. The rational response to that fear would be to get to know the unknown, empirically. Yet humans instead created stories and images, manifestations of that fear that lacked material or experiential evidence to support them.

As human civilization became more heavily centered around a livestock economy, people gained some experience with wolves, but lacked the objective understanding of the context of those experiences. In other words, people dealt with wolf predation on livestock, but since they lacked the ecological knowledge to understand the inevitability of that happening, they viewed it more simplistically as an occurrence that interfered with their financial livelihood. If humans did not understand the ecological forces responsible for those inevitable encounters, then they certainly could not understand the ecological implications of whatever course of action they took in response. Thus, humans decided that the best way to combat livestock depredation was to kill wolves, without understanding the ecological consequences that may arise from that method of livestock

protection. Contemporary knowledge proves that killing wolves is actually counterproductive, as it usually results in an increase in predation, and discouraging wolves from preying on livestock is more effective than killing them. Yet given where ecological knowledge stood at the time, killing wolves was not necessarily an irrational response. However, killing *all* the wolves certainly was irrational.

Responding to the fear of the unknown wolf with folklore and vilified imagery reflected emotional irrationality, but the response to livestock depredation reflected even greater irrationality. People saw livestock depredation as a hindrance to their livelihood, but treated it like a deliberate attack on their personhood. Simply put, humans got extremely angry, and irrationally so. Killing all the wolves in the lower 48 states was not a form of livestock protection, but rather an act of hateful retaliation.

Things often work the same on a microscopic and macroscopic scale. Just as an angry individual only seems to see things clearly and logically for how they are at the calm end of their temper, people didn't realize the error of wolf eradication until their retaliatory measures subsided and wolves reached local extinction. The absence of wolves proved their ecological vitality, and thus began the efforts to reintroduce them into the wild. Yet the heavy opposition that wolf reintroduction faces is proof that the shift in rationality and environmental custodianship has not been universal, and the rationale that supports an environmental stewardship that prioritizes humanity over all else still thrives.

Despite the obvious ecological benefits, the prospect of having wild wolves still faces substantial opposition. The ranching industry still holds substantial influence in the world of politics, and state governments that rely on the income from that industry have

persistently tried to contest the federal government's protection of wolves, pushing for wolf management policy to be within the states' jurisdiction. Over the course of the last decade, wolves have been removed from the Endangered Species List and then re-listed numerous times. Both state and federal governments have authorized numerous organized wolf hunts that have rendered roughly five thousand dead wolves over just the last five years. Given that the last study conducted by the USFWS estimated a population of roughly 5,500 wolves in the lower 48 states, America is making it fairly difficult for wolves to make a comeback.

Although American environmental ethics have shifted away from the instrumental, utilitarian treatment of nature over the last half century, that shift has been far from universal. Humans obviously still exhibit a lot of self-prioritization in their relationship with the environment and wildlife. Our society is structured to serve humans, and it is structured around money, so political action is often financially motivated. Thus it is difficult to get the government to protect wolves and other wildlife, especially when doing so costs money, and the government has the financial incentive from hunting and agriculture lobbyists not to do so. That is why it is so crucial to raise awareness and garner public support for wildlife protection and preservation in order to gain political influence in the form of public demand. It's easy to get discouraged since an influential portion of the public still opposes wolf protection and any wildlife preservation that may come at the cost of human livelihood, and an even bigger portion of the public is either unaware or apathetic toward the cause.

Yet it is crucial to remain optimistic, given that America has taken such a tremendous turn in environmental ethics over the last half century. Over the last two

centuries, America has spent millions of dollars to get rid of all the wolves, and now it is spending millions more to get them back. That polar shift in wolf policy provides hope for the future of not just wolves, but all wildlife. In order to secure a better future for wolves and all other non-human species, it is crucial that people continue to raise awareness and join the cause.

We are in the middle of the sixth mass extinction. If we don't want our children or grandchildren to live in a world where wolves, tigers, polar bears, and elephants are only known to them as historical relics, then the time to act is now.

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