

The story of a Montana woman who recently killed and skinned a domestic dog, then proudly posted photos on her social media pages, has sparked a flood of public outrage.

It should. The woman allegedly mistook the dog for a wolf, saying she was excited to share that she had "smoked a wolf pup." When others pointed out that she had actually killed a dog, likely a husky and not a young wolf, she doubled down on her actions, saying that if she were in that situation again, she still would have pulled the trigger.

The photos are gut-wrenching.

In one, the woman holds up the dead dog's head and smiles. In another, she poses next to the dog's skinned body, seemingly prepared as a trophy rug for a wall or floor display.

According to media outlets, the husky and at least 11 others had been abandoned in the Doris Creek area of Flathead National Forest in Montana. The local sheriff's office reported that several of the dogs tested positive for parvovirus, a highly contagious disease transmissible to dogs, foxes, coyotes and **wolves**. An investigation is ongoing.

The woman who killed the husky defended her actions by saying that she hadn't killed anybody's pet. Somehow, that's not an excuse.

But the context here points to a larger and troubling reality about the status and persecution of **wolves** in the West. They are killed every day during trophy-hunting seasons in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. In Montana, trophy hunters can kill up to 20 **wolves** each, and in Idaho there's no limit at all.

This is how the killing is carried out in 2022: **Wolves** are chased down with packs of radio-collared dogs, shot at night with the aid of night-vision goggles, or captured in steel-jawed leghold traps and strangling wire neck snares.

In Idaho, even mothers and pups in their dens can be killed year-round.

They're slaughtered by the hundreds each year - both legally and by poachers and lawbreakers who live by the "shoot, shovel and shut up" code of killing wildlife.

The killing of a husky under these circumstances is a tragedy, one born of a trigger-happy mindset about killing **wolves**, and now, it would seem, any canid that might be mistaken for one. In that sense, it's part of the larger tragedy that threatens America's wolf populations, one that we could prevent by restoring federal protections for them.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is currently considering whether or not to relist **wolves** in the Northern Rocky Mountains under the federal Endangered Species Act.

If authorities can identify and punish anyone responsible for the abandonment of the dogs, or find a way to hold the woman who killed the husky accountable, they certainly should do so. As companions at home and in the field, dogs are special, and a society that fails to protect them is not one to be envied. But we can also think about how we treat **wolves** in light of this incident.

In the West, we know that **wolves** are ecologically important as well as a huge magnet for ecotourism. Their presence is worth literally billions of tourist dollars annually to Idaho, Montana and Wyoming.

It's the height of folly to destroy their populations, and Western states with their disturbing and vicious policies are not merely out of step with majority opinion concerning the trophy killing of **wolves**. They also are divorced from everything we know about the value of **wolves** to the region's ecological balance.

Killing **wolves** out of some misplaced zeal threatens to undo decades of progress toward recovery. That is why it is vital for the federal government to restore protections to **wolves** in the Northern Rockies now.

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