

FNR 22300

Wolf Population Reintroduction: Recovery Program or Danger to Human Interests?

Draft Policy Brief

Group 10:

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Executive Summary

Audience:

- Senate committee on Environment and Public Works
 - Legislative jurisdiction on matters related to environmental protection, resources utilization and conservation, and public infrastructure

Importance of Environmental Issue

Wolves and humans are naturally afraid of each other and they have historically had sufficient space between their populations. However, as farms got bigger and bled into wolf habitats, wolves turned to livestock for prey. Humans lashed out and hatred for wolves spread. Starting in the late 19th Century, government-sanctioned wolf eradication programs were put in place to secure pasturage. By the mid-20th century, wolves were nearly extinct in the continental 48 states. Since then, researchers have begun to understand the importance that gray wolves have for their respective ecosystems and in 1973, gray wolves were placed on the Endangered Species List. Wolf reintroduction policies have become a subject of controversy and have been implemented to varying degrees of success and a split in public opinion. **Because of this, we believe that future wolf reintroduction policies should focus on how to manage and regulate wolf populations after reintroduction to support a healthy, stable population and limit negative impacts on the ecosystem and human interests while educating the public on the benefits of wolf population management.**

How do wolves impact society and environment?

Wolf impact on local/domestic wildlife populations (yellowstone.com source)

- Wolf prey (game wildlife?)
- Hunting?
- Impact on local predator populations
- Native American cultural value

Impact on ranches out west (Montana, Colorado)

- Public opinion is very strong (Active public rural vs. urban)
- Financial Implications for rural communities

Economic Value? (Ex. Tourism)

Ecotourism has increased since wolves were reintroduced Yellowstone

- 3 million average visitor count, 5% increase related to wolf presence
- Programs in yellowstone related to wolf education brought in an extra \$200,000 in 2005

Cost of introducing wolves into an ecosystem (\$, natural resources)

- Scientific research, public or privately funded
- Financial implications of management (re-visiting wolves, tracking etc.)
- See Mexican Gray Wolf Recovery plan for 25-35 year budget!

Cost to ranches (livestock)

- Livestock insurance
- Loss of livestock/loss of income -- proof that wolves are at fault?
- Cost of security (Fences)
- Government regulations

Promotion and establishment of environmental issues through public educational programs; Inform public about wildlife and environment

Wolf education project

- Special interest group dedicated to changing public opinion of wolves and share their environmental impacts

Education offered to improve the management of wolf populations

- Educating farmers/ranchers on how to prevent livestock loss

Description and Critiques of pre-existing policies or programs

Livestock compensation programs:

- Sheep cattle and horses are eligible for state compensation for deaths caused by wolves.

Other livestock animals will be dependent on availability of state funds.

- Most prominent on West Coast
- Managed by State Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Must notify within 24 hours of wolf attack to open a case

CRITIQUES

- Allocation of funding is not sufficient
- Proof needed for reimbursement is difficult to provide
- Timeline of receiving funds is prolonged
- In Oregon's Wallowa and Baker counties, local oversight of loss claims has proven unbalanced or thin in key cases, leading to approval of suspicious compensation requests.
Confirmed wolf kills may not have skyrocketed, but missing cattle claims have

Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery Plan

- The NRMWRP outlines steps for the recovery of the gray wolf populations in portions of their former range in the Northern Rocky Mountains of the United States.
 - Implicated by US Department of Fish and Wildlife

- Implicated in late 1980's in hopes of removing Northern Rocky Mountain Wolves off of the Endangered Species list

CRITIQUES

- Outdated, needs revision to meet today's technologies and new populations
- Difficult to experiment on populations of endangered species
- Maintenance and upkeep of wolf habitats is necessary and a prolonged piece of this policy

Endangered Species Act 1973

- The purposes of the Endangered Species Act are to provide a program for the conservation of such endangered and threatened species as well as a means whereby the ecosystems upon which such species depend may be conserved.
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CRITIQUES

- Some states have voted to remove wolves from the Endangered Species list, allowing the relatively small populations there to be hunted:
- “Delisting has been based on carefully made, evidence-based decisions. Not so for the wolf. In spring of 2011, Congress removed Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections for wolves in Idaho and Montana with an 11th hour Congressional rider attached to the federal budget bill”

Wolf Bounty Programs

- In 1906, the U.S. Forest Service acquiesced to the stockowners and enlisted the help of the Bureau of Biological Survey to clear cattle ranges of gray wolves.
 - Hunters compensated for elimination of wolves
 - Intended to protect public and livestock species

CRITIQUES

- BBS Revoking anti wolf propaganda by 1940
- Wolves Nearly Eradicated
- ESA contradicts this policy when protecting endangered species

West Coast Population Re-introduction

- Policies operate under ESA, policies differ by state
 - “Today, wolves in Idaho, Montana, eastern Oregon, eastern Washington, and north-central Utah are no longer listed under the ESA and are being successfully managed by the states. Both Idaho and Montana manage wolves in accordance with state management plans, under which their wolf populations have remained secure and well above recovery objectives.”
<https://www.doi.gov/ocl/management-wolves>
 - These policies have been mostly successful
 - “As of December 31, 2015, there were at least 1,704 wolves in 282 packs in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming. An additional 200 wolves in 34 packs were estimated in Oregon and Washington. “

Here's what's going on today

- Good stuff
- Bad stuff
- Room for change
 - Defining when the population has been successfully reintroduced and when is appropriate to take the population off of the protected species list to prevent a rubber-band effect of putting them on/taking them off back and forth
 - Education program to fight anti-wolf sentiments
 - Including Native American history and culture in this

Policy Recommendations

- I. Addressing what has worked in the past
 - A. Mexican Gray Wolf Recovery Plan -- monitoring population throughout reintroduction process; started in 1982, updated in 2017
- II. Changing what hasn't worked in the past
 - A. We need to come up with a plan for managing and studying the population post-reintroduction to ensure successful reintroduction
 - i. Regulations for states delisting wolves
 - B. Education about the benefits and management of wolf populations -- combating anti-wolf sentiments
 - i. Tourism -- why are we reintroducing wolves? How can the general public help? (i.e. not bothering them in the wild)

- ii. Ranches -- why are we reintroducing wolves? How can ranchers prevent livestock losses due to wolves?
- iii. Native American culture and history -- spiritual connection to and respect for wolves; would be an interesting group to include in the planning of the education movement especially

III. Policy alternatives

- A. Controlled reintroduction of wolves only in national parks and protected lands.

Impose management practices to ensure wolf populations do not impose threat to livestock populations.

- B. Fences to contain populations and prevent wolf-human/livestock interactions

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- Reintroducing gray wolves into Yellowstone
- Local feedback from supporters and opposers