

## Personal Encounter

By John Baden

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Here's a fundamental truth of ecological and economic systems: Not all good things go together. A neighboring rancher, an old-timer I've liked and admired for more than 30 years, called my attention to a Bozeman Chronicle article of May 26th, "Canadians consider wolf kill to save caribou."

I'm a guy who, with my wife Ramona, ran 500 ewes for years. Yet we publicly support the return of the wolf to wild areas. Hence, my friend hectored me:

"As time goes on we will find out what our forefathers learned the hard way, kill the dammed things! The wolves also like dogs, chicken, beef, horse foals, pigs, elk, deer, moose calves, antelope, all small nesting game birds, and small children. The list has no end!"

There's a lesson here. And the critical part isn't this predator's menu. Rather, it's cultural conflict and the West's changing political economy.

The reintroduction of wolves into Yellowstone illustrates the radical changes in the West. In the 1920's, the National Park Service exterminated them from Yellowstone. Until 1995, the wolf population in Yellowstone was zero.

Those insulated from rural traditions see wolves not as a threat, but as a keystone species providing ecological balance for the region. The wolf is an icon combining their romantic vision of an untamed past with a feel-good mission to set things aright. Conversely, many rural westerners view wolf reintroduction as ethnic cleansing that threatens ranching and the traditional culture.

The reintroduction of wolves necessarily means that more livestock and pets will be prey. Not all good things go together. Given their tough economic situation and the strong ethical obligation to husband one's livestock, "the only good wolf is a dead wolf" principle still prevails among some ranchers.

Equity and ethical conflicts are evident when stockgrowers suffer the losses from wolf reintroduction while benefits go to the public at large. Further, a system

creating incentives to kill wolves on sight undermines recovery. When we ignore the forces of economic incentives and rural culture, we have unsuccessful or unnecessarily costly attempts at recovering a lost world.

The Defenders of Wildlife established a program to compensate losses. It has been successful because it recognizes this elementary but commonly neglected principle. Through this program, the cost of restoring wolves has significantly declined—as has resistance to wolves.

In 1987, Defenders established a \$100,000 fund to compensate ranchers for the value of livestock killed by wolves. Through private donations this fund has grown to \$200,000. The efforts, to reduce the economic incentive for ranchers to kill wolves, have helped the wolf population recover. The fund now includes projects aimed at reducing future livestock losses. These include buying guard dogs and scare devices.

If a rancher believes a wolf has killed his livestock, he notifies the proper agency in the area. The carcass is examined to determine if the death was caused by a wolf. If so, a report is sent to the Defenders of Wildlife, and one of their staff contacts the rancher. In more than 90 percent of the cases, they agree on fair compensation for the lost livestock and the rancher receives a check within two weeks.

The Defenders' program has several benefits. Ranchers are compensated for their wolf losses, resulting in fewer wolves killed. More wolves generate more people visiting the park hoping to see them. Witness the spectacle of a hundred people waiting with high-powered



J. & K. Hollingsworth

"The wolf is an icon combining their

scopes in the Lamar Valley for a glimpse of wolves. Defenders estimates that communities surrounding Yellowstone have enjoyed a \$10 million increase in tourist spending.

The cultural tectonic plates have shifted from 70 years ago when westerners demanded wolf extermination and the government complied. Defenders' compensation fund recognizes this. Their actions moderate rural values from undergoing a process geologists call "subduction," where one tectonic plate submerges below another and quietly heats up. The process produces volcanic eruptions, such as my neighbor's harangue.

Soon sheep will return to our ranch for summer pasture. And wolves are reportedly in our area. Our guard dog Thor, a 150-pound Sharplanitz, was bred for centuries to ward off wolves. However, he is old and lame.

The burden is ours, not only Defenders'. Wolves were reintroduced as an experimental population, so shooting is permitted when wolves are attacking stock. The surviving wolves may inadvertently learn that while they have their place, it's not with our sheep on private lands.

Not all good things go together, but with intelligent and sensitive arrangements, we can make progress. I believe Defenders has. ■

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Serie Chapman

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