

Final Comments

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The wolf success stories of Yellowstone and the western Great Lakes region have provided benefits far beyond their borders. One of those benefits is the change in a fundamental premise about how we think about wolves—no longer is the discussion about whether we will live with wolves, but rather where and how. This special issue explores the where and how from a variety of distinctive perspectives.

A common theme in many of the articles is the reality of the negative impacts of wolves on livestock around the world. The proponents of wolf recovery are often portrayed as being cavalier about livestock concerns. However, as this issue of *International Wolf* demonstrates, research on minimizing wolf-livestock interactions, education work done by nonprofit organizations, the creation of private depredation compensation funds, and the efforts of state and federal wildlife management agencies attest to a

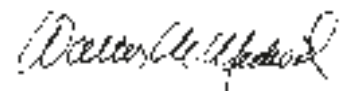
serious commitment to make wolf recovery “work” for the stakeholders.

At the same time, we cannot gloss over the wolf’s tendency to kill livestock or pets, nor can we treat depredation on livestock like some extraordinary event that suggests wolves are the only animals that have negative impacts on humans. Society has come to treat deer and car collisions (even when someone is killed) as a conventional occurrence. And, in California, where mountain lions have killed people, the public has not called for the elimination of the species. Bears break into cabins and destroy property in many areas. Deer and elk certainly take advantage of

crops and reduce yields to farmers.

If society starts viewing the wolf less as an icon and more as a “mainstream” animal (despite the animal’s remarkable characteristics), wolf recovery will be that much more successful. The public needs to recognize that wolves, like dozens of other variables (weather, energy availability, global-economic conditions, or even the changing diets of consumers), have become part of the cost of doing business. As society mainstreams this understanding, remedies to wolf predation, such as livestock insurance and a greater search for non-lethal methods of alleviating wolf depredation, will come to the forefront.

Even if the various battles being waged on behalf of wolf recovery are won, wolves and a host of other species reach a crossroads whenever humans decide the future of our landscape. These questions arise: how much open space will we preserve? Which plant and animal species will we protect? And when will we stop development that infringes on critical habitat? The wolf is just one species, but it does have a strong and important constituency that can help answer these questions and provide a model for the world, just as our national parks did more than a century ago. ■



Mary Ann Phelan

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