

Mech Challenges Study's Pessimistic Outlook

Reacting to the feasibility study, Dave Mech of the Biological Resources Division, U.S. Geological Survey, disagreed with some of the study's key conclusions. Mech was raised near the Adirondacks and worked there for four summers.

"I certainly agree there are enough prey in the Adirondacks to support wolves,"

stated Mech. "And there are sufficient high quality wilderness areas there for wolves. What I disagree with is the contention that wolves cannot persist for 100 years in the Adirondacks and the implication, then, of 'why bother?'"

Mech explained, "Even 50 years would

be a long time to have so interesting an animal as the wolf around." He pointed out that a totally inbred population of wolves has persisted on Isle Royale's 210 square miles for 50 years and is still going strong, proving how adaptable and resilient even small, highly inbred wolf populations can be. "In addition, if inbreeding were to become a problem in Adirondack wolves, that is easily solved," he said. "An artificial infusion of two or three wolves from Canada every 5-10 years should suffice to overcome it."

"All in all, I am not convinced that the issues raised in the feasibility study warrant a pessimistic outlook for wolf restoration to the Adirondacks," he said. He said he does agree that the true identity of wolves that formerly inhabited the area must be determined first. "And, as I have cautioned many times, New York State must be prepared to control the surplus wolves that are sure to disperse from the Adirondacks," said Mech.

Dave Mech is a Senior Research Scientist for the Biological Resources Division, U.S. Geological Survey, an Adjunct Professor at the University of Minnesota in St. Paul, and a board member of the International Wolf Center.



J. Henry Fair

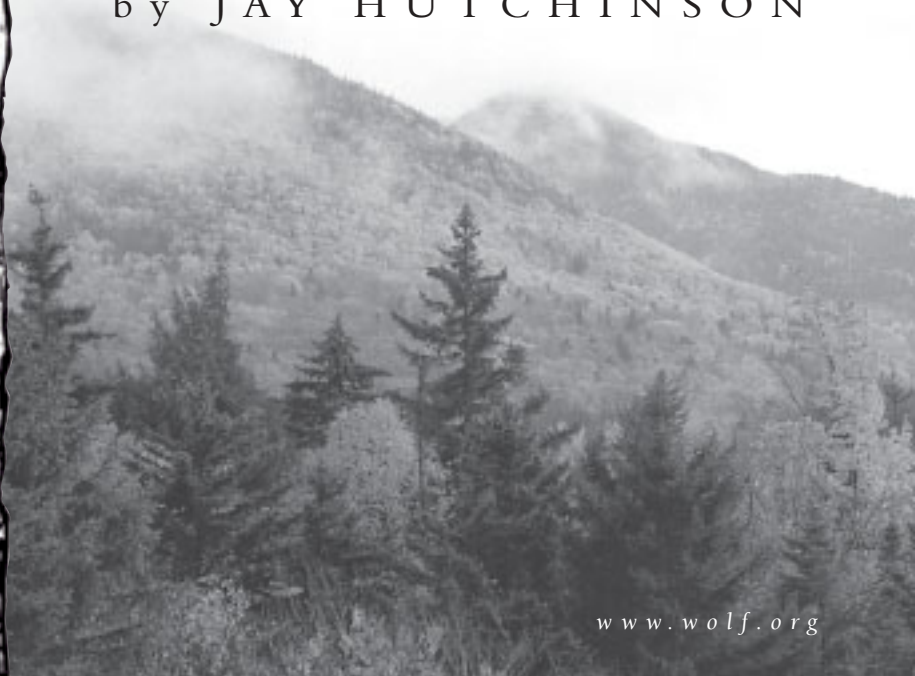
Ross Johnson



Gray Wolf Reintroduction in Adirondack Park?

Experts Disagree on Feasibility Study's Findings

by JAY HUTCHINSON



The following article is a summary of a report, "Gray Wolf Reintroduction Feasibility in Adirondack Park" prepared by consultants Paul C. Paquet, James R. Strittholt, and Nancy L. Staus of the Conservation Biology Institute for the Adirondack Citizens Advisory Committee on the feasibility of wolf reintroduction. A reaction to the report by wolf experts at the International Wolf Center's Beyond 2000 Symposium last February is also included.

With the successful reintroduction of wolves in parts of the U.S., interest has increased among wolf advocates in the possibility of returning the wolf to the Adirondack Park in northern New York State. The last wolf in the Adirondacks was killed in 1893.

At six million acres, the Adirondacks constitute the largest "park" in the contiguous United States; however only 42 percent (2.6 million acres) is publicly owned by the state and protected by the state constitution as "forest preserve" and "forever wild". The rest is privately owned, devoted mainly to forestry, open-space recreation, and agriculture.

In October of 1999, the Conservation Biology Institute conducted a study to assess the potential of Adirondack Park to support reintroduced gray wolves. Their method was to use earlier published data to create models with current physical, biological, and cultural data in a mapping system (called a Geographic Information System) to identify geographic areas with a high biological capacity to support wolves, probable wolf travel routes, areas with few people, and areas where people might conflict with wolves. A number of areas where wolves would be exposed to humans were also mapped.

The main conclusion of the study is that while Adirondack Park has sufficient habitat to support a small population of

Paquet Reaffirms his Conclusion: Adirondacks Cannot Sustain Wolves

Paul Paquet commented that from an ecological perspective, wolves have persisted on Isle Royale for only a very short time. "Given the perils of small populations, the probability of these wolves surviving into the next century is very low," he said. "Moreover, we doubt seriously this small population of wolves would have endured in the presence of the lethal human activities that occur in the Adirondacks."



Paquet said that in human dominated landscapes, roads, hunting, off-road vehicles, industrial forestry, urban development and disease all contribute to the death of wolves. "Lacking a reliable supply of new wolves, small and isolated populations cannot sustain the combined mortalities that result. As noted in the Adirondack report, we believe the goal of any wolf reintroduction is to establish wolves permanently without depending on artificial augmentation of the population," he said.

Dr. Paul Paquet is the Senior Ecologist with Conservation Science, Inc. He is an internationally recognized authority on mammalian carnivores, especially wolves, with research experience in several regions of the world.

Left: Adirondack Park includes six million acres of land where there are enough deer, moose, and beaver to sustain a wolf population, according to a study by Paul Paquet and colleagues.

Walter Medwid

wolves for perhaps 50 years, it could not support one for 100. Surprisingly, the study also suggests that it might even be inappropriate to introduce gray wolves, based on a recent separate genetic study.

According to the genetic study, the last Adirondack wolf killed in 1893 may have been similar to the smaller eastern wolf now inhabiting southeastern Canada. If the gray wolf was never present or existed in low numbers, the report concludes, it would be inappropriate to introduce gray wolves. Instead, the recommendation would be to reintroduce the eastern Canadian wolf based on the present knowledge of the genetic data, if wolves are to be reintroduced at all.

Some of the report's major findings include the following:

- There are enough deer, moose, and beaver as prey to sustain wolves in the park.
- Remote areas and other high quality habitats in the park are adequate to maintain a small population of wolves.
- Adirondack Park is highly fragmented, so wolves might not be able to gain access to some secure habitats, because of human activities and developments.

- Corridors connecting high quality habitats within the Adirondacks are secure enough that wolf packs can move about freely; however, the tenuous linkages to areas outside the Adirondacks and the great distance wolves would have to travel to reach other gray wolf populations cannot maintain wolves over long periods.

- The densities of paved roads and railways within potential wolf range are within acceptable limits.

- Denning areas are adequate and could be protected by restricted entry zones.

- If gray wolves are reintroduced, the initial population will need to be augmented annually to help offset annual mortality rates, which could exceed 30 percent.

- Higher human and road densities outside Adirondack Park threaten wider geographical distribution and the sustainability of wolf populations.

- Present highway speed limits could adversely affect introduced wolves during reestablishment. ■

Jay Hutchinson is retired from the North Central Forest Experiment Station of the U.S. Forest Service. He is interested in natural history subjects and has written past articles for International Wolf magazine.

Some people question whether the gray wolf ever existed in the Adirondacks or whether the wolf that did was really a newly proposed species, the eastern wolf.



Dwight Andrews

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