

Wolves of the World

WOLVES OF CANADA

Algonquin Becomes First Park with Surrounding, Permanent Protection for Wolves

by John and Mary Theberge

On March 3, 2004, the Ontario government announced a permanent ban on the killing of wolves in all townships surrounding Algonquin Provincial Park. These townships are about 10 to 15 kilometers (6 to 9 miles) wide and encompass almost as much land as within the 7,600-square-kilometer (2,900-square-mile) park. More importantly, it is within these townships that most wolf killing has occurred, as detailed in our research between 1987 and 1999. That mortality, through snaring and shooting, was threatening

the viability of the population, causing a drop of 33 percent over the years of the study and exacerbating the ongoing problem of gene swamping by coyotes.

This action represents a conservation milestone, the first time any park in North America and perhaps the world has enacted a permanent ban on killing a large carnivore adjacent to a park. The action is significant given a general concern among conservation biologists that the large parks of the world are failing to protect the large carnivores of the world due to competing land uses and exploitation around them. In a recent survey of Canadian national parks, all but one park with resident wolves reported a significant problem over exploitation of its transboundary wolf population.

Three years ago, the government enacted a temporary ban on wolf killing, to expire on June 30, 2004. However, a change in political party and leadership brought a different sensitivity to the issue. In

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January, with media attention again beginning to focus on the plight of Algonquin Park's wolf population, and after meetings with environmental leaders, the government announced its intentions.

The government's announcement had two other components: a ban on the killing of coyotes as well as wolves because snares cannot be set for one without catching the other, and hunters cannot distinguish easily between the members of the populations that overlap in size. Secondly, the province committed itself to the development of a province-wide wolf management strategy. In that strategy, hopefully, boundary protection may come for other parks such as Pukaskwa National Park on the north shore of Lake Superior, where killing outside the park is also a particular problem. And maybe Ontario's action at Algonquin will be precedent setting even beyond, for Yellowstone, Denali, Riding Mountain and other parks.

John and Mary Theberge published a 167-page scientific monograph in May 2004 titled "The Wolves of Algonquin Park, a 12 Year Ecological Study" that involved intensive research on 150 radio-collared wolves. It can be ordered from the University of Waterloo through e-mail to bkevans@fes.uwaterloo.ca. The price is \$23.50 Canadian or \$20.00 U.S. or other countries.

John and Mary Theberge