



WILD SENTRY



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Not a Comfortable Place to Reside

"The best things in life can't be said. The second are misunderstood. The third are the realm of history." Joseph Campbell

THE WOLF HUNT IN MONTANA and Idaho ignited a firestorm of controversy. This morning, when I opened our local paper, the issue hit home like a punch to the gut. The headline read, "First Bitterroot Wolf Killed" and a photo displayed a 35 year old man kneeling above the bloody carcass of a wolf. My insides tightened. My breath came out in short bursts. I set the paper aside and willed myself to take a deep breath. I called our dog, Ripley, and headed out for a walk.

When something hits me where I feel it, my first response is emotional. That's all well and fine... it tells me that I care and that passion still burns inside. However, as I've aged, I've come to see that a stance or course of action based upon a gut reaction usually results in a bigger mess.

As Rip and I made tracks across a thin veil of new snow, I thought about the wolf hunt. There are two ways to view the issue: emotional and rational. In the emotional level, I included perceptions, attitudes, and values. I'd started, upon seeing the picture of the dead wolf, at the emotional level. But

as I walked, I explored the rational level. Within that context I saw three basic elements of the hunt to ponder: biological, legal, and sociopolitical.

LEGAL

I'll start with the legal morass involved with wolves and the Endangered Species Act because that's the stickiest issue. Wolves in the northern Rockies are designated a 'distinct population' meaning they're viewed as a subgroup of the entire population of wolves in the United States.

Last year the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service removed wolves from endangered status and turned management over to the states... well, all of the states except Wyoming because Wyoming has acted like a recalcitrant and spoiled child. Wyoming submitted a management plan that, outside the greater Yellowstone area, allowed anyone to kill wolves, by any means (at den sites, run over by snowmobiles...), at any time, and in unlimited numbers. The USFWS could not sign off on that. Idaho produced a marginal management plan and Montana wrote a respectable plan. Oregon and Washington, where wolves aren't really an issue (because there are so few), have plans that are more restrictive than the federal guidelines.

(From here on, the wolves I'm referring to are those in the northern Rockies.)

There are two law suits filed against the USFWS for delisting wolves. The principal argument of both suits maintain that the distinct population of wolves can't be sub-divided – that for delisting to occur it's all-or-nothing. Ironically, though the grounds for both are pretty much the same, the suing parties and their motivations are at polar opposites.

In arena one, there's the state of Wyoming and an alliance of woolgrowers, cattle ranchers, and sportsmen suing the USFWS. According to them, wolves can't be delisted in Montana and Idaho without including Wyoming. You don't need to be a political wonk to suspect that this group doesn't have the welfare of wolves in mind. They want Wyoming included in delisting without the state



Koani's debut in front of a bulky camera Bruce borrowed from Missoula Community Access TV back in 1991. Photo: B. Weide

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coming up with a reasonable management plan.

In arena two, we have a group of environmental organizations. The grounds for their suit are that the USFWS can't turn wolf management over to Montana and Idaho until



Koani about to get a faceful of snow from a tree avalanche!
Photo: B. Weide

Wyoming gets onboard with a decent plan. And knowing that Wyoming isn't about to cooperate in the foreseeable future, they see this as a means of taking management away from Montana and Idaho, stopping wolf hunts, and keeping the wolf listed. (It's only fair to point out that a number of other environmental organizations are quite displeased with the groups involved with the lawsuit.)

The big legal question, in both cases, is: within the context of the Endangered Species Act, can a portion of a Recovered population be delisted while another portion remains protected? The judicial system does not decide cases based on feelings, what's reasonable, or what ought to be... it simply adheres to the law and when the intent of the law isn't clear, it's up to the court system to interpret the law. In terms of these cases, the legal briefs must be submitted and oral arguments made by early 2010. Decisions will probably be rendered by mid-2010.

BIOLOGICAL

Next, let's segue into the biological realm. Will the₂

"As I grow older and wiser I find that I can remember anything, whether it happened or not."

current Idaho and Montana hunts eradicate wolves? No. Conservationists, and I consider myself one, tend to see the glass as half empty... So I'd like to put this into context – wolf recovery in the northern Rockies has been a success.

When Pat and I started presenting Wild Sentry programs in 1991, I hoped to see wolf reintroduction take place in my life time. Then, quite amazingly, four and five years later, wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone and central Idaho. Now, a mere decade and a half down the road, the fact that there are enough wolves to even consider allowing a hunt... well, that's astounding. And there are a lot of wolves – we've gone from 66 reintroduced wolves (plus a small number of wolves that migrated from Canada into northwestern Montana) in the mid-90's to more than 1,645 as of December of 2008.


Here are some rough annual averages, based on numbers provided by the USFWS, for wolf births and deaths relative to the total population prior to the hunts. Births accounted for a 30-50% increase (the only number that wolf-haters pay attention to) and deaths for around a 25% decrease (the only number that wolf-huggers see). So from 100 wolves, there were 30-50 births and 26 deaths: 10 from illegal killings, 10 from government control actions, 3 from road kills, and 3 natural causes. Based on these figures, we see that the wolf population, without a hunt, grows five to twenty-five per cent each year.

...we've gone from 66 reintroduced wolves in the mid-90's to more than 1,645...

Idaho, with some 520 wolves, set its sights on a hunting quota of 220 wolves (which I personally view as extreme... but I'm trying to remain rational) spread out over 12 zones. As I write (on Nov. 18th), 108 Idaho wolves have been harvested... a hunting euphemism for killed. Montana's quota of 77 from three zones has been met and the season is closed. You can learn about the hunts at these two websites:

Montana: fwp.mt.gov/hunting/planahunt/wolfStatus.html

Idaho: fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/hunt/wolf/quota.cfm

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Genetic Diversity

Is 1,645 wolves enough to guarantee the survival of the species or allow for genetic diversity on an evolutionary scale? Not likely. But Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming do not offer enough suitable habitat for the number of wolves needed to insure species survival or genetic diversity. Humans occupy most of the prime habitat. And I don't think we're going to give it up to wolves. Simply put, there are too many of us.

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Hunting wolves, especially given the quotas and zones, is not going to jeopardize the existence of wolves. In order to exterminate wolves, the use of poison would have to be allowed, as occurred during the extermination campaign at the turn of the 19th century. And while there is strong opposition to wolves, no state has proposed returning to the use of poison, not even Wyoming.

SOCIOPOLITICAL

Now, into the sociopolitical zone. I've been monitoring comments submitted by Bitterrooters in response to that front page article about the wolf shot by a local hunter and the ignorance, profiling, polarization, and depraved craziness is running rampant. If it's still posted, it's well worth viewing:

www.ravallirepublic.com/articles/2009/10/27/news/news82.txt

In one camp the anti-wolf contingent is firing off comments and insults – congratulating the local hunter for defending himself and his children (from a wolf that was oblivious to their presence), going into graphic detail about how wolves bring down an elk or deer (you try it without tools or opposable thumbs), describing how they haven't seen any elk or deer since the wolves came back (try getting out of your truck), telling the tree-huggers to go to hell or at least back to where they came from, and basically being rude.

...the social realm isn't that far removed from the Twilight Zone...

Meanwhile in the other camp, you've got tree-huggers who carry on about what a noble animal the wolf is, how they mate for life (which most humans and wolves don't do) and only eat bunnies (why is that okay?) or carrion, and hunters are pathological murders (because they shoot the meat they eat instead of buying it wrapped in plastic at the supermarket) and it's immoral to kill anything or at least an animal you don't eat (unless it's a mouse in the house)... But enough about the comments, I simply wanted to point out that the social realm isn't that far removed from the Twilight Zone and there's certainly not much consistency in either side's arguments.

One purpose of the hunt is to 'encourage' wolves to remain in areas that are suitable for them... that being wildlands as opposed the wildland fringe or rural areas where wolves might be tempted to kill livestock or family pets. Many wolf proponents ask, how does shooting wolves that lived in wild areas encourage them to remain there and not venture into the unsuitable fringe?

I talked to Carolyn Sime, the wolf coordinator for Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, about the wolf hunt. She pointed out that in Montana, 95% of the wolves live outside the bounds of a national park, in Idaho it's 100%, and that means wolves are sharing a lot of land with humans and their livestock and pets.

And all those people have differing agendas when it comes to wolves. Many of those who raise livestock feel that wolf management isn't aggressive enough, that Montana should adopt Wyoming's management strategy – shoot on sight. "That's not going to happen," Sime tells them and goes on to point out, "That'd be the quickest way to get wolves relisted [as an endangered species by the USFWS]." As for hunters, she said, "We're not getting as many complaints from hunters about wolves this season."


In regards to managing the wolf hunt, she didn't hesitate to say that "We're learning as we go." It's likely that where hunters are allowed to hunt and the number of wolves killed in specific areas will be different next year based on what MFWP learns from this year's hunt. "We will still want to offer hunters the opportunity to harvest elk and wolves," said Sime, "but we will fine-tune the regulations so wolf harvest is more widely distributed and not so focused in one area."

Among the anti-wolf crew, there's been the perception that wolves aren't being managed. While far removed from



Bruce's favorite picture of him and Indy with Lee Metzcar in background - Up on Mt. Jumbo in 1992. Photo: P. Tucker

reality – the government has been quite busy “managing” (which translates into killing) wolves – that's the perception. Due to federal protection, a lot of people who live in wolf range view the wolf as an über animal, an untouchable creature that's been 'shoved down' their throats (as they so often love to phrase it). Allowing a hunt undermines a bunch of whining about how “us common folks otta be allowed to

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“Guts are important. Your guts are what digest things. But it is your brains that tell you which things to swallow and which not to swallow.” Austin Dacey

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manage wolves ourselves.” A hunt transforms the wolf into just another animal out there in the woods – that’s going to go a long way towards defusing animosity aimed at wolves.

Mountain lions and bears are hunted in Montana; they are viewed as part of the landscape. While lions and bears kill livestock, the media rarely reports it. If a wolf kills a cow or sheep, it’s front page news. Demystifying wolves would be good for them and a hunting season begins to establish such a status.

Also in the social dimension, but at the opposite end of the political spectrum, is the perception that the hunt will exterminate wolves. Biologically speaking, that’s not going to happen. But that hasn’t stopped some environmental groups from exploiting the issue and sending out hysterical alerts that proclaim the annihilation of all wolves. The alerts read something along the lines of: “This cute little wolf pup will be blown away unless you do something to stop that from happening! What can you do? SEND MONEY!” This smacks of fundraising based on manipulating emotions. Such tactics only cloud the real and much more complex issues and make it difficult for those striving for workable solutions here on the frontlines. (It’s similar to the stance the Church took on the mass-produced Bibles that rolled off Gutenberg’s press... you don’t need to get a copy and read it for yourself. Don’t worry your little head over complexities contained in the Bible, the clergy is here to interpret it for you. Just keep tithing money.)

“The whole controversy over wolves comes down to three things. Perceptions, perceptions, and perceptions.”

Many wolf proponents harbor the perception that every hunter hates wolves and wants to kill one. This is not true. Prior to reintroduction, in survey after survey, when hunters were asked if they had a problem with wolves, a consistent 60% said, “No.” In Montana, only one out of twelve elk hunters purchased a wolf tag (tags cost only \$11.50 in Idaho and \$19 in Montana so money wasn’t a factor). That makes for a lot of hunters who aren’t interested in killing a wolf. But that’s not the perception conveyed by the media.

As Ed Bangs, the Wolf Recovery Coordinator for the USFWS, often points out, “The whole controversy over wolves comes down to three things. Perceptions, perceptions, and perceptions.” I’ll fine tune his observation – it’s about the perceptions of ranchers, the perceptions of hunters, the perceptions of environmentalists, and the perceptions

of animal-rights proponents. A tactic employed by all sides is the selective use of ‘science’ to support their agendas. This disingenuous and deceptive ploy causes the public to distrust science and, in the end, proves a disservice to us all as we’ve seen with the continuing controversy over global warming. Those who cherry-pick science to support their claims are as contemptible and destructive as the sanctimonious holy-rollers who selectively quote Bible passages out of context in order to further their self-righteous agendas.


As is the case with controversial issues, those with moderate views aren’t afforded a voice in the media – we hear only from the extremes. And that influences perceptions... which give birth to attitudes that go on to form values. And that’s where things get emotional... which is where I started out.

What makes the issue of a wolf hunt so emotional is that most people view it from the stand point of morality. Each of us believe that our morals or values are ‘right’ – otherwise we wouldn’t believe in them. If I hold a value, I’d just as soon not see any inconsistencies in it. Nevertheless inconsistencies riddle values.

BACK TO WHERE I STARTED

Ripley and I returned to the house... and then I saw the newspaper photo of the dead wolf again. I folded the front page in on itself and placed the newspaper in the recycle box.

I spent more than a quarter of my life living with a wolf. Throughout those 16 years, I never grew indifferent to the feelings that coursed through me as I looked into Koani’s eyes. Sometimes, when our eyes locked, I felt a sense of communication that approximated dialog. Other times, her eyes penetrated and cut through me as if she’d sized me up and was now peering into a world that, given my human

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“I use emotion for the many and reserve reason for the few.”
Adolf Hitler



Gopher Ranch in the winter. Photo: B. Weide

Book Recommendation

Wolf Wars: The Remarkable Inside Story of the Restoration of Wolves to Yellowstone (Falcon Press): Hank Fischer's book was published in 1995 after the historic wolf reintroduction and explores the decade-long political battle that finally resulted in reintroduction. Though a lot has happened in the 14 years since then, Fischer's book provides an excellent foundation for understanding the complexities of wolf recovery.

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limitations, I would never see. The thought that a member of my species could be possessed with a desire to willfully darken the gaze of a creature like Koani filled me with a grief that permeated my bones.

Perhaps a Universal Truth applies to some things but for the most part life isn't that simple, unless you believe your values are so Universally righteous that they should be imposed on everyone. My mind lives in a place where emotional truth and rational truth often collide. How to reconcile this dilemma? To begin with, it helps to simply recognize the existence of emotional and rational truths and to differentiate them. Then take a deep breath, step outside of emotions for a moment, and think. Acknowledge the role emotions play with influencing a stance or opinion. Investigate credible facts as opposed to believing a story

...an unexamined reaction seldom aids the process of working towards solutions.

heard at the bar or in the checkout line or an e-mail. Instead of joining the ranks of the marching morons and being pressured into accepting a conclusion that mirrors that of a peer group, be bold and step out of line, explore the facts and think for yourself.

Intellectually, I understand why there's a wolf hunt. Rationally I can see that the impetus behind the hunt is fueled more by the emotions that stem from perceptions than from the rationale of biology. But if a hunt causes people who live in wolf recovery areas to view the wolf as simply another animal that's part of the landscape then the end results of a hunt will prove best for wolves as a species.

Be that as it may, I have looked into the eyes of a wolf. I can not wrap my mind around consciously wanting to end the life of such an animal. So while I can accept a wolf hunt at a rational level, I find myself unable to approve of it at an emotional level.

I have to admit that, at times, I tire of moral relativism. It's so much easier to take a stand, shout out that I'm for this or agin' that, and not worry my little head about details and complexities. But such an unexamined reaction seldom aids the process of working towards solutions. Perhaps one purpose

*"Get your facts first, then you can distort them as you please."
Mark Twain*



Pat awaits a 'take' as Krist ponders lighting. Photo: B. Weide

of life is to learn to live with the tension that results when reason and emotion collide. It's not an easy or comfortable place to reside. But then, there's no evidence that life was meant to be easy.


I recognize that I haven't fully addressed this issue, but that would require a book... And who'd read it?

"I do not feel obligated to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reasons, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use." Galileo Galilei

What's Happening with the Film?

WORKING TOWARDS MAKING THE documentary about Koani a reality has proven an amazingly slow and, at times, frustrating process. Even in the best circumstances, getting a film up and rolling takes a lot of time. What I didn't see coming was the nosedive the economy took which transformed a challenging undertaking into an even tougher quest. So here's the Reader's Digest Condensed version of what could easily be a *War and Peace* sized book.

In January, Katy and her associate, Krist (who served as an extremely resourceful grip), spent two days here at Gopher Ranch filming and interviewing Pat and me. From

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Facebook

I'm not an avid Facebook user but I do make posts, so if you'd like to connect via Facebook:

1. Search for Bruce Weide;
2. Make a Friend request and add a message that you'd like to be a Wild Sentry friend.

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that footage and our archive of Wild Sentry footage, she and Kathy created an impressive promo. If you haven't seen it, you really need to. Here's the URL:

www.sproutfilms.net/koanipromo.html

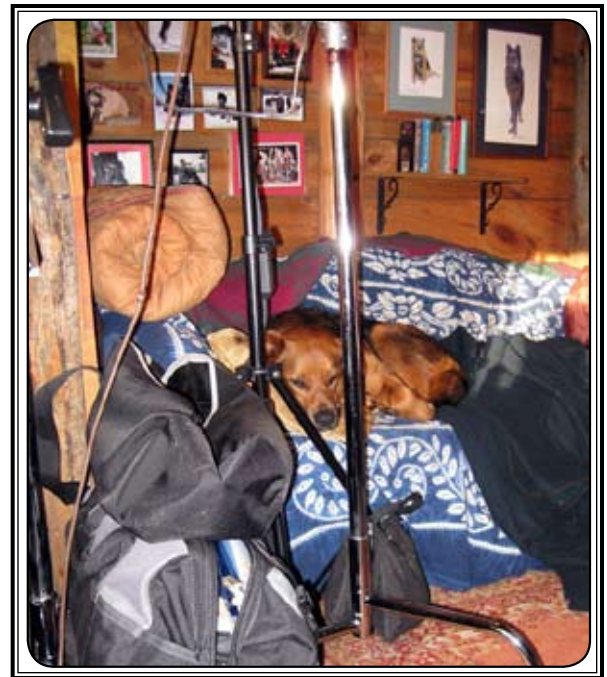
As Katy slaved away on the promo, I wrote a treatment. Kathy then reworked it with the aim of gearing it for an upcoming pitch to Animal Planet.

In February, I flew to Washington D.C. and joined Kathy, at a television convention called Reel Screen, where we pitched the project to Animal Planet. The story didn't fit Animal Planet's agenda.

I found humor in the irony of how things have changed in the world of television: Back in the mid-90's, we dealt with numerous television production crews who wanted to shoot footage of Koani (or the Wild Sentry team) for a portion of their program. Whenever I suggested a documentary about Koani, I was told, "The problem is, this story isn't over, it's still ongoing, there's not a story arc." Now fast-forward 15 years and the advent of 'reality' TV: "The problem is, that this story is complete, it's over... it's not on-going." Timing is everything but styles do come and go and good stories always captivate an audience.

Since then we've had ongoing discussions of the film with several other production houses, including the Public Television series *Nature*. Where and when these discussions will end remains to be seen but we remain hopeful that, as the economy improves, there will be increasing interest in new projects that convey a solid and inspiring story.

I just talked to the program director at Montana Public Television and proposed teaming up with them. Local public television



Ripley chills between takes. Photo: B. Weide

THE OTHER TEAM MEMBERS

CHRIS PALMER: Pat and I met Chris when he directed the National Wildlife Federation's Media and Film Division. He asked us to play a role in the IMAX film *Wolves* and from that a friendship based on mutual respect ensued. Chris is now the Director of the Center for Environmental Filmmaking and a professor at American University's School of Communication.


KATY MAGRUDER: a creative and competent young film maker whose award-winning documentary *Little Mom Full of Color* explored the difficult terrain of dying. Kathy filmed the interview footage for the Koani film promo that she then edited.

KATHY PASTERNAK: an experienced producer who produced films such as *In the Valley of Wolves*, *Raptor Force* (for *Nature*), and *Wolf Pack* (for National Geographic).

Wild Sentry's Work

As we let you know previously, Wild Sentry's primary mission at this point is producing a film that focuses on the important role public education plays in controversial wildlife issues. With Koani and Indy at its heart, this film will be engaging, informative, entertaining, and will honor their memories. Broadcasting the film will be the first step in creating an educational unit that emphasizes respect for various viewpoints.

Once again, we want you to know that Wild Sentry is still in operation as a federal not-for-profit (501c3) organization. We appreciate your contributions. Donated money is being used as needed to further the film project with the remainder put in savings for actual film production.

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6 Katy and Krist spent two days at Gopher Ranch shooting footage for the Koani film promo. Photo: B. Weide

Dominion

*The Dominion we
humans boast of,
the dominance over
all the creatures
that move
upon the earth,
it is nothing more than
fear.*

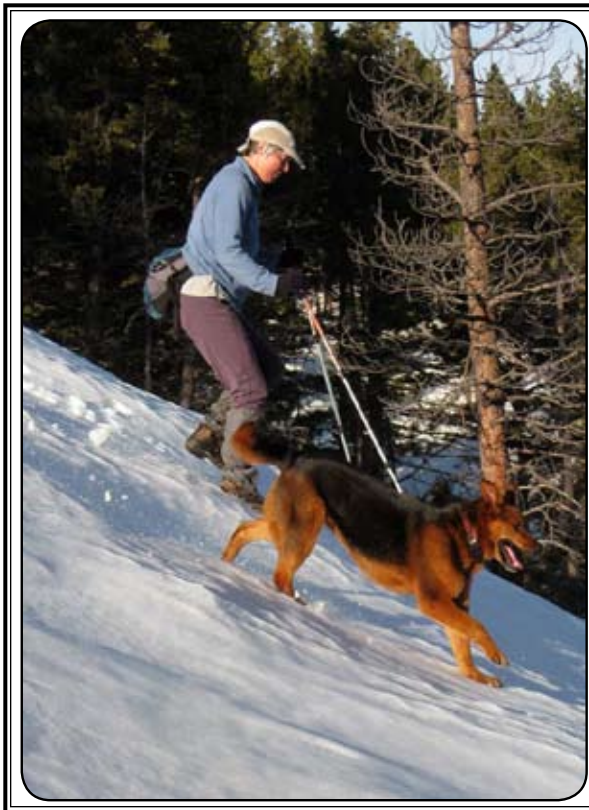
*The animal Man
ducks and
flails arms wildly
when a bee
flies near.*

B. Weide • 1985

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stations don't have money to fund productions (they're struggling just to find enough money to stay on the air), but working with Montana PBS would guarantee a regional broadcast venue that can go national.

If you're interested in the narrative treatment (with lots of nice photos), I'd be happy to e-mail it to you. Just e-mail me at gopherranch@wildblue.net and ask for the narrative treatment.



Pat and Ripley run down the eastern flank of the mountain in our 'backyard' on the day we found the wolf tracks. Photo: B. Weide

Here There Be Wolves

THE TREES CAST DARK shadows on fresh snow as Bruce, Ripley and I skirted a cliff band only half a mile from our home. After several days of gray skies and flurries of snow, our spirits were high. Points of light glittered everywhere. Temperatures in the mid-twenties with an afternoon sun, a spot light in a bowl of bright blue, made it a perfect time for a walk.

Ripley was running point as usual. There will be a day when her aging out paces our own and she will follow behind. But at age five that day is impossible to imagine. Suddenly her head went down. Up it came covered with snow clinging to her face. A bound forward, nose deep down, and big snuffling as she sucked up the scent. She looked at us, eyes bright, tailing wagging excitedly, "Come quick! Come see!" And we did.

There they were: a perfect string of tracks. Five inches long, four wide. We followed them as they wove around trees and rocks, Ripley urging us on. She knew exactly what made the tracks. She'd had one for a buddy once. We kept reminding her that just because one wolf had been a friend and mentor didn't mean they all were. We lost the wolf tracks on a southern aspect where they crossed bare ground.

In the following weeks we searched, but saw no more. There were no reports of livestock killed by wolves or of a wolf shot in our area. It was likely a lone animal, probably young, off on its own in search of a mate and unclaimed territory that offered good hunting and the opportunity to start a family. Not finding one or the other, the wolf moved on.

We'd heard rumors of people seeing wolves in our canyon. We know they must travel through; there are too many wolves in the Bitterroot for them not to. But actually seeing the physical evidence ourselves was quite another matter. Their impact stunned me: a wild wolf walked here, where I stood, only an hour or two earlier. For sixteen years the only wolf tracks in the canyon were those accompanied by a human with tell-tale drag marks of a leash in-between. And now... It's difficult to describe the emotions that swept through me as I stared at those tracks.

The celebration of physical evidence that wolves are a reality in the canyon mixed with concern for this individual wolf's fate. The truth, I am sad to say, is that the canyon near our home would not be safe for a family of wolves. Too

"Intuition is reason in a hurry." Holbrook Jackson

NEWS FLASH • Good News Just Arrived!

After reviewing the trailer for your film, and reading through the treatment, I must say that I am intrigued. While certainly an extraordinary story, I find the sacrifices you and Pat made of particular interest, the honesty about the daily challenges compelling, and most of all the question you leave unanswered for the audience to ponder. "Was it worth it? Was it the right thing to do?" The film is more powerful for allowing the audience to make their own conclusion.

I believe your proposed film has the potential for broadcast not only on MontanaPBS, but also for distribution to public television stations around the country. I look forward to working with you and assisting you in any way to make that happen.

Sincerely,

*Aaron Pruitt • Director of Programming
MontanaPBS • KUSM-TV/Bozeman &
KUFM-TV/Missoula*

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many people, too many pets, too much livestock. As much as I want it otherwise, it's true. But still, these tracks are what we worked for and here was evidence of success. Wolves make do; I've presented that biology to thousands of people. Wolves adjust and, as a species, are amazingly resilient to persecution.

The key, for me, to being able to revel in wolves, to proudly proclaim that Bruce, Koani, Indy, you and I played a role in the amazing triumph of bringing wolves back to the Northern Rockies is focusing on the species. As with every living thing, individuals come and go. We celebrate their births and mourn their passing. That is how it should be. That proves our humanity. But the great wonder of it all belongs to the species: its toughness, perseverance, adaptability. That is the piece we're bound to protect and fight for.

If I worry too much about the fate of "my canyon's" wolf, I'm paralyzed. I lose the important

ability to take pride in society's great accomplishment of returning wolves to Montana, Idaho and Wyoming after their vicious extermination 70 years ago.

Most of all I lose perspective on what must be done to ensure that, as a species, wolves have a permanent place here. Two things are critical to that: public attitudes (especially important are the people living in close proximity to them) and preservation of enough wild lands (with prey animals) for them to hunt and play relatively undisturbed by humans. In your continued work for wolves, examine it closely to ensure that it is furthering those goals. Emotion and concern for individuals are not bad but they sometimes work counter productively to what the species needs for its survival.

The tracks in the snow up our canyon pointed to a success that we can all feel good about. Where once we walked a captive wolf, wild wolves now roam free.



Wolf track - Blodgett Canyon - 2009. Photo: B. Weide



*Here's Hoping that your firewood is cut, the root cellar stocked,
and you find the time to enjoy good stories and reflect on pleasant memories
from the past year in the warm company of close friends.
Happy Holidays from the Wild Sentry Team.*

Return Service Requested

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Wild Sentry

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on Wild Sentry's website.

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