



Of Wolves and Liars

The wolf issue is reaching critical mass

The proliferation of Canadian wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountain States over the past few years brings to mind another issue from a couple of decades ago. Environmentalists latched onto the spotted owl like their lives depended on it, not because they honestly gave a “hoot” about an owl, but because it was a tool to accomplish another unspoken agenda – stopping logging. On many fronts, it worked. Arguing the case for or against logging on its own merits would have been too difficult, so finding a likely tool (the owl), a vehicle (the Endangered Species Act), and a venue (the courts) became their M.O.

Here we are a couple of decades later, and these extremist animal rights (and anti-hunting) organizations are up to their old tricks again. This time the wolf is the tool. I don't honestly doubt that these organizations might actually care more about a wolf than they did about an owl, but their M.O. is the same and the goal is nearly the same, except this time it's about stopping hunting.

The sad part of this whole affair is that the people in the middle, who don't know most of the facts, fall for their propaganda hook, line and sinker. Just listen to Ashley Judd or any other city dweller who doesn't see the truth from their back porch and it's easy to understand why people can be led astray on this issue. Wolves howl, they have great family structure, and well...they're cute.

Liking or disliking wolves really has little to do with this. It has to do with ulterior motives and dishonesty, and Defenders of Wildlife and its sister organizations are chock full of both. The original agreement of “30 packs and 300 total wolves equitably distributed across Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming” has been met sixfold or better, depending on whose numbers you choose to listen to. But that's not enough for these groups. They want MORE. Why? Because as wolves continue to decimate game populations, it makes hunting tag numbers drop - and not just drop, but to the point of making entire hunts disappear, so that wolves have completely displaced hunters.

Think it's not happening? Call Idaho Department of Fish and Game and ask them about the future of moose hunting in the Clearwater River drainage. As soon as next year, all of those hunts could potentially be completely eliminated. The Lolo elk herd in that vicinity has gone from 12,000 strong to 1500. And the historic late Gardiner elk hunt in southern Montana? Gone. Gone like smoke. Moose in Yellowstone? Barely more than a memory now.

Think the 2009-10 wolf hunt is fixing the problem? Not on your life. The pups being born this spring alone will far surpass the wolf-hunting mortality from last fall, plus they'll now be harder to kill. Sport hunting alone will not do the job, not even if every hunter in the hills was REQUIRED to have a wolf tag in his/her pocket.

The sad part of this deal gone wrong is that as outraged as hunters are, they mostly all just go shout and sulk in their own corners, and seem to do little to actually combat it. Preaching to the choir only helps to remind each other what we already all know.

Recently, David Allen, President and CEO of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, wrote a letter to Defenders of Wildlife in response to a letter they had written RMEF. That letter is printed in this issue's MRS (subscribers' copies only) and I highly encourage you to read it. RMEF, in Allen's own words to me, “sat on the fence way too long on this issue.” He's right; they did. And they paid for it by alienating the people that brought them to the dance – hunter-conservationists. However, RMEF, along with the rest of us who actually truly do care about wildlife, has seen enough. Over a century of conservation and wise management that restored our Western big game species to unparalleled levels (from near extinction in many cases) is being catastrophically devastated by overzealous “wolves in sheep's clothing”. These organizations are so consumed by their goal of eliminating hunting that they'll wipe out a century of conservation – including nearly all Shiras moose and 90% of the elk population – to do it.

In his letter, Allen tactfully and rightfully

calls them out for “moving the goal line”, meaning not honoring agreed-upon objectives by continually demanding more – to the tune of 2000-5000 total wolves (far from the original 300).

Allen states in his letter, “We do not believe that your organizations subscribe to hunting as a viable conservation tool (which they claim); in fact, we believe you and other animal rights groups have an overriding agenda to decrease hunting until there is none.” Allen is dead on with these statements, and RMEF is to be applauded for calling these groups onto the carpet for their irresponsible actions.

If these groups are successful in their hidden agendas, hunting will largely be eliminated. Tag and license sales? Gone. State wildlife agencies? Gone. Bountiful wildlife? Gone. Another piece of our outdoor heritage? Gone. As David Allen said in a phone call to me, “If this happens, we'll be the new European model, where major wildlife are largely found only in large, fenced-in zoos, where we all just drive by and look.” How's that for a picture?

It's time to get aggressive and start asserting our rights, our heritage, our success stories, and why our story and legacy is the better one; a story full of vested interest in bountiful wildlife populations for ourselves as well as our children. I encourage every last one of you to take some time out of your schedule and write every congressman and senator you can; to join every hunter-based conservation organization you can; and to diplomatically spread the message not only to other hunters, but also to anyone you know who needs to know the truth. Our heritage and all that we hold dear may just depend on it.

Toward the end of his letter, Allen states, “If your organizations do not begin to subscribe to sound wildlife management soon, this disaster will lay squarely on your hands for history and the public to judge.”

He was mostly right. It may also be on our own hands if we don't speak loudly enough and soon enough to stop this disaster.