

WOLVES FRIEND OR FOE?

- For this lesson I have included a map and some photos of wolves, you may want to find others to share with your class. There is a site in the references to get photos.
- In this lesson the term livestock means, cattle, hogs, sheep, horses, llamas, goats, donkeys, emus, ostriches, herding/guard dogs, etc

During our childhood we have been led to believe wolves are mean characters (red riding hood, three pigs). Are wolves as bad as they seem? Or are they just going about their lives doing what wolves do for their survival?

Wolves are highly social animals who usually live and hunt in packs with an alpha male and female and their young and usually one other adult female, usually last year's pup who takes over the "nanny" role with the pups while the parents hunt. Wolves can cover over 30 miles or more in a day to hunt for food, in the case of arctic wolves where food is at a premium they may have a hunting ground of over 800 miles.

Wolves have the same ancestry of domestic dogs and wild dogs as in the dingo, African wild dog, jackals and foxes.

The numerous sub-species are categorized into two groups. The Northern wolves inhabit North America, Europe, and Northern Asia. The Southern wolves live in North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and South Asia. The northern wolf is a larger size and has a bigger brain than their southern cousins.

There were over 35 sub-species of wolves until most of them had been hunted into extinction, or loss of habitat, now there are only about a half dozen viable sub-species, some are considered endangered.

Gray Wolf

The gray wolf (also known as timber wolves) is a survivor of the ice age from over 300,000 years ago, over time they have adapted well to cover the areas of the Arctic Tundra of North America to the tropical forest of Eurasia.

Until the mid nineteenth century gray wolves existed throughout most of North America except Southern Mexico and the Gulf Coast Region. By the 1920's wolves were gone from most of the United States, by the 40's they were only in isolated areas including the Great Lakes region and portions of the Rocky Mountains.

They are capable of covering a lot of ground at a trot of 6 mph and with amazing stamina, when chasing their prey they can reach speeds of over 40 mph and at 5.5 to 6.5 feet in length they can bound 16 ft which contributes to their proficiency as hunters. They have an average life span of 7 to 8 years. Their color ranges from grizzled gray or black to complete white

Red Wolf

The red wolf shares his lineage with the gray wolf, the prairie wolf and the timber wolf. They are native to North America and once dominated the territory of Texas, Pennsylvania and Florida, recently 1.7 million acres of South Carolina has been declared as red wolf territory. The red wolf measures 4.5-5.5 ft., slightly smaller than the Gray, they communicate with scent and sound and they can even read each other expressions. They live 6-8 years in the wild or 15 in captivity.

They thrive on small animals like rabbits and birds, but can take down a deer when hunting in a pack. They are highly endangered with a very small population left today.

Arctic Wolf

The Arctic wolf also known as the polar wolf, white wolf or Yukon wolf is also a sub-species of the gray wolf, arctic wolves inhabit Alaska, Canada and Greenland, because of their harsh and remote territory are the only sub-species of the gray wolf to still inhabit their original territory and are not on the endangered list largely because they very rarely encounter humans in their remote home range. Arctic wolves have a much harsher climate than other wolves. Because of their highly insulated fur, they can survive sub-zero temperatures of -25 or more for years.

Arctic wolves live and hunt in packs of 2-20 , and give birth to 2-3 pups who are born deaf and blind and rely on the adult wolves for regurgitated food as they work together to raise the pups, due to the scarcity of food they may roam up to 800 miles moving their pack with them while following the elk and caribou, with their 42 sharp teeth they can eat every part of the animal including the bones, since they don't know when their next meal will come along, they can eat 20 pounds of food at a time and survive for weeks without food.

They don't have the speed of the gray wolf so they rely on stamina when hunting.

Black Wolf

Black Wolves were considered rare in France but common in Southern Europe and occurred in Italy, Montenegro and Russia, They are bigger than the more common grey variety and exceeded them size and strength but are generally less aggressive then grays and interbred with dogs more readily. Smaller communities of black wolves have been seen in Asia and North America about half of the wolves reintroduced to Yellowstone Park were Black wolves.

The black wolf /dogs were mentioned by the Florida Indians as identical to the local wolves except they could bark. The hides of black wolves were considered more valuable and could be worth as much as 40 American beaver skins.

Euro-American history

With the influx of the European immigrants to North America they brought with them their hatred of wolves, their prejudice was either by direct contact or ingrained by their culture or the religion of their homeland.

Wolf persecution was so intense in Europe that the last wolf was killed on the British Isles in the early sixteenth century. In an extreme measure to exterminate wolves in Scotland the immense forests that offered safe havens for wolves were burned even though they were a major source of fuel for humans.

The pilgrims arrived with all the prejudices, beliefs and devices that had been used to eradicate the wolf in their homelands, in 1630 bounties were soon established in all settlements along the eastern seaboard and by 1700 the wolves had been eradicated from New England. As the western migration began, wolves were systematically killed by expanding human population. Their bad reputation was fostered by the large number of bison carcasses left by hunters and farmers in their efforts to open up the land for farming and the need to protect their animals which had been domesticated for the benefit of humans for transportation and the expansion of cropping.

Native American and wolves

Wolves and Native American tribes coexisted for generations, as with other resources, tribal people learned the value of wolves, coyotes and foxes and were revered on a spiritual level.

The influx of European people with their hatred of wolves and their disregard for natural resources disrupted the whole causing the values and relationships to one another to be out of balance between nature and humans.

To be able to maintain and relearn the value of one another, the tribal people believe the wolf should have its place without limits and restrictions so future generations may have a complete circle again.

Eagles and other small carnivores and birds and bugs are scavengers and benefit from carcasses left behind by wolves, bears, coyotes, and foxes so their survival is tied into sharing the same regions as these predators.

In 1915 the responsibility of predator control became a responsibility of the U.S. Government, official hunters were paid to kill wolves and stories of the killings were used to strengthen the rationale for the need to exterminate wolves. The last ones were killed in Arkansas in 1928 and Oregon in 1946, Colorado and Wyoming in 1943. Bounties were repealed in Wisconsin and Michigan in 1956 and 1960 respectively. Several hundred wolves survived in northern Minnesota.

Wolves versus livestock

Deer and elk herds often migrate to lower ranges on both private and public lands also used by livestock during late fall and winter which makes for likely wolf-livestock interaction, when ranchers see this as a threat to their herds this puts wolves at risk to be blamed for livestock losses even though there are multiple studies which shows livestock is more at risk from cougars, bears and coyotes. **Coyotes are the main threat to livestock and kill more than wolves.**

Preying on livestock is a learned behavior and they can teach this behavior to other wolves, most packs routinely encounter livestock but do not attack livestock at each encounter which might be avoided with better management of livestock.

Parts of Canada have heavily forested and less intensely managed grazing lands and so they have more kills, whether they are from wolves, bears or coyote's is unknown and unproven.

In North America and Europe untended livestock in remote pastures are at greater danger of losses from wolves. Coyotes are the main threat to livestock and with closer vigilance on rancher part could see less kills

Where livestock is managed well in relation to wolf management there is less likely hood of livestock perdition.

Proactive, non-lethal deterrents encouraged by agencies and livestock producers include electric fencing, rubber bullets, guarding and herding animals, increased human presence, night pens, and light or siren warning devices, some of these may not be possible or too costly to do but ranchers have to take some responsibility to keep their cattle as safe as possible instead of arbitrarily killing all predator animals.

Wolves in Oregon

In 1999 after an absence of over 60 years, a radio-collared female gray wolf entered Oregon from Idaho, she was one of three in Idaho from an experimental population, she was captured and returned to Idaho however two males from the same group were found dead in Oregon.

Since the re-establishment of wolves in Montana, Wyoming and Idaho through the Federal Wolf Recovery Program established in 2005 wolf biologists predict that wolves will disperse from Idaho into Oregon. In 2005 after many Oregon law changes, the **Oregon Wolf Management Plan** was implemented to oversee the process of wolf/ human matters whose goal is to: **“ensure the conservation of gray wolves as required by Oregon law while protecting the social and economic interests of all Oregonians.”** (1)

“In developing their recommended Plan, the committee sought a model that is achievable, realistic, fair, flexible, cost-effective, defensible, sustainable and fundable, and which also engages the public and provides incentives for achieving wolf conservation goals.

The Plan applies to all lands in Oregon with respect to the take provisions, except potentially those lands of Indian Nations which are identified as reservation lands and are managed under sovereign tribal authority. The Plan does not intend to require private landowners to take action to protect the species or to impose additional requirements or restrictions on the use of private land” (1)

In 2010 a minimum of 14 wolves are known to reside in Oregon and share their habitat with other carnivores including cougars, mountain lions, coyotes, black bears, wolverines, badgers etc. during the winter wolves and cougars often share the same range , wolves will take over a cougars kill which makes the cougars kill again to recover their lost prey.

So in a roundabout way I guess you could say wolves are to blame.

Wolves primarily prey on the old, weak, and the very young, while other predators are not as discerning and will take down any animal.

Wolves and other Wildlife VS Humans

Do wolves attack people? That was the question Oregonians attending town hall meetings in 2002 asked. Compared to other wildlife to human interactions wolf attacks on humans are quite rare.

Wolf populations as of 2003 are estimated at 10,000-20,000 in Europe, 40,000 in Russia and 60,000 in North America, Despite these high numbers, recorded fatalities by wolves were 4 people in Europe, 4 in Russia and 2 in North America during the last 50 years, since 2005 there has been documented reports of 1 in Canada and 1 in North America, some were caused by rabid wolves.

Wolves are not a major source of rabies but rabid wolves contracted the disease from other animals which were carriers, account for most of the attacks in Asia and Europe. Rabid wolves would run through villages during the "furious stage" of rabies and bite anyone they came in contact with wounding some and killing others, these attacks probably contributed to the bias against wolves of the European people who settled in America even though we have a low rate of rabies in wolves in this country.

According to the CDC report in 1997, Domestic dogs are responsible for 4.7 million bites and 15-20 fatalities per year, domestic dogs are the single most important vector for the transmission of rabies to humans

Wolves are not responsible for the amount of deaths as previously speculated. With the advent of all the studies done by scientists and writers the reputation of wolves has taken a turn for the better. During the 20th Century, brown and grizzly bears have killed 36 people in Europe, 206 in Asia and 71 in North America, An estimated 25 attacks each year in North America by black bears each year with 1 being fatal every third year, cougars accounted for 17 fatal and 72 non-fatal attacks.

Even though they make beautiful animals, because of the danger to humans, possession of dog/wolf hybrids is discouraged because they have no fear of humans and are less predictable and manageable than dogs and they are difficult to distinguish from wolves and can be mistaken for a wolf and killed.

The majority of Oregonians are thrilled to have wolves back in the state, but according to the Center for Biological Diversity, who have worked hard to develop a wolf plan that balances wildlife conservation with the legitimate interests of ranchers, but the Cattleman Association and other anti-wildlife groups are refusing to honor their end of the bargain by pushing the legislature to intervene in the legal proceedings,

As a large organization based around the country they are not always working in the best interest of Oregonians.

“Compared to the 29 wolves now roaming Oregon, more than 1.3 million cattle exist in the state. In 2010, more than 55,000 cows were lost to causes from weather, disease and thieves. In the rare instances in which livestock are lost to wolves (fewer than 25 in 2011), ranchers are reimbursed at fair market value by Oregon taxpayers. Some have questioned whether the state’s compensation and killing programs provide a perverse incentive for anti-wolf livestock operators not to take effective measures to protect their livestock.” (2)

In 1973 the Federal government established the Endangered Species Act and they were reintroduced into the contiguous 48 states into Idaho and Yellowstone National park and have been under constant Management and Recovery Plans.

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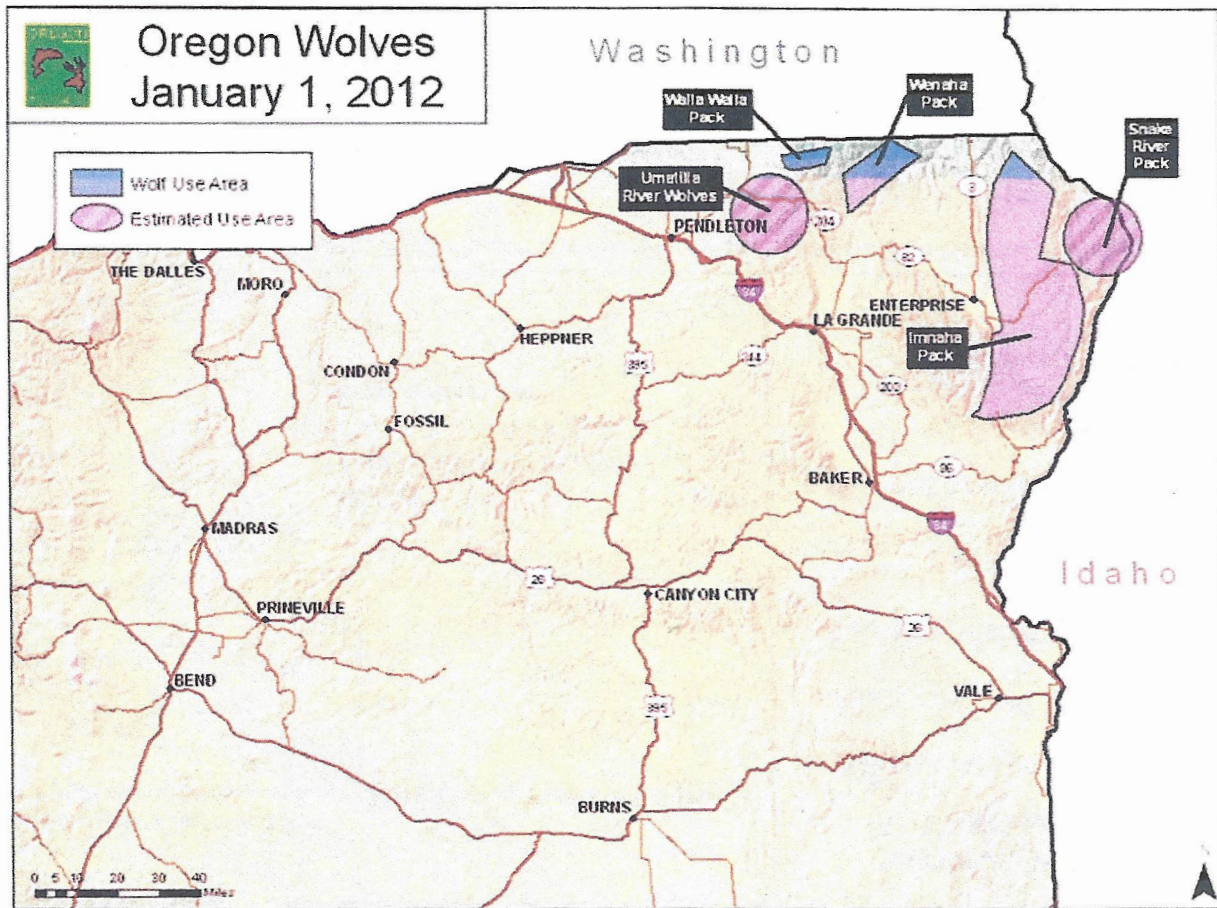
Decades of persecution and intolerance have driven wolves out of existence across much of the U.S. Today they occupy just 5 percent of their historic range

Wolves have had to overcome some very adverse and harsh environments and attitudes to survive. They have had to endure a lot of misinformation and gotten a bad reputation when they are blamed for kills that other predators took down, we need to educate ourselves and open our minds to the whole picture of wolves vs. livestock vs. Humans.

I hope I have enlightened you to their plight and can look at wolves with an unbiased eye

References

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- ODFW.state.or/wolves for maps and photos
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- Wyoming fish and Game, (Wyo.gov)



Wolves in the News

ODFW Wolf Photo Gallery

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Male wolf from Wenaha pack was fitted with a radio collar on Aug. 4, 2010. Aug. 4, 2010. ODFW photo. [Download high resolution image.](#)
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Wolf B-300 on July 17, 2009 in Wallowa County. ODFW snapped this picture after capturing and placing a new radio collar on the wolf; its collar stopped working back in fall 2008. Photo courtesy of ODFW. B-300 was first confirmed in the state back in January 2008. [More information](#). [Download high resolution image](#).

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Photo taken Aug. 20, 2009 in the Imnaha Unit (Wallowa County). ODFW believes this is the alpha male that bred with B-300 to produce the Imnaha wolf pack. [Download high resolution image](#).

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