

**Hunting Wolves? Why Trapping Is Intolerable**

Grace Day

Helena College University of Montana

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Karen L. Henderson

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### **Hunting Wolves? Why Trapping Is Intolerable**

“I had lost many traps by animals who desperately pulled trap stakes to escape. Some I later found dead, some hanging by their entangled traps and chain high up in a tree where they had died,” (Stastny, as cited in Heister, 2022). Stastny had been a trapper as a child and considered mournfully, throughout his writing, that he had never thought to consider the pain and agony he forced upon the creatures whom he trapped (Stastny, as cited in Heister, 2022). There are many other trappers today who do not see the problems with trapping even as the creature is lying before them having died, after trying to gnaw its paw off to escape. Wolves are one of the most valuable animals to the American ecosystem, being apex predators and keystone species. However, they are one of the most persecuted species in America. The atrocity of trapping should not be tolerated and is unnecessary. To ensure a better future for the ecosystem and the wolf population, as well as for many other animals caught in inhumane traps, the laying of wolf traps must be halted.

Too many times hunters have made the well-known claim that the wolves “need to be managed for the sake of the ecosystem.” This belief is based purely on indoctrination and bias. Before wolf reintroduction to the Yellowstone ecosystem, their prey, namely elk, were starving to death due to their skyrocketing overpopulation. With hundreds of elk bodies littering Yellowstone, the government decided it was time to reintroduce the apex predator to Yellowstone National Park in a desperate attempt to save the ecosystem (Peterson, 2020). Many years later, the wolf population has stabilized Yellowstone’s ecological health in unimaginable ways (Peterson, 2020). As asserted by Peterson (2020), “New research shows that by reducing populations and thinning out weak and sick animals, wolves are helping create more resilient elk herds.”

Komi and Nygren explain, “Traditional habits of human-wolf coexistence were lost when wolves were purposefully eradicated in the turn of the 20th century, after which industrialization of agriculture and forestry together with urbanization have made rural livelihoods increasingly precarious” (Komi &

Kroger, 2022 as cited in Komi & Nygren, 2023, p. 1250). Since then, America has made it a mission to wage war on this keystone species. Considering the American ecosystem, particularly that of Montana, and other states with similar composition that rely on wolves to remain healthy, it seems strange that this species is the one selected to be nearly eradicated from existence. Lavallée may have stated this better than anyone:

With the absence of the wolves, elk overgrazed on plants such as the willow (*Salix* spp.) stands along riparian systems, causing a decrease in available food for grizzly bears and beavers. The loss of plants and root structures along the riparian system resulted in sediment erosion along the banks. This led to further loss of plant diversity and the widening and change of river flow. (Lavallée, 2018, p. 77)

Without wolves, the ecosystem would fall apart and even the landscape can be altered. As a result, the loss of wolves changes the habitat and food availability for various species of animals. Considering the role beavers play in their ecosystem by creating ponds based on the river flow, removing wolves would deprive both the beavers and the animals who depend upon them to shape their habitat. With starving, overpopulated elk herds, as in Yellowstone, their overgrazing can decimate the available food supply for the other existing animals in their ecosystem and still fail to provide the herds with enough food to flourish. However, if wolves are present, these issues are immediately resolved. The landscape remains unchanged, allowing the beavers to create a comfortable habitat for the other members of the ecosystem, including themselves, and the elk population remains controlled.

Commonly backing wolf hunting and trapping are the ranchers in their communities. Claiming that wolves pose a threat to their livestock, many supporters of ranching have blindly followed their claim and continued the massacre of the wolf population under false pretenses. According to Williams (2022), "Livestock depredation is another make-believe issue. In 2015, 1,904 wolves shared the Rocky Mountain West with 1.6 million cattle. Wolves killed 148 cows, or 0.01 percent, and the states

compensated ranchers.” To manage the wolves for the sake of these alleged crimes, the public has backed hunters in their war. It is commonly believed that when humans decimate the wolf population, the population will naturally compensate for the loss. However, according to Creel and Rotella (2010), while some hunting could be sustainable for the population, the extent to which it has been employed will cause the wolf population to plummet rather than allowing it to recover post-hunting season (p. 6). It is hardly a surprise that wolves are constantly struggling to replenish their numbers when they are being so heavily hunted. Creel and Rotella continue to explain that the wolf population is likely to fall as Montanans often exceed the recommended wolf hunting amount for the state (Creel & Rotella, 2010).

It is a shame to see that the only true reason Americans are so committed to the hunting of wolves is because of the propaganda in society. As illustrated by Treves et al. (2013)

“Our study spanned a period of policy shifts and increasing wolf abundance. Over time, the 656 respondents increased agreement with statements reflecting fear of wolves, the belief that wolves compete with hunters for deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), and inclination to poach a wolf. Endorsement of lethal control of wolves by the state and public hunting of wolves also increased. Neither the time span over which respondents reported exposure to wolves locally nor self-reported losses of domestic animals to wolves correlated with changes in attitude.” (p. 315)

These lies lead to retaliation. It has become a more common practice to defy the laws instituted by a state and for hunters to poach and kill wolves illegally.

Wolf poaching has been met with far more tolerance than deserved. Instead of punishing those committing these crimes, the government has often claimed that legalizing the hunting of wolves, to a certain degree, will improve the American people’s perception of them. This too, is an illogical argument. According to Chapron and Treves, allowing for further domineering of the wolf is only likely to maintain, if not worsen, the public opinion of the wolves. As Chapron and Treves state (2016)

“In addition, a quasi-experimental longitudinal study of attitudes to wolves before and after Wisconsin’s October 2012 regulated, public hunt of wolves revealed a decline in tolerance among men with familiarity with hunting who lived in Wisconsin’s wolf range, exactly opposite to the predicted decrease in ‘frustration’ with more liberalized wolf killing [42]. Studies of attitude change since 2001 have repeatedly shown that liberalizing wolf killing did not reduce inclination to poach among residents of Wisconsin’s wolf range [43,44].” (p. 5)

While the trapping of wolves routinely inflicts agony on these creatures, they regrettably do not suffer alone. Only days ago, a judge ruled that to protect not yet denned grizzlies, the wolf trapping season should be halved. Judge Donald Molloy ruled in favor of a shorter trapping season: “In a 25-page order, U.S. District Court Judge Donald Molloy wrote that the Flathead-Lolo-Bitterroot Citizen Task Force and WildEarth Guardians established ‘a reasonably certain threat of imminent harm to grizzly bears should Montana’s wolf trapping and snaring seasons proceed as planned’” (Eggert, 2023). In addition to the many animals who have been captured by these traps, the grizzlies are now in danger of losing the potential for a strong next generation.

Although grizzly safety is a current concern, they are not the only species of animal, aside from the wolf, that is routinely affected by trapping. Many animals including raccoons, foxes, ferrets, and coyotes are also often caught in the excruciating traps. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association (2008), the number of animals aside from the intended target, who are often captured accounts for up to 67 percent of the total catch, from leg hold traps. This begs the question, why are wolves constantly being removed and reapplied to the Endangered Species List? If this form of massacre is not slowed soon, the wolves may not be alone in their plight. There is only one explanation, willful blindness.

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