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Canadian Wolves

Surviving Babbitt's weapon against the West.

By Judy Boyle

In January 1995, Department of Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt personally oversaw the release of Canadian wolves into Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana. He reportedly said it was the highlight of his career. In reality, it was another battle in the war on the West and specifically on the western rancher. The states, livestock industry, and sportsmen all opposed the introduction and warned of its consequences. Now, 22 years later, the damage is apparent and getting worse each year. Wolves are the top-level predator, capable of killing any animal they choose. Wolves have even been documented killing grizzlies in Yellowstone. The “facts” on wolves have proven to be false.



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Instead of only killing the sick and the weak, we have learned the hard way that wolves kill for sport and teach their pups how to kill while rarely eating their results.

The western states were told that hunting would control wolf populations. By 2016, the original 35 wolves released into Idaho had expanded to an estimated 1,200, besides populating Oregon, Washington and California. In 2016, Idaho Fish & Game issued 35,000 wolf tags. Out-of-state unsuccessful elk hunters can also use their elk tags to harvest a wolf. A total of 270 wolves were reported harvested in 2016, only making a small dent in the rapidly expanding population.

The best defense for ranchers, livestock,

wildlife and hunters is the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services' personnel. WS in Idaho has 18 employees and several aircraft. They are professionals who excel at their work. In addition to protecting livestock and wildlife from wolves, WS personnel are tasked with confirming wolf depredation of livestock. Due to a lack of will in D.C. bureaucracy, Idaho livestock producers and sportsmen volunteer money from brand fees, wool payments, and hunting fees to help pay the cost of investigating depredations and removal of problem wolves.

According to Idaho Outfitters & Guides, half the backcountry big-game-hunting outfitters have quit, with the remainder reporting a 50 percent reduction in business due to lack of wildlife from wolf depredation. Where thousands of elk inhabited the backcountry,

there are now areas with precious few left. One backcountry outfitter, with 39 years in the same area, reported that his clients rarely had trouble filling their elk tags before wolf introduction. By 2000, success dropped off. During the entire 2017 season, he, his clients or guides never saw a single elk. Ranchers throughout the state report increased elk numbers living nearly year-round on their private property. Deer and elk have adapted to wolf introduction by seeking safety and security closer to people.

The Idaho Lolo hunting zone used to be one of the most productive in the West. After wolves took over, elk numbers sharply plummeted and deer became scarce. Idaho Fish & Game contracted with WS to remove a number of wolves in the Lolo to provide the remaining wildlife a chance to rebound. This dangerous job was done by helicopter in steep, rugged country. An example of the absolute fear elk have for wolves comes from the following eyewitness account during that work.

A herd of elk was found huddled together in a clearing surrounded by trees on three sides and the river on the fourth. As the helicopter flew over at close range, the elk were intent on the tree line above them and never gave the helicopter a glance. Knowing that this is abnormal behavior, a WS employee asked the pilot to circle the area again, even closer, so he could get a better look. Again, the elk never even flicked an ear nor turned a head towards the helicopter, which was close enough that the rotor wash ruffled their hair. The pilot was instructed to circle again and come in above the trees which held the elk's rapt attention. This maneuver flushed out seven wolves and the threat to the elk was quickly eliminated.

Idaho has 20,000 native black bears but few livestock depredations, yet fewer wolves have caused 3,872 confirmed livestock depredations plus 84 stock dogs, nine horses, and one mule since wolf introduction. From July 1, 2016, to June 30, 2017, WS conducted 121 investigations in 19 Idaho counties with only 15 attacks not being from wolves. Three-fourths of cattle depredations were on private property. Since wolf introduction, livestock producers in just one county have lost 125 cattle and 1,367 sheep through confirmed wolf depredations. This summer, WS documented that one rancher has lost 10 cattle to wolves in nine different attacks.

The 3,872 depredations are just the tip of the disaster for Idaho ranchers. Due to Idaho's rugged terrain, many wolf-depredated livestock simply are never found. Dead livestock are either quickly consumed or WS is not able to confirm wolves killed the animal due to numerous predators and birds eating the carcass. Ranches with pre-wolf losses of from one to two percent between spring turnout and fall gather have suffered losses of four to



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seven percent post-wolf. Cattle are losing body condition and weight, and there are higher numbers of open cows because of the stress of wolves.

Many ranchers have stopped reporting dead or injured animals because most years there is little to no compensation available and they don't want to deal with the paperwork and time involved in reporting. However, this allows environmentalists to state that wolf depredation is minimal. Wolf depredations are on the rise and many times it is the same ranchers suffering damage. Phil Davis has had over 75 confirmed depredations on his private meadows abutting the forest near Cascade. It is the perfect attack area for wolves. In fact, Davis had the second and third depredations recorded in Idaho from wolves released on the eastern side of the state. It didn't take wolves long to expand



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FROM TOP: Pawprint by the pen with back paw on top. ► Wolf after being collared to keep track of the pack. ► Collapsed adult cow run to death by wolves with no signs of a struggle. Notice the missing tail and hock damage which occurred during the chase.



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across the landscape.

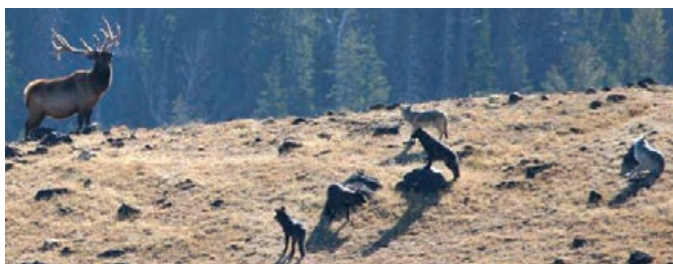
Confirming wolf depredation on livestock is a partnership between WS and producers. In the past, ranchers believed if they found a chewed-up animal or even just some remains, that indicated a wolf attack. We now know wolves kill both livestock and wildlife for sport or in teaching their pups to hunt. August is when this begins in earnest, especially in high meadows or on private pastures with trees in the backdrop. Wolves will cut out an animal from the herd and literally run it to death nipping at its hocks, jerking its tail, pulling off an ear to keep it moving.



CAPTIONS, FROM TOP: A pack looking for food or mayhem. ► Five wolves (there could be more out of sight) surround a bull elk. ► USDA Wildlife Services' trappers check for wolf bite marks and trauma on a mother cow found dead along an irrigated pasture fence in Idaho. ► This Idaho hunter could barely lift her 127-pound wolf off the ground.

Wolves are built to run and cattle are not. Even wildlife cannot sustain long runs in a stressful situation without collapsing. Ungulates (hoofed animals) develop a fatal disease called capture myopathy. This happens within two to three minutes when an animal is subjected to intense stress and muscle exertion from chasing. Coupled with lactic-acid buildup, the by-product of excessive muscle metabolism, damage occurs to muscle fibers, kidneys, heart, and other internal organs. The pH level becomes so low that the heart simply stops. Wildlife managers are taught about this danger when capturing wildlife for study or transplant. Cattlemen are not.

Ranchers need to be alert when they find dead cattle lying in unusual positions appearing to have just dropped in their tracks as that is exactly what has happened. WS trains ranchers to treat the area as a crime scene and immediately begin looking for clues while not disturbing the evidence. One huge clue is finding a dead animal lying with both back legs behind them. A missing tail, torn ear, or chewed hocks are more signs of a wolf attack as those areas have no food value. Another sign is when the grass or dirt has not been disturbed by the animal collapsing. When a cow dies of poison or sickness, it will thrash around. When it dies from being run to death, it simply drops. The animal is usually facing downhill or in a clump of trees as it seeks to get away from its tormentor. There may be a few drops of blood on the trail, but not much as the dam-



age is internal.

There may be no external signs of animal bites, but once the carcass is skinned by WS, the trauma becomes obvious. Instead of a clean, white carcass, the body is a bloodshot mass of tissue where the wolf's teeth and jaws have done tremendous damage. Sometimes a

single wolf just concentrates on one area of attack, behind the front shoulder or the nose. Multiple wolves cause damage everywhere covering an animal's body with bites but not eating it.

Ranchers who find dead livestock should take pictures or videos with their phones and immediately call WS. Cover the animal with a tarp or plastic held down with rocks to keep other predators and birds away from the carcass until WS can arrive. The more depredations reported and confirmed, the clearer the picture will be of the immense damage done to the livestock industry, so corrective action can be taken.

Livestock wounded by wolf attacks are most often the walking dead. The trauma usually kills them within a few days to a week. Ranchers always want to treat an injured animal, but in cases of

wolf attack, it is often for naught. If the animal survives, it never fully recovers and is usually not saleable. Wolf-induced trauma also similarly applies to wildlife.

The introduction of Canadian wolves was a premeditated act by an unelected federal bureaucrat. A wise person made the analogy that turning Canadian wolves loose on the West is as criminal as giving a serial killer the keys to your home while leaving your young daughters there alone. ■

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