



Article

“Wolf Wars”¹: Embodiment and Symbolism in North American Wildlife Conservation

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Received: / Accepted: / Published:

Abstract:

Wolves (*Canis lupus*) have long been held as a symbol of the North American wilderness and figure prominently in United States frontier mythology. Currently the legal status of wolves is being hotly contested following their near extermination and then successful reintroduction in the North Rocky Mountain region. The opposing positions on the status of wolves very neatly conform to political party lines, with Democratic Party members supporting the protection of wolves and Republican Party members opposing it. Wolves are recognized on both sides as symbols: for Democrats, the wolf is a positive symbol representing not only environmental wholeness but also the power of positive social programs legislatively; for Republicans, the wolf is negative, representing the destructive influence of outside forces, especially that of the federal government. Because the protection of wolves does in fact require the implementation of legislature, these associations are not without merit. This paper will review existing literature on this subject, extending back to the enactment of the Endangered Species Act in the 1970s', and will contribute new research on the recent developments, including the "delisting" of wolves from the Endangered

¹ The title of this paper is taken from the 2010 National Geographic cover story “Wolf Wars” by Douglas Chadwick.

Species List in August of this year, in order to elucidate the idea that a truly viable plan for animal conservation must be socially sustainable.

Keywords: wolf, canis lupus, conservation, conflict, symbolism, republican, democrat

1. Introduction

Gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) have always occupied an important role in the lives of Americans. In 1630 the first wildlife legislation in the American colonies concerned a bounty placed on wolves [1]. Since the colonization of North America, wolves have been and continue to be instrumental to the economic, political and social development of the United States.

While much of the previous Euro-American² interaction with wolves has involved hunting, recently wolves have become the subject of wildlife conservation efforts. Currently the legal status of gray wolves³ is being hotly contested following the near extermination and then successful reintroduction of wolves in several key areas of the western United States. While previous scholarship has most often positioned the debate over wolves as between agriculturalists/hunters and environmentalists [2], opposing ideological positions on the status of wolves very neatly conform to political party lines, with Democratic Party platform supporting the protection of wolves and Republican Party platform opposing it.

Wolves figure prominently in United States frontier mythology and have long been a symbol of the North American wilderness. Their symbolic value continues to be important in the current conservation debates. Both sides recognize wolves as a symbol. For Democrats, the wolf is a positive symbol representing not only environmental wholeness but also the power of positive social programs legislatively; for Republicans, the wolf is negative, representing the destructive influence of invasive domestic forces, especially that of the federal government. The symbolic nature of wolves has been extensively investigated, especially as it relates to negative perceptions of wolves and the resistance to their conservation [3]. Conservation models that reflect this include attempts to educate the public about wolves in order to counteract negative perceptions [4]. This fails to recognize the tangible realities wolves play in the lives of those opposed to their reintroduction, and conforms problematically to the Western paradigm of treating “nature” and “culture” as separate entities.

2 Wolves have undoubtedly also played an important role in the lives of First Nations people but this paper will be focusing primarily on Euro-American perspectives, which have in recent years merged with First Nations as part of the larger American identity.

3 For the purposes of this paper, sources will primarily relate to the Northern Rocky Mountain Grey wolf reintroduction, but the overall ideas of this paper are relevant to issues surrounding all wolf conservation

This paper proposes to look at the important existing scholarship on wolf conservation in the United States and to build on it both chronologically and conceptually. The legal status of wolves in the United States is constantly changing, with legislation being enacted as recently as October 3rd, 2012. In addition, applications of political and economic theory to the cultural and biological scholarship relating to wolves can perhaps present new methods for approaching wolf conservation that reflect a larger need to integrate these ideas. Wolves are a part of the social, economic, and political systems in the United States, not just as symbols but as the embodiment of value and power. By recognizing wolves as such, conservationists can create more sustainable models of wolf conservation. In addition, addressing nature and culture as inextricably linked may provide an ontological shift that benefits wildlife conservation as a whole.

2. Background

Before discussing the current state of wolf conservation, it is important to understand how wolves have become a part of social, economic and political landscapes of the United States.

One question writers pose in relation to wolf conservation is why the conservation of wolves is so vehemently opposed, especially when compared to the less controversial conservation of other large predators like bears and mountain lions [5]. Some conclude that the prominent and villainous role wolves have occupied in Western folklore has led to their continued marginalization [6]. While this has certainly contributed to negative perception of wolves, there is more to this lineage than the folk-belief that ‘wolves are bad.’

Without going into an overly detailed analysis, wolves have consistently been used as a metaphor for *internal* threats. While other predators may have also had antagonistic roles in folklore, the wolf often uses trickery or deceit in order to impersonate a member of the group and attack from within (ie. in “Little Red Riding Hood” or “The Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing”). Similarly, the archetype of the werewolf represents an internal corruption where the human body is literally infected with inhumanity. The fact that the animal chosen most often for this amalgamation is a wolf (as opposed to a were-bear) enforces the association of wolves with internal threats.

The representation of wolves as an internal threat positions the wolf as a combatant or opponent, distinguishing the wolf as especially virulent. This is reflected in much of the early American frontier writing on wolves, which historically described them as “enemies of civilization” [7].

These symbolic associations predisposed wolves to be appropriated from folklore into other human systems like economics and politics. As previously mentioned, wolf bounties were a part of early colonial culture in the United States [8]. The eradication of wolves corresponds strongly with expansion, and occurred most intensely during the westward expansion [9]. As other writers on wolf conservation point out, the wolf became a “scapegoat” for the larger problems faced by frontiersmen [10]. Stephen Kellert mentions “historic wolf killing in both Canada and the United States often seemed to extend beyond any reasonable rationale suggesting wolf elimination may not have served pragmatic ends alone” [11]. Kellert and other conservationists have used this to advocate for education

as an important tool for conservation, but the pragmatic issues of early wolf eradication must also be balanced with education if one hopes to change these practices.

The wholesale destruction of any species will drastically alter an ecosystem. In Yellowstone National Park, the elimination of wolves has created a cascading effect, allowing ungulate populations to grow [12]. Unregulated ungulates have been able to decimate tree saplings, causing widespread deforestation [13]. For early frontier settlers, killing wolves (and the associated ecosystem destruction) would have proven beneficial, as many had a vested interest in using land for agriculture. Wolves (as opposed to any other species) were chosen because of their symbolic meaning, but their elimination also served pragmatic purposes. Wolves gained a commodity value in their attachment to (or as the case may be, detachment from) the land, a resource early settlers and frontiersmen not only wanted, but needed to modify in order to exploit its economic value.

Settlers also eradicated wolves because they believed that wolves killed livestock. While current figures demonstrate wolves do not pose a great threat, accounting for less than 1% of losses annually [14], they do pose some threat. Agriculture is an industry with a high amount of instability because it is contingent on uncontrollable factors like disease and weather. Any advantage early agriculturalists could obtain, including the wholesale destruction of wolves, improved their chances of success, however marginally.

The creation of the bounty system, which existed from 1630 until the early 20th century in various states, indicates wolves alone did not represent enough of a threat for people to hunt independently, possibly indicating wolf predation was not as severe as was reported. Government incentives allowed for the widespread destruction of wolves, which created a slightly more advantageous environment for agriculture and encouraged expansion and settlement. These were both areas in which the government had a vested interest. Therefore the destruction of wolves came with a tangible benefit of monetary incentives. Both macro and micro-economically, the destruction of wolves generated economic gains.

While the negative economic value of wolves demonstrates how their destruction may have been pragmatic in a very tangible way, wolves also played an important role in forming social groups. Often during the establishment of colonial American communities, wolves became a common hunted enemy for the group to collaborate against [15]. Hunting, in Western culture, has often had a significant role in the formation of communities and in the communication of social roles.⁴ Historically, in Europe, hunting was an activity confined to the aristocracy [16]. Under the feudal system, the exchange of labor for access to land also included the belief that the landholder was obligated to protect those workers and their products from threats both militaristically and through the elimination of destructive “vermin” [17]. Hunting became abstracted overtime due to its decreased importance agriculturally, and the ability to hunt instead became a signifier of economic and political power [18]. In this sense, hunting gained cultural capital that superseded the immediate ramifications of hunting itself.

4 For a more in depth discussion of this in Imperial England, see John M. MacKenzie’s *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation, and British Imperialism* among numerous others.

In the United States, hunting was considered significantly more democratic. During the colonial period, hunting was restricted not to aristocrats, but to land owners [19]. Post-American Revolution, hunting laws became increasingly more lax, culminating during the western expansion [20]. Daniel Justin Herman has pointed out that hunting was integral to the formation of an American identity rooted in egalitarianism [21]. However, despite the legal democratization of hunting in the United States, the values of “sportsmanship” often represented an ethical superiority and “sportsmen” were typically members of the upper class [22].

Despite this, the government-initiated bounties represent the way in which wolf hunting further formed group identity. Theoretically, in a Republican Democracy, the actions of government represent the interests of the people, or at least the majority of people. The economic benefits of expansion, including the appropriation of lands for agricultural use, had direct benefits for those landholders and for a government who received tax benefits from those landholders. By initiating bounties, the government converted the problems of agriculturalists into the problems of everyone. In order to do this, the vilification of wolves was necessary. Because wolves became counter-group or counter-civilization (something that was facilitated because of their earlier symbolic lineages as a domestic threat), their presence was also integral into the forming of identity along the paradigm of self-other. This is furthermore enforced by the association of wolves with Native Americans in early frontier writing [23]. In fact one contemporary member of the Nez Perce tribe pointed out, “to get access to the land you tame the land by one, removing the inhabitants that have access to the land, you tame the land, and, two, by getting rid of the predators” [24]. In addition, these kinds of dualities position frontiersmen and other settlers as members of civilization, defined as oppositional to wilderness.

The bounty system was widely abandoned at the beginning of the 20th century and replaced by government-employed hunters [25]. During the late 19th and early 20th century new policies of game management were enacted which represented a shift in attitudes towards wildlife in general [26]. Similarly, the “humane movement” gained more widespread interest following the Civil War, including the founding of the American Society of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals [27]. In 1973, the Endangered Species Act was passed and included several subspecies of the gray wolf [28]. In 1978, the gray wolf and all subspecies were listed on the Endangered Species List [29]. In several regions, most notably the Northern Rocky Mountain Region, plans for wolf reintroduction were created and implemented. Since 1990, an increasing volume of pro-wildlife legislation had been passed [30]. In addition, sociological studies have revealed that American attitudes towards wolves are positive, with a majority of 61% of the general population expressing positive attitudes towards wolves [31].

3. Discussion

While the changes in policies and opinions towards wolves seem to be a reversal, they are in fact a shift that contains many of the important elements of earlier American-wolf interactions. Wolf conservation most often represents the legal obligation to not shoot wolves, an example of Isaiah Berlin’s concept of negative liberty. Borrowing Elsie Cloete’s model of applying Berlin’s two

concepts of liberty⁵ to wildlife conservation (in Cloete’s case, this was applied to the conservation of African Elephants) [33], wolf conservation seeks to legally oblige Americans not to kill wolves. Conversely, hunting is an example of positive liberty – Americans have the right *to* shoot wolves. In the formation of an early American identity, this was very important in establishing Americanism as distinct from European culture where hunting was a negative liberty – you may not kill game (unless you are an aristocrat). Furthermore, in the creation of a uniquely American hunting tradition, rugged independence and self-reliance were highly valued [34].

This directly feeds into contemporary American politics. When I assert that pro- and anti- wolf conservation sentiments conform to Republican and Democratic Party ideologies, it is not a simplification that Republicans are “Wise Use”⁶ advocates and Democrats are environmentalists. In fact, varying permutations of conservationist mentalities (especially “stewardship” and models of wildlife management) as well as wise use mentalities exist on both sides of the debate, and there are certainly many different variations of what it means to be a conservationist.

Conservation advocates for the responsible treatment of wildlife and organizations like Defenders of Wildlife and the Sierra Club are not anti-hunting or anti-industry when wildlife populations are not threatened by these activities and when these activities are conducted humanely [36]. Emphasized by both organizations, however, is the need for monitoring and legislation in order to safely maintain environments [37], which can be implicitly connected to support for federal intervention in protecting wildlife. In addition, while agriculturalists typically have pronounced negative views towards wolves, hunters very often advocate for stewardship models that dictate wildlife control and protection [38]. However some hunters fear the increased regulations associated with wildlife conservation represent a larger national trend favoring “animal rights” over “animal welfare” which strip hunters and trappers of their constitutional rights [39]. Furthermore, some hunters (especially those who identify with sportsmanship) feel that hunters and trappers are qualified to guide wildlife policy as they have experience and knowledge working with wildlife, a fact that is statistically corroborated⁷ [41].

The issue of wolf conservation is then not about being pro or anti wolf or wildlife, but fundamentally concerned with self-determination and federal intervention as well as what is meant by the “value” of wildlife. Categories like Republican or Democrat become helpful because of the overlap between political and economic mentalities, which then relate to social mentalities. Democrat and Republican are more effective distinctions than environmentalists and “wise use” advocates, because they uniquely

⁵ Berlin’s two concepts of liberty are positive liberty, “the freedom to” act, and negative liberty, “the freedom from interference” [32]

⁶ Wise Use is a loosely organized social movement, named for a conference, which is “a diverse assemblage of developers, miners, loggers, ranchers, and farmers” who believe “nature was meant to be consumed” and are often positioned as anti-environmentalist [35]. While Wise Use does not explicitly include hunters, I believe there is a shared view of nature as an economic resource for human use, and will use the term for simplification to refer to the diverse ideologies opposed to current models of wolf conservation.

⁷ “Hunters and trappers are among the groups most knowledgeable about predators and wildlife.” [40].

encompass correlating sets of political, economic and social beliefs⁸, which also make up the varying elements of the wolf conservation controversy. This does not mean that positions on wolves (or any other issue) are uniform across both parties but that the “official” (as communicated through their party platforms) stances of both parties conform to the most outspoken and prevalent positions on wolf conservation.

“Wise use” can be conflated with the views of the Republican Party because both Republicans and wise use advocates strongly petition for reduced federal intervention and the privatization of federally owned land. In their official stances on conservation and the environment, the Republican Party states “public access to public lands for recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, and recreational shooting should be permitted on all appropriate federal lands” and “Congress should reconsider whether parts of the federal government’s enormous landholdings and control of water in the West could be better used for ranching, mining, or forestry through private ownership” [42].

Wolf conservation and most other forms of wildlife conservation conducted under the Endangered Species Act usually address two main concerns: to protect the at-risk species habitat and to make it illegal to kill, intentionally or unintentionally, the at-risk species. In the preface of the Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery Plan, published in 1987 by the Department of Fish and Wildlife, it states:

As enacted by Congress, the purposes of the Endangered Species Act are to provide a program for the conservation of such endangered and threatened species as well as means whereby the ecosystems upon which such species depend may be conserved. [43]

In addition the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife website states the Endangered Species Act (1973)⁹ :

-authorizes the determination and listing of species as endangered and threatened;

-prohibits unauthorized taking, possession, sale, and transport of endangered species;

-provides authority to acquire land for the conservation of listed species, using land and water conservation funds [44]

One of the main obstacles to the conservation of wolves has been previously identified as the fact the wolves are seen in the wise use movement as “a ruse and political ploy for more regulatory federal lands management, therefore posing a serious threat to rural communities, extractive industries and the sanctity of private property and individual freedom” [45]. Wolf conservation requires implementation of legislation that creates negative liberty and in fact does threaten the “sanctity of private property and

⁸ Social beliefs being liberalism and conservatism, respectively.

⁹ It is important to note President Richard Nixon, a Republican, signed this act into law.

individual freedom.” In this sense, those opposed to wolf reintroduction conform to Republican political ideologies, which state that government should not interfere with the right of the individual. Republican ideology states “for without property rights, individual rights are diminished” and staunchly opposes “the taking of property by environmental regulations that destroy its value” [46]. The wolf then does not merely symbolize a threat to these rights and values - it embodies them.

The Republican Party’s website includes this statement: “We oppose interventionist policies that put the federal government in control of industry and allow it to pick winners and losers in the marketplace” in reference to Republican views of the economy [47]. Wolf conservation does just that; by restricting land use for wildlife sanctuaries and promoting non-extractive industries [48] over industries that have a negative impact on the viability of wolves (such as logging or ranching) the federal government, through the Endangered Species Act, is intervening in the market and picking “winners and losers.”

Republican economic ideologies that promote individualism also extend to their stances on a variety of subjects, many of which are oriented around ideas of “self-determination,” “self-governance,” “self-defense,” “self-reliance” and “self-sufficiency”[49]. This can logically be extended to their stance on conservation, which promotes the rights of individuals (both citizens and industry) to determine their role in conservation without implementing policies that are intended to benefit the group at the expense of individual liberties. Once again, Berlin’s notion of negative and positive liberty is important. Conservation policies, as they are currently constructed under the Endangered Species Act, represent negative freedom, in which “B is obliged *not* to act so that A may realize his or her rights”[emphasis from original] [50]. In this case, B is Wise Use advocates/interests and hunters who are being obliged not to exercise their rights to wise use so that conservationists may realize the right to preserve species, or possibly (in a term I do not think they would oppose) their right to survival.

Environmentalist views can be seen as equally prevalent in the Democratic Party Platform as Wise Use views are in the Republican Party Platform. Just like Republican notions of individualism are communicated through their continual use of “self,” Democratic devotion to group interests are communicated through their repeated use of words like “together,” and “everyone” as well as employing “us” and “we” in reference to “the American Public” [51]. Environmental activism and conservation under the Endangered Species Act is a group value, which dedicates land and resources to the wellbeing of the associated ecosystem and includes human members, orienting around the notion of the ‘greater good’. Democrats advocate “protecting our natural resources while creating jobs, preserving habitats, and ensuring that future generations can enjoy our nation's outdoor heritage” and “working with local communities to conserve our publicly-owned lands and dramatically expand investments in conserving and restoring forests, grasslands, and wetlands across America for generations to come”, and furthermore ties environmental issues to the economy stating “[opponents] ignore the jobs that are created by promoting outdoor recreation, cleaning up our air, and promoting a healthy environment” [52].¹⁰ In order to achieve these ends, Democratic ideology is willing to legally

¹⁰ It important to note that “opponents” implicitly refers to Republicans: the same party platform states “in stark contrast to our opponents” and then immediately follows it with “the Republicans in Congress” [53].

oblige individuals to conform to group interests, via wildlife legislation like the Endangered Species Act.

The oppositional nature of the current two-party system is moreover mirrored in the oppositional nature of wolf conservation. Several authors have noted wolf conservation is a “conflict,” a “battle”, and most dramatically, a “war” [cite]. Despite the multiplicity of perspectives (hunters, agriculturalists, constitutional conservatives etc. on one side; environmentalist, animal rights advocates, social liberals on the other) there seems to be a strong duality to wolf conservation that is *mutually exclusive*. Wise choice values and conservationist values are complimentary; where the positive liberty of wise choice ends, the negative liberty of conservation begins and both are defined by their relationship to the other. Negative liberty especially relies on a relational status between two parties where the interest of one interferes with the interest of other (in the previous example A and B). Republicans and Democrats function often in a similar way: ‘issues’ for both parties are created by their polar juxtaposition to the other party; where opposition does not exist, issues do not exist.

For wolf conservation, the question of viability has relied on a majority opinion in favor of wolves. However, “majority” cannot be construed simply as a statistical majority but as hegemon, where possession of various forms of capital relates directly to the ability to assert power and affect change. A majority of Americans are pro-wolf conservation, with 60% stating they support wolf reintroduction efforts [54]. This statistical majority is concentrated primarily in urban areas, among younger demographics, and those with higher levels of education [55]. Looking at CNN exit polls for the 2008 election, 53% of college graduates (58% of post-graduates), 66% of people between ages of 18-29, and 89% of democrats all voted for Barack Obama [56]¹¹, showing a clear correlation for these values. In addition, a Washington Post info-graphic shows a clear preference for Barack Obama (and by extension Democratic values) in urban areas, despite some of those areas being in predominantly “red” states [58]. These unsurprisingly show demographic correlations between pro-wolf conservation sentiments and pro-Democratic sentiments. The urban/rural distinction is especially significant as humans only come into contact with wolves in wilderness and semi-wilderness areas that most often overlap with rural communities [59].

Opposition to wolf reintroduction and respective conservation is strongest in “red” states. Wolves today “are found in the mostly forested lands of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Montana, Idaho and Wyoming” as well as Alaska [60]. Wolf conservation in Minnesota and Michigan has been met with weaker opposition than in other states [61], with “Minnesota trappers and Michigan deer hunters expressing considerable affection and protectionist concern for wolf populations, recognizing this animal's ecological importance and supporting its restoration to the northern forest” [62]. Michigan and Minnesota are also “blue” states, with stronger affiliation to Democratic ideologies [63]. The Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery plan, which included parts of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming, has been met with some of the strongest opposition and resistance, which is most clearly

11 As opposed to 45% college graduates, 40% post-graduate, and 32% of ages 18-29 for McCain [57].

manifested in the “de-listing” (removal from the Endangered Species List)¹² of wolves as a protected species in these states between 2009-2011 [65]. Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming are all also “red” states [66]. Wolves have been able to be hunted in these states since fall of 2012 [67]. Since the delisting of wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountain states, others including Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin initiated wolf-hunting bills, which subsequently passed in Wisconsin (a swing state) and Minnesota [68]¹³. Wolf hunting season is scheduled to open November 3rd, 2012 [70], in Minnesota. In Alaska, a “red” state, wolves were not the subject of the Endangered Species Act but have been the subject of extensive “control” efforts, which involve the systematic culling of wolves [71].

Because of the popular majority in favor of wolf conservation nationally, as well as the majority of Democrats [72], it is important to ask why wolf conservation is so controversial and continuously contested. This stems from the fact that the anti-wolf conservation faction, including wise use and Republican groups, possess significantly more capital, which allows them to compete more evenly with statistically larger pro-wolf groups. Several authors on conservation have pointed out that a disproportionate number of members of groups directly responsible for drafting and enacting wildlife legislation (ie. state run Fish and Wildlife boards, local politicians etc.) are pro-hunting and pro-wise use [73], representing an increase in political capital for these groups. In addition, despite the current national negative opinion of hunting [74], hunting still represents cultural capital. Big game hunting especially is still seen as the purview of the wealthy and powerful. Consider the fact that both Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan (the current Republican nominees for president) are outspoken hunters (although Mitt Romney admits to being “only a varmint hunter” as opposed to a big game hunter) [75]. Similarly, Sarah Palin, former governor of Alaska and Republican Vice Presidential candidate in 2008, represented herself as a hunter and endorsed aerial hunting in Alaska, a very controversial practice that is directly related to wolf control [76]. In years past, Presidents including Grover Cleveland, Theodore Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower, Lyndon Johnson, Jimmy Carter, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush were all known hunters [77]. Hunting’s association with power in the U.S is therefore not misplaced. Interestingly, current President Barack Obama is not a hunter, but takes a centrist viewpoint, stating through the White House website he “did not grow up hunting and fishing, but he recognizes the great conservation legacy of America's hunters and anglers and has great respect for the passion that hunters and anglers have for their sports” [78].

In the 2008 Presidential election, hunting may have come to represent a negative cultural capital, as demonstrated by the McCain/Palin loss. Conversely, Al Gore’s staunch and well-documented commitment to environmentalism and conservation did not prove to be sufficiently beneficial during the 2004 Presidential election. This is not to say Presidential contenders' view on the environment is

12 Removal from the Endangered Species List does not alone revoke legal protection on animals, but allows those organisms to become the subject of state laws which may include the ability to hunt or trap them [64].

13 Several notable efforts have been made to block this in Minnesota, indicating pro-wolf conservation sentiments are still strong. In Michigan, wolf-hunting bills have been unable to be enacted [69].

the most important, or even a significant, factor in their getting elected, but represents part of an accumulation of political capital, which amounts to a victory.

While no strong correlation has been documented between wealth and hunting, a study from the National Shooting Sports Foundation states “a majority of states’ hunters have higher-than-average incomes. Stereotypes portraying the average hunter as low-income may be off the mark” [79]. This may indicate (but does not conclusively demonstrate) that hunters may also possess more economic capital. Along this notion, the aforementioned Presidents and Presidential Candidates all possessed significant economic means, logically construed from the fact that they were able to run for President. Romney and Ryan both have been portrayed as being both enormously wealthy and as being hunters. Interesting to also note, Donald Trump Jr. and Eric Trump, sons of businessman Donald Trump (arguably an icon of American wealth), came under media criticism last year for hunting big game in Africa [80]. In reference to the Trumps' hunting, one commenter stated hunting is “a rich white man's sport” [81].

Conservation and hunting are still being negotiated and are constantly in flux as the dominant sentiment on wildlife (again, dominant being construed not as a demographic majority but as relating to possession of capital). So too is the dominant ideological position of Democrats or Republicans constantly in flux. The two-party system dictates a balance between these two opposing positions that often results in centralist politics.

4. Conclusions

The constant vacillation between a Republican or Democratic hegemon means that the legal status of wolves and other wildlife will also constantly change. Conservationists interested in protecting wolves must find a way to work within the system as opposed to moving outside it. Attempts to strip wolves of their symbolic meaning (through education), while admirable and in some cases successful, do not counteract the political and economic reality that wolves pose to those living in proximity to them.

One conservation strategy which has had mixed success is compensation [82]. In areas where it has been shown that wolves have killed livestock, hunters are given monetary compensation equivalent to the loss [83]. In Michigan and Minnesota, where conservation was better received, compensation was used [84] and may have contributed to the relative ease of wolf reintroduction. I would argue that the pairing of compensation with a political and social environment that favors wolves (as ascertained from Michigan and Minnesota being “blue” states as far back as 2004)[85] is what allowed for wolf conservation to be successful in these areas. Similarly, in Wyoming, despite the introduction of compensation, wolf conservation was met with strong resistance and hostile attitudes towards wolves were still reported [86]. Wyoming has been a “red” state [87] and compensation by itself did nothing to address political and social views of wolves.

Education speciously seems a successful route in changing the popular opinion of wolves. Most education initiatives seek to present biological information in order to counteract misconceptions about wolves, typically that they will harm humans or decimate game populations [88]. Education also seeks to show people wolves are a necessary and important part of a healthy North American ecosystem

[89]. Studies on education have been inconclusive and individuals' dislike of wolves may not originate from fear of wolves [90]. In order to truly combat the issues posed by wolves, conservation education would need to indoctrinate individuals with different political ideations, namely that they need to sacrifice their individual liberties for group liberties. Education that seeks to change someone's fundamental political, economic, and social views (like the Republican ideology of individualism) is problematic and usually met with resistance. Without hegemonic forces enacting change on how wolves function politically, economically and socially, it is unlikely opinions will change dramatically enough to represent a consensus on wolves. However, a consensus that wolves are beneficial and necessary may not be needed to successfully conserve them.

The limited success of compensation may reveal a conservation model that is more sustainable and enacts lasting change for wolves: that of exchange. Under compensation, economic capital is exchanged for cultural capital; wolf conservationists and ranchers both receive something they value from protecting wolves. A system in which all forms of capital can be directly and indirectly exchanged is necessary. In developing that idealistic system consider the quote from one private rancher:

We have to realize that the general U.S. population wants wolves. That population is also our customers for beef. It's not a good idea to tell your customers they don't know what they're doing. So instead of taking a hard line and fighting to get everything back to where it was 50 years ago, we're trying things [91]

This rancher has perhaps identified one possible solution: the transformation of conservationists from opponents to customers. This rancher has not expressed a like or personal desire to conserve wolves, but recognizes it may serve his own interests to do so. If conservationists can change the value of wolves, from a group value to an individual value, it may no longer be necessary to legally compel individuals to adopt conservationist values.

Pro-wolf conservation organization may consider creating identifiers that label products coming from areas in direct conflict with wolves as "wolf-friendly," depending the various steps different producers take. This also creates a system where industries and interests other than ranching (such as lumber and mining) can also receive monetary exchange. Furthermore, it drives individuals to want to adopt opposing values because they directly benefit them, even if their adoption of these values is only superficial and do not represent a change in opinion of wolves.

The labeling of products as animal friendly (an idea that is not novel, consider "dolphin-safe" tuna) may represent a more gradual change than immediate legislative action. However, where wolf conservationists may also gain an advantage is in implicating the distributors.

Using beef as an example, conservation organizations could create public standards by which "wolf-friendly" beef is determined. They could then appropriately label different beef "wolf-friendly" in tandem with publicity that seeks to educate the public about the role ranching plays in ecosystems where wolves exist. Finally, conservationists could contact grocery store chains about carrying wolf-friendly beef and then label those who do as sympathetic to wolves. The same model could be applied

to lumber and hardware chains. In addition, there may be a willingness by the public to pay more for products that have ethical value, as seen in the current “green” trend [92].

By creating a system where wolves gain positive capital, there is no need to ask ranchers, loggers, and other industries adversely affected by wolves to change their opinions on economic and political individualism (should they have these beliefs) because they are not obligated by negative liberty, but are instead motivated by economic incentives. This does not directly address the interests of all wise use advocates but it can be hoped that by incentivizing wolf-conservation for some, a cohort effect will be experienced. Considering the Republican ideologies surrounding conservation and wise use, incentivism, and by extension conservation, may come to represent the best use of land where it gains commodity value in its conservation that does not contradict or exclude the current commodity value it holds in agricultural and extractive industries.

There may be more sophisticated and immediate ways to incentivize conservation than has yet been explored to date. In order to be sustainable however, they need to include plans that work with all groups involved. Asking current industries captured under wise use to radically change by (for example) trading ranching land for eco-tourist preserves or eco-friendly real estate, is not viable. Asking them to do anything without long-term incentives is not viable. It is possible to include wolves in sustainable political, economic, and social landscapes that include benefits based in exchange to all parties.

Current wolf conservation efforts also reveal a larger issue in conservation as a whole. In discussing wolf education programs, conservationists seem to feel that educating the public about the “biological reality” of wolves is important to counteract prevailing symbolic beliefs and misconceptions [93]. While these are important tools, they show that within conservation there are two wolves: biological wolves and human-constructed wolves, or put differently, natural wolves and cultural wolves. Despite the paradoxical elements entailed in their fusion, natural and cultural wolves must be merged in order for them to be conserved; one kind of wolf cannot be privileged as more true or valuable than the other. In addition cultural wolves are real wolves and concretely affect the lives of those who live in proximity to them. Addressing wolves as both will lead to more nuanced and sustainable forms of conservation and may in fact ameliorate the problematic duality of nature and culture across all of Western culture, conservationist and hunter, Republican and Democrat alike. Wolves not only embody their canine, corporeal manifestations, they also fully and no less legitimately embody human politics, economy, and society.

By addressing wolves as elements within our own human systems, we also implicitly involve ourselves in theirs, demonstrating “culture” (the manifestation of human action) is a product of “nature” (biology and ecosystems) and “nature,” as a distinct notion separate from culture, is entirely a product of “culture.”

Acknowledgments

Access to many of the sources used in this paper was provided by The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the University of Florida.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest

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