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Testimony
May 23, 1995

Senate
Energy
Parks and Historic Preservation and Recreation

Reintroduction of Wolves in Yellowstone Park

Testimony
on behalf of the
PUBLIC LANDS COUNCIL
in regard to
Wolves in Yellowstone National Park

submitted to
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Parks, Historic Preservation and Recreation

submitted by
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Executive Director
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May 23, 1995

My name is Bill Myers. I am Executive Director of the **Public Lands Council** (PLC) and am also here today as Director, Federal Land for the National Cattlemen's Association (NCA). The **Public Lands Council** represents approximately 27,000 federal lands livestock permittees operating in 14 western states. PLC also coordinates the federal lands policies of the American Sheep Industry Association, the Association of National Grasslands and the National Cattlemen's Association. The National Cattlemen's Association is the national spokesman for all segments of the beef cattle industry -including cattle breeders, producers, and feeders. The NCA represents approximately 230,000 cattlemen. Membership includes individual members as well as 46 affiliated state cattle associations and 29 national breed associations.

Mr. Chairman, the introduction of wolves into Yellowstone National Park is a poorly conceived program with limited chances of success for reasons that I will set forth in my testimony. Both the **Public Lands Council** and the National Cattlemen's Association have policy on the introduction of wolves. Before I set forth that policy, let me clarify that I use the phrase "introduction" of wolves rather

than reintroduction as used by the government because, as the government admits, the subspecies of wolf that used to exist in the Yellowstone National Park area was completely exterminated by the mid 1930's. The wolf that is currently being brought into this area is, thus, not a reintroduction of the same species, but, rather, the introduction of a new subspecies into a new area.

It is the policy of the **Public Lands Council** that good range management practices cannot be conducted in areas where wolves are prevalent because of restrictions placed on landowners. Thus, the **Public Lands Council** encourages that wolves be treated as predators whenever they are harassing, chasing, injuring or killing domestic livestock in grazing areas. PLC also supports fully delisting the wolf and turning control of the species over to appropriate state authorities.

NCA policy also supports delisting the wolf and returning the management of the species to the states. If this delisting is not accomplished, NCA remains strongly opposed to expansion of existing parks or designation of ecosystems that give priority to wolf recovery efforts over economic values.

One of the great paradoxes of this regulatory regime is the contradiction on the face of the policy. The final regulation specifically states that the wolves introduced into Yellowstone are "non-essential" because the loss of these wolves will not reduce the likelihood of survival of the species in the wild. If this is the case, one might wonder why all of the effort and expense is being made. Just a few pages later in that same rule, the Fish and Wildlife Service "finds that reintroduction of non-essential experimental gray wolves will further the conservation of the species." So, on one hand, if these wolves die it will not impact the species and, on the other hand, if they are introduced they will conserve the species. Which one is it? The obvious answer is the former statement and not the latter. This is because it is also noted in the rule there are tens of thousands of these wolves in Canada and also thousands located elsewhere in the United States. Thus, the question is not the protection of the species but simply an administrative decision that the species is not living in a physical location where certain members of the human species think they should live; namely, Yellowstone National Park. With this background one might reasonably question the benefit to be gained from relocation from one part of the United States to another and at what cost, when the impact on the survivability of the species is not at stake.

It is not even really a matter of location since wolves have been migrating southward out of Canada into the United States for some time now. So, the real issue seems to be whether wolves are migrating into the right location fast enough to placate the time schedule established by some members of the human species.

Let us now take a look at the program in order to assess the relative cost and benefits.

What one immediately notices is the extreme amount of interaction between humans and wolves to accomplish the stated goals of the program. Those wolves that are so unfortunate as to be selected from Canada for importation into Yellowstone National Park must run a gauntlet of interaction with humans. I'm surprised that the animal rights crowd has not voiced its opposition based on what these wolves go through, to say nothing of the animals that will become their victims as they consume wildlife and domesticated livestock in and around the park.

The 45 to 75 wolves that will be captured and transported from Canada over the three to five year term will be hunted, tranquilized, examined, shipped and held in isolation in unknown territory before they ever set paw in Yellowstone National Park. Even after they are released, they are radio collared and tracked. Federal employees will shoot and kill other animals to feed them as necessary. Veterinary care will be provided as will transportation as needed. This is hardly the romantic image of the lone wolf howling at the full moon in the frigid air of a Yellowstone winter.

Let me explain now the point of view of the sheep and cattle ranchers who are also in the unfortunate position of trying to make a living near Yellowstone National Park. What can a rancher do to minimize wolf predation on livestock? Well, if the wolf is found in the act of wounding or killing livestock on private land, the landowner may injure or kill the animal. This, of course, assumes an absurd situation where the highly intelligent wolf, in an extremely remote location, will be caught in the act of injuring livestock in a manner which affords a landowner the opportunity to actually inflict harm on the animal. Good luck!

But that is not all. Even if a rancher is able to kill such a wolf, that rancher must produce physical evidence of the attack and report the incident within 24 hours to the Fish and Wildlife Service. This also assumes that the rancher knows whether at a particular moment a wolf is on private versus public land (not an easy assumption in intermingled land) and whether the evidence will satisfy the investigating officer and whether a report can be made within 24 hours to the appropriate officer. If the rancher is wrong on any count, they are subject to possible penalties ranging from \$100,000 in fines to a year in jail. 'Mat, of course, can be ruinous to one's entire career and is a fairly major bet to place on all the odds working in your favor.

If the wolf kills livestock on public land, killing the wolf will only be permitted after due notification to the Fish and Wildlife Service, followed by unsuccessful capture efforts, and following the establishment of six or more breeding pairs in the park, and after receiving a permit from the agency to kill the wolf. By the time all of that occurs, the wolf is likely to have died of old age.

These are not the only impacts, however, on how a rancher goes about interfacing with wolves. Ranchers are required to remove animal carcasses so as to not attract wolves to the area. Whoever wrote this

regulation clearly doesn't have a clear appreciation of federal lands ranching in the remote areas where livestock travel in the open range without daily supervision. In other words, it just doesn't make common sense. Furthermore, ranchers can be limited in their use of animal damage control methods, targeted at other species such as coyotes. Again, the impact will be devastating on ranchers who, if they challenge this, can find themselves in the jail for a year to think about their mistake. It is for reasons such as these that ranchers fear the two legged humans that will enforce these regulations more than they do the wolves themselves.

Mr. Chairman, perhaps the most insidious aspect of this program is the failure of the federal government to provide a fair compensation program when ranchers lose valuable business assets as a result of this government program. These small businessmen and businesswomen have only their livestock to sell in order to maintain their income. Livestock animal science is complicated. One animal can be the result of many years of breeding success and investment. Similarly, the loss of one animal can devastate a breeding program; thus, the impact can be much greater than simply the market value for a particular animal. At bottom, the program is simply unfair. A few individuals are being asked to bear the cost for the public good. 'Me theory seems to be that, "well, sure, a few ranchers may suffer financial hardship, but because we are not happy with the speed with which wolves are introducing themselves into new parts of the United States, those individuals will suffer that economic loss for the good of the general public."

Make no mistake about it, these are government wolves destroying private property without any attempt by the federal government to provide compensation for the loss of that property. It is for this reason that so many ranchers are both philosophically and economically opposed to the program. If wolves are worth introducing, then the federal government should be able to find sufficient funds in the United States Treasury to compensate ranchers' losses. If, as the government suggests, those losses will be minimal, then the impact on the federal treasury would be extremely minimal.

As Richard Stroupe notes in a recent paper on endangered species, it is ironic that the Constitution explicitly forbids the U. S. Army, even in the name of national defense, from requiring that a citizen quarter a soldier; yet, the government can require that same citizen to quarter a wolf at the landowner's expense. If the Army had the same power to demand the billeting of soldiers as Fish and Wildlife Service does for wolves, we could expect to see soldiers feared and despised. Thanks to the military policy of compensation, the Pentagon seems to be unable to close military bases without great difficulty.

The final irony is that this program will continue pursuant to the final rule until formal delisting can be accomplished. Delisting occurs when the best available science and commercial information shows that wolves are no longer threatened with extinction; and yet, the Fish and Wildlife Service in its rule plainly and clearly states that wolves are not subject to extinction and that these are non-

essential animals. Even after delisting occurs, the species population must be monitored for another five years.

Mr. Chairman, this program is unnecessary, unfair and not affordable. I would be pleased to answer any questions the Committee might have. Again, thank you for this opportunity to testify.

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On Behalf of the **Public Lands Council**
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