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That Women Fight
Everyday
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Who Raised Me
Ashton Vank Devering
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Michigan Debates Their 'Big Bad Wolf'

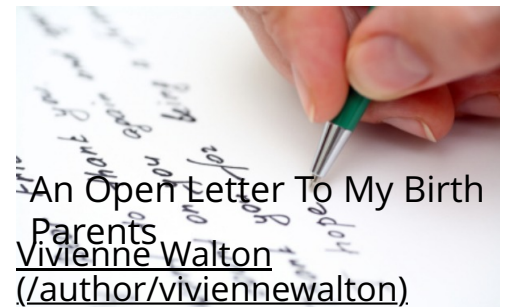
Many hold a stake in what we do to the killer,
Ma'iingan: the gray wolf

Abigail Fergus in **Ideas** on **Feb 8, 2016**

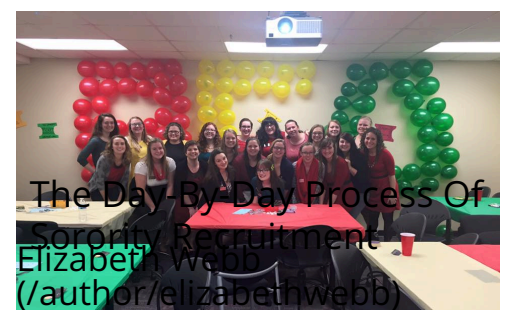
A wolf has stalked a little girl through the woods and killed her grandmother. Another terrorizes three cute little piglets. These evil characters from European folklore paint an image for the species, but is the "big bad wolf" an overpopulated threat or a misunderstood victim?

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An Open Letter To My Birth
Parents
Vivienne Walton
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The Day-By-Day Process Of
Sorority Recruitment
Elizabeth Webb
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A Letter To The People
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Farmers in Michigan find tracks on property every night. (https://pinterest.com/pin/create/button/?url=http://theodysseyonline.com/alma-college/michigan-debate-wolves-1) Hunters point fingers and lament deer sparsity. For the first

time since 1910, evidence of *Canis lupus* has been confirmed in the Lower Peninsula. Still, there is disagreement regarding whether the gray wolf is endangered.

(http://www.reddit.com/submit?url=http://theodysseyonline.com/alma-college/michigan-debate-wolves-1) Wolves have not been repopulated in a large part of their

historical habitat, in the eyes of Adrian Treves, founder of the carnivore coexistence lab and associate professor of environmental studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Gray wolves have rebounded in Michigan after near extinction by 1973. The Fish and Wildlife Service, scientists, hunters and farmers want the gray wolf off the Endangered Species Act list for the sake of the canine's protection. Scientists, activists and tribes want the howling predators to stay listed for the sake of their well being. Political divides and five changes in legislation have surrounded the issue in the past 13 years, despite both sides' claim to having the creature's best interest in mind.

"The government misinterpreted the Endangered Species Act. They can't create subpopulations in order to delist wolves," said Treves, referring to the successfully recovered groups in states such as Wisconsin and Michigan. "When wolves were originally listed in the 1970s, the entire national population was in most of the lower 48 states."

It's impossible to restore wolf numbers to 100 percent of their historical habitat, according to Brian Roell, Michigan Department of Natural Resources wildlife biologist and wolf specialist.



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"Wolves are recovered and meet federal requirements," said Roell. "Biology has been thrown out the window and we're dealing with political and social aspects. Wolves will never be recovered in their original habitat, it's not there anymore."

"Research has shown what wolves need to survive is social acceptance. [That erodes] the longer they stay on the Endangered Species Act list."

Tribes, farmers, hunters, legislators, activists, government employees, scientists and citizens all have a stake in the canine's control and emotions on the issue.

"A lot of people enjoy wolves ecologically, aesthetically, and religiously, all legal and legitimate," said Treves. "Future generations deserve to inherit the same legacy."

Treves took a new tone when asked about witnessing wolves.

"One time in a plane 300 feet off the ground we [Treves and a pilot] were circling and circling. We could see them [the wolves] against the snow. The pilot was counting and could see some of them had mange and which ones had a radio collar. It was unforgettable."

(/author/elizabethwebb)
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Photo Credit: John Rahn

Wolf tracks found on a farm in the Upper Peninsula.

Aerial views of these apex predators are common sights for Rolf Peterson, a leader of Michigan's Isle Royale wolf and moose study since the 1970s and former professor at Michigan Technological University.

"Wolves are extremely observant and smart creatures," said Peterson. "They know exactly what people are all about. Since 1959, a little red and white plane has been flying

around Isle Royale, [used to count wolves].

"I thought as long as the plane was in the air, we wouldn't be bothering wolves and they didn't know we were in there. [They'd] treat us like a far off raven; they chase at you like ravens if you get down low.

"One loner used our airplane to find its pack. The loner didn't know where the pack had gone and followed our flight line [to find them]."

Though all the individuals interviewed were at least tolerant of the revived wolf prowling the state, hunters and livestock owners fear for the safety of animals, humans and business.

"It's getting worse and worse," said John Rahn, a hunter and farmer from Germfask, Mich., about the wolf population.

"Five years ago it started getting pretty bad. This spring, when the cows have calves, we're going to have a lot of problems."

Rahn said he sees tracks always and spots the creatures responsible once or twice a year. He hasn't experienced any livestock loss because he: "spent a lot of money on a pig fence. It's a five-foot fence so it'd be pretty hard to jump over."

Owning a small amount of livestock, Rahn is also able to keep his animals inside at night.

"There is a lot of [wolf attacks] in my neighbors' farms who run bigger operations. They can't [afford to] put a fence around all the animals.

"[Wolves are] a nice looking animal, [they're] just highly destructive. There's just too many of them. It'd be wise to have trapping. [That] could really target the problem areas."

Changes to the Endangered Species Act requirements for delisting wolves may be responsible for debate on whether the controversial canines are endangered.

A primary reason the Fish and Wildlife Services has pushed for the delisting of the gray wolf is the number of animals that now populate the country. The organization also segmented the United States into three regions of gray wolves that can be independently listed and delisted; the Great Lakes wolves are doing exceptionally well. Under the original listing, repopulation had to occur in all wolf-sustainable environments. The group eliminated the requirement, because they thought it was unreasonable.

“The Service’s 2013 comprehensive review determined that the current listing for gray wolf, which was developed 35 years ago, erroneously included large geographical areas outside the species’ historical range,” according to the Fish and Wildlife Services.



Photo Credit: John Rahn

Hunter poses with tranquilized wolf while participating in DNR effort to track attach radio collars.

Vanessa Kauffman, Fish and Wildlife Services public affairs specialist, summarized the thought behind these evaluations: "If climate change was a reason [wolves were listed], such as for the polar bear, we switch to recovery and analyze if [that factor] continued to affect that species.

"If we introduced gray wolves in a sustainable habitat, we don't have to recover to its historical population. We take the historical population into consideration, but we don't have to repopulate [to that extent]. Congress can overwrite listings, but delisting is our goal."

Nationwide, wolves have rebounded by about 300 percent of the target population numbers. The goal was set at 1,251 to 1,400 animals populating Minnesota in addition to one stable group besides the packs in Isle Royale, according to the Endangered Species Act listing from 1974.

The DNR's 2008 wolf management plan established a goal of recovering at least 200 wolves with no cap aside from what the habitat and society could sustain. These animals primarily reside in the Upper Peninsula and Isle Royale, according to Kevin Swanson, DNR wolf specialist.

The U.P. alone could support upwards of 1,000 wolves, but this number is limited by social capacity: how much humans will tolerate their presence. "Quite a few wolves are poached every year. Some people are not very happy with [the state's] inability to manage them," said Swanson.

There have been three attacks on dogs and 12 on livestock in 2015. These numbers are "significantly down" from last year, according to Swanson. Despite this, he feels giving Michigan control of wolf management, something that

would result from delisting, would also reduce the illegal hunting of the ancestral dogs. He supports a small scale, regular hunting season.

“Keyword sustainable, we don’t want to eliminate wolves,” said Swanson. He appreciates the animal: “Tomorrow when I’m [deer] hunting, I hope to see a wolf track.”

Deer populations have been low the past couple years due to harsh winters. Drew YoungDyke, chief information officer for Michigan United Conservation Clubs, thinks hunters have responsibly reduced their hunting and that deer kills by wolves should be controlled in response to deficient prey numbers.

“With deer, management is focused on how many doe tags are given out. We eliminated the ability to take a doe this year on an archery tag or doe specific tags in most of the U.P.

“Wolves aren’t limited to buck only, they can take fawns and does. Deer get grouped into small areas with a lot of snow so it’s harder to escape wolves. They can take out a bunch [of deer] at once.”

Roell, the DNR wildlife biologist who formerly held Swanson’s position, agreed that state management would provide citizens with “peace of mind,” though he says farm animal deaths in the state are low.

If Michigan was in charge of control efforts, the DNR would be able to issue wolf tags to farmers facing livestock threats, as it had done in the past.

“Farmers felt empowered, it gave farmers a tool, they were much more at ease,” said Roell.

“Now they can’t shoot at wolves even in the act of killing livestock or a dog. That’s really hard for a farmer to watch.”



Photo Credit: John Rahn

Wolf caught on trail cam in the Upper Peninsula.

The Humane Society has offered a middle ground between listing and delisting: reclassification. The organization has fought to keep wolves on the Endangered Species Act list in the past.

“The Humane Society won a lawsuit to place all wolves in the Great Lakes region back on the Endangered Species Act list on the grounds that states had proven they could not responsibly manage wolves under their care,” said Jill Fritz, Michigan’s state director for the Humane Society.

“Within weeks of delisting, Minnesota and Wisconsin introduced legislation to begin aggressively hunting, snaring and hounding wolves. Fifteen hundred wolves were killed in

the Great Lakes region. Wisconsin enacted a plan to reduce wolves from 800 to 350."

Last January, the Humane Society switched gears to push for gray wolves to be relisted as threatened, but the Fish and Wildlife Services declined stating that not enough information justified the classification. "If [threatened] wolves were shown to be a chronic problem, farmers could work with the federal government [and would be] able to use some lethal control," said Fritz. "If [livestock loss] is their concern, this would solve that problem."

This listing would also prevent against the regular wolf hunts that Swanson, the DNR wolf specialist, and other sportsmen have proposed.

"Scientific studies consistently show the use of lethal control and the use of hunting seasons have proven to be ineffective," said Fritz. One paper she cited was written in part by Peterson, the Isle Royale scientist, and Treves, the carnivore coexistence scientist.

The article states that there is no evidence confirming the belief that a hunting season will make wolves more wary of humans. Such a control method could only be effective in reducing risk to farm critters if an exceptional amount of wolves were killed.

"Hunters go out and shoot some wolves, some others survive," said Treves. "The argument is the other wolves will be fearful of people. The way wolves get shot or trapped [is by hunters] far away, not seen. A guy in camo and a blind shoots a wolf from a distance. If they want wolves to be afraid, the hunters should be visible."

“Reducing the expected number of farms affected by depredations (animal kills) each year by just a single farm, from 17.7 to 16.8, would require reducing wolf abundance, across Upper Michigan, by about 20 percent, which would require harvesting approximately one out of every three wolves,” according to Treves and Peterson’s work. “That number of harvested wolves would be in addition to those that will also be killed by poachers.”

The Humane Society has had their way several times with legislation. Native Americans, on the other hand, may be less represented in decision making.

“I think thus far the tribes have been completely overlooked in the delisting process of wolves in the Great Lakes Region,” said Lacey Hill, wildlife specialist for the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Tribe.

“When something is delisted by Fish and Wildlife Services, management authority is given to the state and tribes. The tribes and the states should have to sit down together and come to a management agreement before delisting can occur.”

The band values wolves, or Ma’iingan, as brothers based on the Anishinaabe creation story. The close relationship between the two is depicted in The Mishomis Book by Edward Benton-Benai: “The Creator said, ‘You are to separate your paths. You must go different ways. What shall happen to the one of you will also happen to the other. Each of you will be feared, respected and misunderstood by the people that will later join you on the Earth. ’”

As wolves face a possible loss in their protection, Hill feels her Tribe and others haven’t been represented in decision making.



Photo Credit: John Rahn

A wolf looks toward a trail cam as it trots pass.

Fluctuating legislation isn't the only solution for wolf-human coexistence. Preventative measures against them can be taken, regardless of their protection status. Rahn, the hunter and farmer from Germfask, exemplifies successful herd protection with his ability to keep animals inside at night and his construction of a 5 foot fence.

Michigan has a compensation program for farmers who lose livestock to wolves, but as Rahn's neighbors exhibit, preventative action such as installing fencing can be costly.

Treves pointed out that to show wolves they ought to be wary, a human must be in sight. Having modern shepherds watching over livestock has been proven very effective against head loss to hunting packs, according to Fritz.

Employees of the DNR have researched additional tactics, according to the Peterson and Treves paper. These methods

entail prevention measures that include unifying cow birthing dates, encouraging animals to form herds, and moving cattle births indoors.

Tolerance of wolves in Michigan has increased, according to Peterson. He encourages education to illuminate the big bad wolf into an important driver of the food chain and environment.

Wolves cull sick deer, benefit the timber industry (which is harmed by grazing deer) and reduce car accidents.

Roell, whose background is in canid studies and job is with the DNR, processed what it's like to witness the creature. "I like [seeing wolves]. There's not a lot of places in the lower 48 states where you can go and see or hear wolves. It represents a healthy ecosystem. They're a misunderstood species. Fairy tales have given them a bad name. Rather than seeing them and being excited, people see it as if they or their pet are in danger."



Abigail Fergus (/author/abigailfergus)

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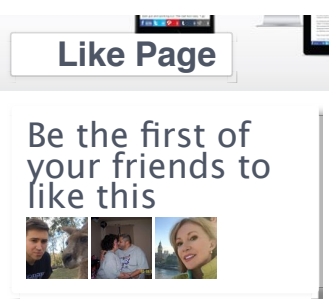
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