

Subject: Can UW-Madison rebuild coexistence between ourselves and our animal neighbors?
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Can UW-Madison rebuild coexistence between ourselves and our animal neighbors?

Since Europeans first arrived in the Americas, wolves have been the stuff of nightmares — a predator to be feared — when they would rather avoid interaction with us altogether. UW-Madison's Carnivore Coexistence Lab is hoping to change that.



Image By: [Courtesy of Skeeze via Pixabay](#)

By [Zachary Ausavich](#) | October 3, 2019 9:00 am

The grey wolf morphed into the first members of the Wolf Clan, one that is still a large part of the Ho-Chunk nation in Wisconsin — at least that is what their mythical origin story narrates.

Prior to colonization, the inhabitants of the land later named Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan were the people of the Ho-Chunk Nation — and within this tribe was the Wolf Clan. The Ho-Chunk Nation maintained a cultural reverence for the animals they lived beside, which for the Wolf Clan meant respect for the wolves in particular.

Since this region was colonized from Native Nations, our relationship with wolves has evolved from that of neighbors to a more hostile one.

The Carnivore Coexistence Lab at UW-Madison is working to mend the broken relationship with Wisconsin's non-human residents.

Founded by Dr. Adrian Treves, the Carnivore Coexistence Lab at the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies examines interactions between humans and large carnivores such as wolves, pumas, bears and tigers. Treves tackles the complicated relationship between humans and wolves living in the Wisconsin and Minnesota regions through non-anthropocentric methods of minimizing conflict between farmers' livestock and the native wolves.

"Non-anthropocentrism doesn't give higher standing to people, it just puts humans at an equal ground," Treves said in describing his set of ethics. "I came to realize that these ethics of non-anthropocentrism preserve biodiversity."

This contrasts conventional conservation management, in which the government delegates the ability to kill these wolves to humans through hunting allocations and regulations.

The CCL's description of governmental regulation regarding hunting carnivores explains that the U.S. Federal Government and the Fish and Wildlife Services advocate for the killing of wolves to mitigate illegal killing and build human tolerance toward wolves.

Following federal removal of the grey wolf from the Endangered Species List, 1500 wolves were killed within two hunting seasons in Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota, according to the Humane Society's report on the delisting of grey wolves.

Fifteen hundred wolves is a significant blow to their entire regional population. Today, Wisconsin is home to 905 grey wolves, according to the Fish and Wildlife Service's 2017-2018 population survey. The populations are still recovering to previous levels after several years of delisted status, which allowed this population to drop.

"We work to hold governments accountable to the broad public interest for preserving nature, and regulating its use by current generations," the Carnivore Coexistence Lab's mission states.

In the case of Yellowstone National Park, wolves were eradicated in the 1920s, leaving the area without a wolf population for roughly 70 years until the Fish and Wildlife Services reintroduced the grey wolf in 1994-'96. The reintroduction of wolves in Yellowstone is predicted to continue to increase biodiversity based on preliminary findings by the [NPS](#).

Wolves are known as apex predators, meaning they are at the top of this particular food chain. The reintroduction of wolves created many more feeding opportunities for scavengers living in the ecosystem. There is a large web of life linked to wolves killing prey in an ecosystem, according to Ed Bangs, wolf recovery coordinator for U.S Fish and Wildlife.

When wolves enter an ecosystem, they not only provide sustenance for scavengers, but regulate populations of prey species such as elk from overrunning the land, according to the NPS reports on the wolf reintroduction to Yosemite National Park.

The CCL works toward goals of nonviolent coexistence with the environment through field research that does not harm the wolf while driving it away from livestock.

Treves and the CCL are currently performing this research around the Bad River reservation by implementing techniques to deter conflicts between farmers and wolves. The lab's field research uses Fladgely, the practice of deterring the predatory species from areas of livestock using flags, strobe lights and other environmental deterrents.

"Coexistence with minimal conflict is within our reach, what we need is the political will to achieve this and separate scientific evidence from current values," Treves said.

The work of the CCL moves society towards a place of harmony with wolves — one where they are treated not as enemies but as brothers once again.

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