



Wolf Awareness
Research • Education • Conservation

Policy Position: Experimental wolf reduction programs underway in Western Canada

CONTEXT:

As caribou declines accelerate in Canada, wolves are once again being scapegoated in attempts to protect oil and gas, mining, forestry, and recreational activities. We urge provincial and federal political parties, politicians, and all special interests who support wolf kill programs under the guise of caribou conservation to review studies on predator control and environmental ethics and reconsider their position on killing predators as an unethical means to achieve the conservation of endangered caribou.

The public, decision-makers, many wildlife managers, and apologists fail to distinguish between existence of caribou and long-term persistence of the ecological systems on which the caribou depend. Intact ecological systems are characterised by the species that inhabit them and by the ecological functions and processes that link species with their environment (e.g. food, security, thermal regulation, migration, predator-prey relationships). Although species can continue to exist after natural ecological relationships have been altered or destroyed, most ecologists understand that such systems are not sustainable and not representative of healthy environments or successful conservation.

POSITION:

Wildlife management and conservation practices should be ecologically and ethically sound. Wolf killing programs are neither and as such should be abandoned.

- Scientific evidence confirming the efficacy of wolf kill programs that are intended to benefit ungulates is equivocal. The notion that a period of intensive wolf control will stabilize declining populations of caribou that are limited by habitat and result in long-term increases in the density of these populations is uncertain. During the time needed to recover lost and degraded caribou habitat, thousands of wolves would need to be killed in a questionable attempt to prevent caribou extirpation. Further, long-term and wide-scale killing of wolves can cause ecosystem wide adverse ecological effects, impairing many plants and animals.
- In making moral judgments, science can inform, but it does not give permission to cause harm and suffering. People tend to regard harm and suffering as more serious if it is deliberate (e.g. recreational and institutional killing of wolves), but sometimes justifiable if done for a seemingly worthy purpose. However, principled justifications invoking science, which are used to sanctify harmful and inhumane practices, are not ethical rationales for killing wolves.
- BC and Alberta are the only two Canadian provinces that have not adopted the Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC) standards that ensure humane killing methods for wild and domestic animals. That these 2 provinces refuse to act in accordance with this national standard and continue to carry out inhumane killing of wolves is deeply concerning.