

Perspectives: An environmentalist's view on wolves

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Joseph resident Peter Barry, a member of Oregon Wild and other environmental groups, has been a vocal supporter of wolves since the late 1990s, when he lived in Jackson Hole, Wyo., an area where wolves were reintroduced. He has helped manage his parents' grazing lands in Wallowa, Union and Baker counties, and he has additionally studied grazing issues in college and on his own.

Q Generally, why do you think it's important to have a wolf population in Oregon?

A Wolves are fundamentally important to a healthy ecosystem. Without them, it becomes somewhat sterile and it doesn't operate properly. ... They're a keystone species.

Q How many wolves do you think Oregon should strive to support?

A I'm no expert on that, but I would guess that many hundreds could easily live in Oregon successfully.

Q What's wrong with the state's current management approach?

A I think it's too quick to persecute wolves and to kill wolves. It's been much too responsive to the special interest pressure of the Cattlemen's Association. ...

Q Wildlife advocates have put up money to provide compensation when wolves kill livestock. Do you think that advocates should continue to serve this role indefinitely?

A While I support the idea because it softens the idea of wolf reintroduction, I just think it's one more welfare program, one more subsidy for cattlemen in this country. They're already heavily subsidized. ...

Q Are there any circumstances under which you would condone lethal control measures for wolves?

A Not until there is a healthy population of wolves in Oregon, and then only perhaps for wolves that are chronically depredating, and all other controls have been tried, and that the ranchers are using all best practices to mitigate and to prevent predation. It's the cattlemen's job, not the taxpayers' job. The way I look at it is, the cattlemen are already heavily subsidized and they just want more subsidies. They want the taxpayers to take away all risk of them not getting a profit. No other business has that. ...

Q Do you think there's something more or different the advocacy community could be doing to help opponents come to terms with having wolves among us?

A I think the taxpayers and nature lovers and wolf advocates, which are well over 70 percent of the population, need to speak up about the truth because there is an anti-wolf hysteria that's not based on fact and when the truth comes out, what they'll see is the wolf isn't the problem, but the cattle ranching practices are the problem. ... But I'd like to say that there is this minority of moderate, progressive ranchers who are living with predators -- some in Oregon, but primarily in Montana and Canada, and other states -- that are successfully living alongside predators and they even sell their beef as predator-friendly beef. They charge a little more and they're successful having few or no losses, so I believe progressive ranchers need to speak up in Wallowa County. ... I think there are a few.

-- East Oregonian Publishing Group