

## Multicultural Perspectives on Wolf Management in the United States

### **Introduction**

Wolves have the largest distribution of all terrestrial mammals outside of humans (Musiana and Paquet 2004). Before colonization of North America wolves and humans lived in harmony with each other. Wolves were a positive symbol to Native Americans and they honored a kinship with the animal (Hoffman and White 2018). There are Native tribes in North America named after the wolf (Musiana and Paquet 2004). The hatred and fight against wolves began with Euro-American settlement in North America. Settlers primarily lived off agriculture and the wolf threatened that food source and economic revenue due to predation on livestock. Alongside the killing of wolves due to predation, this animal was killed for fur, disease control and out of pure fear (Musiana and Paquet 2004).

The first bounty on wolves occurred in the Massachusetts colony in 1630 (Hoffman and White 2018). Throughout the 1600s government agencies instated bounty systems, paying individuals to kill wolves (Musiana and Paquet 2004). These government facilitated and promoted killings lasted until as late as 1965. Sadly, America did not understand the value of wolves until their numbers had drastically reduced (Hoffman and White 2018).

Scientific research over the years has made it known that wolves are “essential to a healthy ecosystem” (NRDC 2009). Reintroduction of wolves at Yellowstone National Park had positive repercussions on the ecosystem. The wolves reduced coyote populations, making small animal, bird and rodent populations thrive. Cottonwood, aspen and willow trees populations increased as elk became more skittish and dispersed over a larger range more often. This change saw the return of beavers and riparian birds. There is a chance that wolves may reduce climate change impacts of shorter winter food shortages as they leave carcasses for scavengers. Tourism to Yellowstone National Park collects thirty five million dollar annually (NRDC 2009). Despite the benefits wolves have to offer the ecosystem and human society, their past and present existence is a hot topic in the United States.

### **Historical Description of the Human-Wolf Relationship**

Human killing of wolves has and still is the greatest threat to their existence (Nie 2003). European colonization changed the history of wolves forever. During the westward expansion, settlers set out to exterminate wolves from the whole country. New England colonists were at battle with wolves over meat supply (Fogleman 1989). Wolves were the first target of settlers' wildlife eliminations (Kellert et al. 1995). Prior to arrival in America, colonists had not engaged with wolves as they were extinct in England as of the 1500s. Their views on this animal were largely based on second-hand testimony. Once in America, settlers established their home in wolf habitats, making their livestock easy prey. Food insecurity was prevalent at this time and the loss of livestock was a threat to survival. Wolves were viewed as threatening settlers' livestock and game supply.

Soon after arrival, colonists established a bounty system. Every wolf that was killed and handed in to the bounty office gave individuals money or farm produce. This system was expensive which in turn exacerbated the hatred towards wolves for draining more of settler's resources (Fogleman 1989). The Colonists' ideology of domination extended to wolves. They were seen as "obstacles to subdue, render productive, or eliminate" (Kellert et al. 1995). Progression westward only increased this idea of dominance.

"There was a sort of unwritten law of the range that no cow man would knowingly pass by a carcass of any kind without inserting in it a goodly dose of strychnine sulfate, in the hope of killing one more wolf" (Kellert et al. 1995).

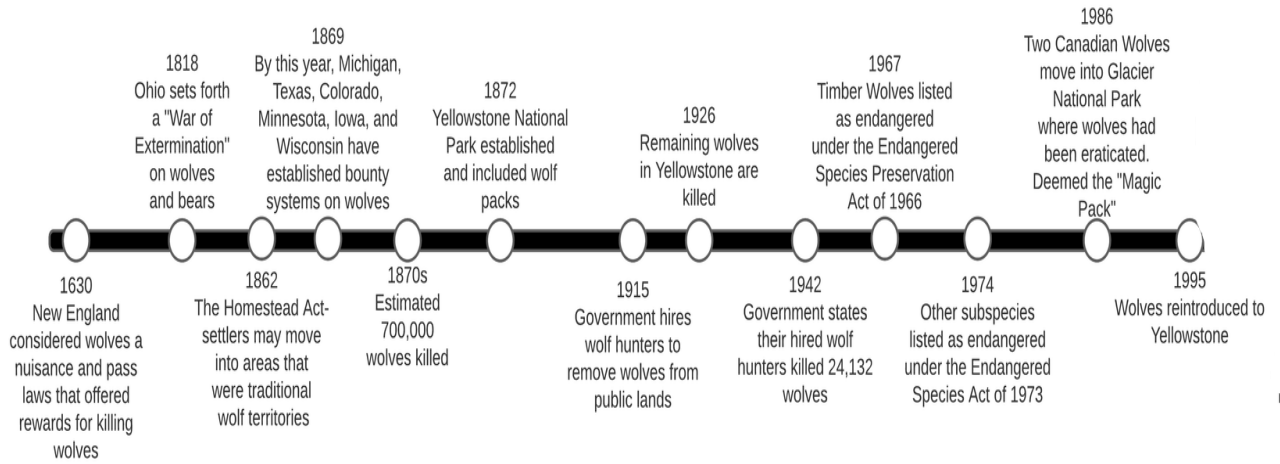
Bison and wild ungulates were killed by the millions as settlers inhabited the west. These were prominent food sources for wolves, leaving them without a food supply. Livestock became their new food source and this escalated the hatred against them. This history is now weighing on the minds of Americans who feel societal guilt over the controversial past of the human-wolf relationship. Scientific understanding of the role wolves play in the ecosystem has changed views on the animal today (Nie 2003).

From colonial America til the 1900s people lived in fear and hatred of wolves. Early on in the 20th century these ideas still existed due to second-hand stories of wolf encounters. During this time wolves were still being killed, even in national forests, as permitted by the federal government. Wolves had been successfully exterminated from all national parks by 1931. Negative views on the wolf began to change as city living increased. The value of the wilderness was recognized as humans became more detached to living among nature. In 1973 the enactment of the Endangered Species Act eliminated the killing campaigns against wolves (Fogleman 1989).

Today there are numerous films, series and books depicting wolves in a positive manner (Kellert et al. 1995). This shift, according to William et al. (2002), started between the 1930s and the 1970s. To maintain these positive attitudes education is necessary. Studies have shown that those with less interaction with wolves view them more favorably. Our continued disconnect with nature may prove advantageous to wolves in the future (William et al. 2002).

# Historical Timeline

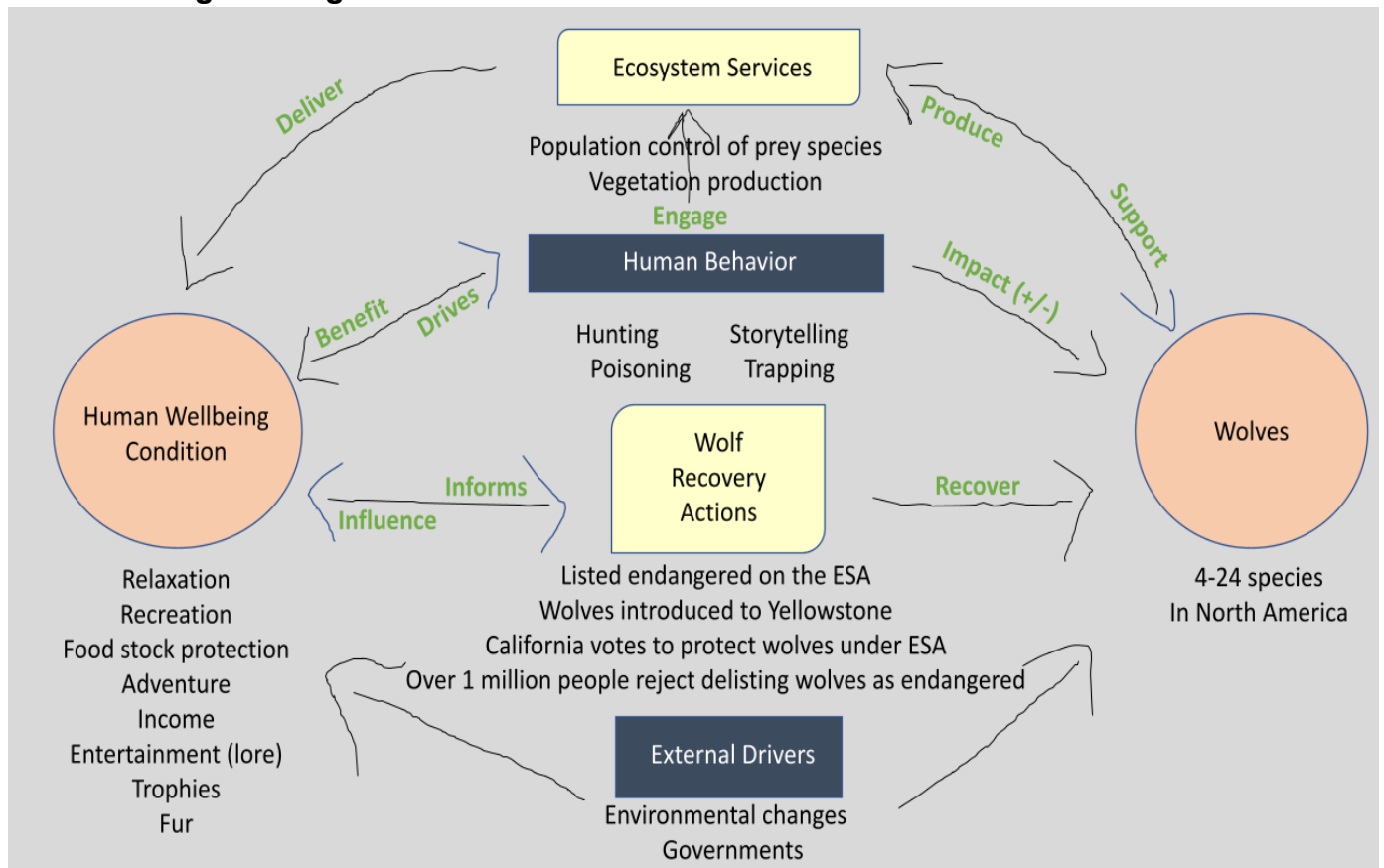
## 1630-1995



## 2000-2020

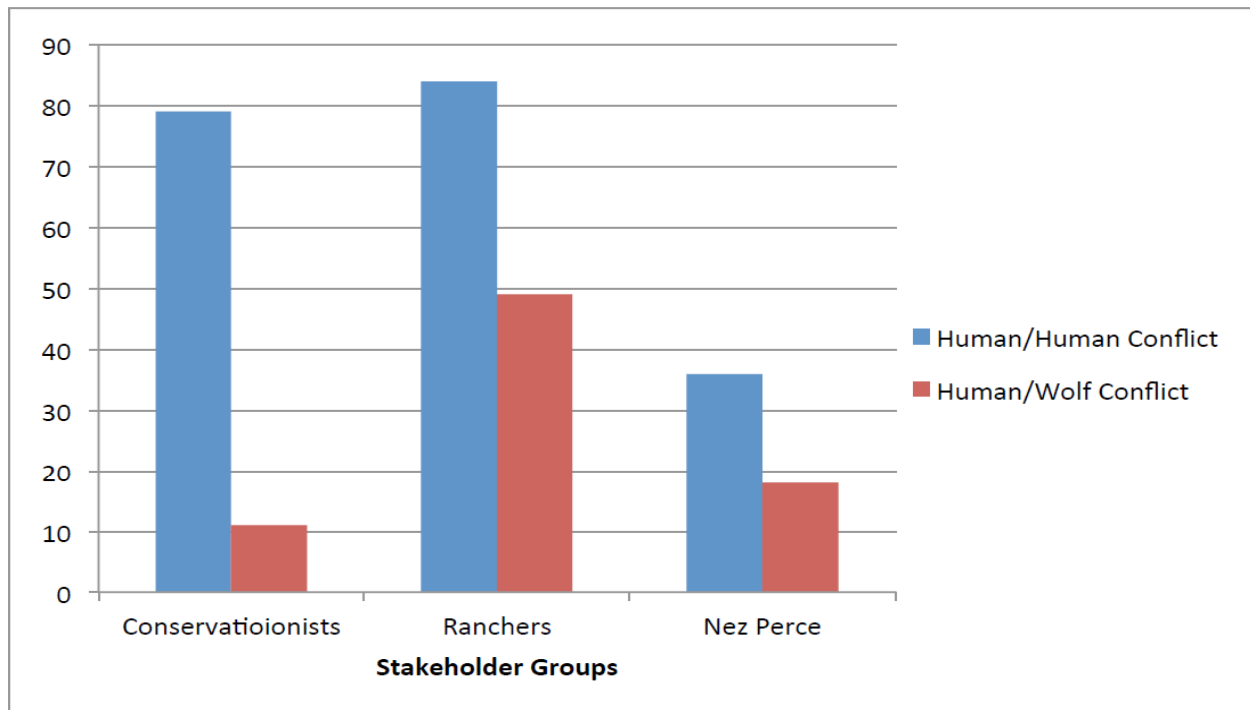


## Social-Ecological Diagram



## Stakeholders

A highly controversial topic such as wolf management takes careful and thoughtful planning. Stakeholders on this topic can have strongly differing views that can cause conflict leading to ineffective management planning. This conflict could alienate less powerful stakeholders, defiance towards regulations and disputes over natural resources (Lute et al. 2014). Wildlife managers have begun to see the importance of stakeholders in wolf management planning. “The problem of wildlife management is not how we manage animals but how we manage humans” (Nie 2003). There are more conflicts between stakeholders than between stakeholders and wolves (Wright 2014). Engaging stakeholders in the management of wolves can help understand one another’s position and potentially decrease conflict between stakeholder groups (Nie 2003).



(Wright 2014, p. 61)

There are nine values Nie (2003) adapted from Stephen Kellert's work that relate to human-wolf relationships. Utilitarian describes the material benefit one can take from nature to appease their needs and wants. In terms of monetary appeasement, wolves have the potential to produce twenty-three million dollars per year in tourism revenue in Yellowstone National Park. The naturalist value entails the benefits of interacting with nature and the satisfaction it yields. Wolf watching is so popular in Yellowstone that the shoulder of the road in Lamar Valley is busy by four in the morning. Ecological-Scientific means that one values how nature's diversity can be understood and controlled. Scientific research over the years has helped shift the view of wolves from a highly hated animal to one of ecological importance.

Those who value nature for aesthetics favor the visual benefits it can bring. Wolves are visually appealing and their intelligence and charisma is revered by some people. The symbolic value of wolves through story and fantasy has played a large role in its history. A general American value, domination, is concerned with being able to dominate nature. This can make it hard for people to support wolf management. The humanistic and moralistic values are somewhat similar. Being able to develop an emotional connection with nature is important for the humanistic value while understanding that all life is connected describes the moralistic value. The last value, negativistic, deals with the anxious and fearful feelings nature elicits, such as the fear of wolves (Nie 2003, p. 32-37).

Utilitarian	Material benefit one can take from nature to appease their needs and wants
Naturalist	The benefits of interacting with nature and the satisfaction nature yields
Ecological-Scientific	How nature's diversity can be understood and controlled
Aesthetics	The visual benefits nature can bring
Symbolic	Communicating nature through stories, fantasy or dreams
Domination	Being able to dominate nature
Humanistic	Being able to develop an emotional connection with nature
Moralistic	Understanding that all life is connected
Negativistic	The anxious and fearful feelings nature elicits

### *Hunters*

Hunting is seen as a culture to many. They may also feel that their culture and related traditions are not widely accepted by society (Lute et al. 2014). Their concerns regarding wolf management may vary but are extremely important. Hunters with the Friends of Yellowstone Elk Herd club worry that wolves are wiping out elk populations. Those in North Carolina see wolf recovery as a “threat to local hunting customs and culture”. Hunters feel that any threat to their state’s game populations is a direct assault on their customs, culture and traditions (Nie 2003). Deer hunters in Wisconsin had a positive attitude towards wolves. There was less direct experience with wolves in this stakeholder group but they still had human safety concerns and were for managing wolf populations (Browne-Nuñez et al. 2014).

### *Ranchers, Farmers and Rural Populations*

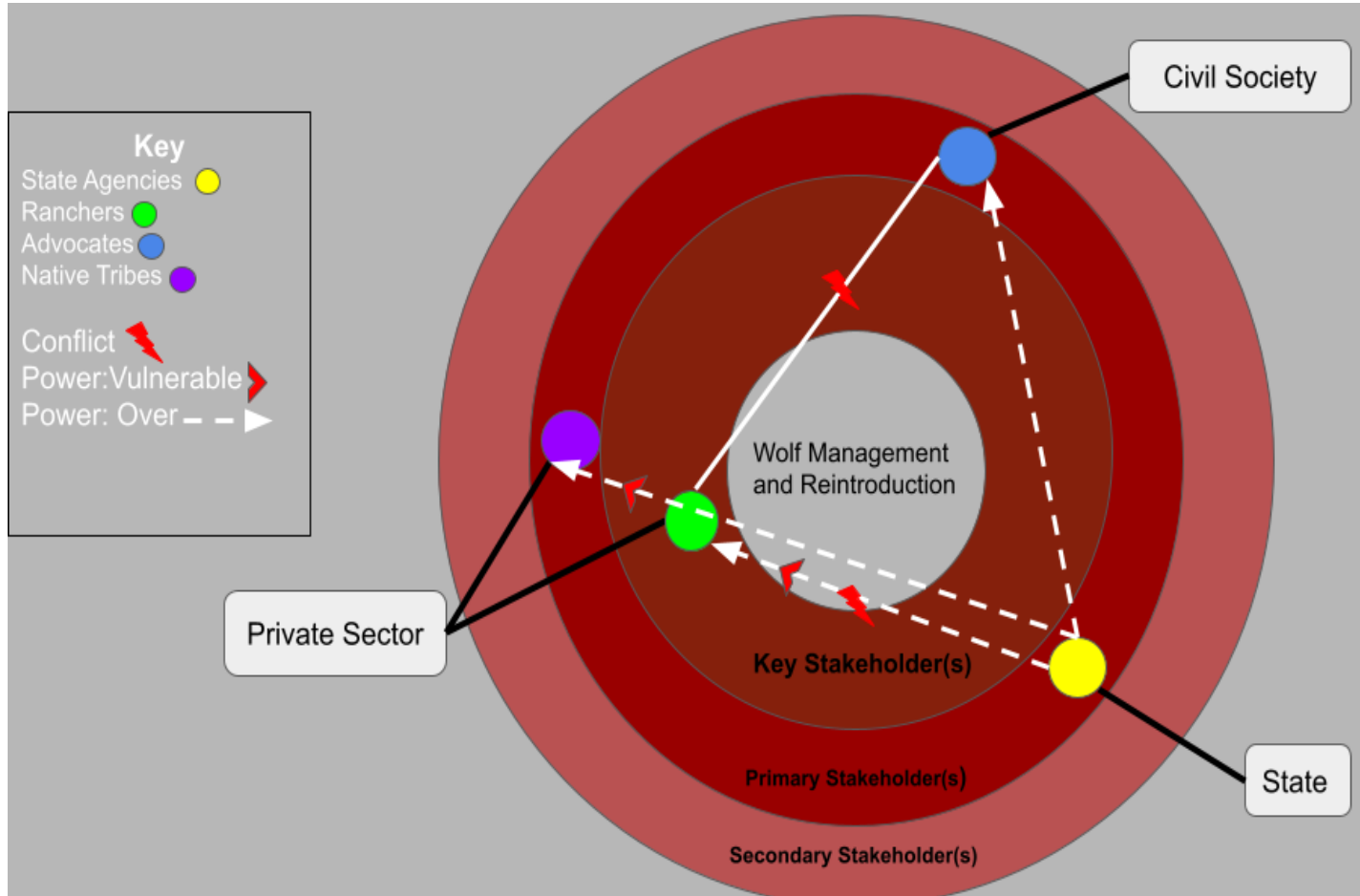
An Idaho Rancher felt that wolves in the area had become more vicious after reintroduction, killing his cattle slowly and painfully. Despite wolves not being the cause for the most livestock loss, this rancher stated that every loss in profit hurt. He also declared that wolf advocates caused more problems for him than wolves did (Wright 2014). A focus group of farmers from Wisconsin expressed that they did not like wolves. These views were due to worry of livestock populations and human safety. In terms of management, these farmers were concerned about population size, the ability to protect their property and the chance the Department of Natural Resources was lying about depredation numbers. If wolves were restricted to non-farming areas or if farmers were allowed to take wolf control into their own hands, some were accepting of increasing wolf populations (Browne-Nuñez et al. 2014). According to Naughton-Treves et al. (2003), 44.8% of livestock producers and 28.5% of the general rural population of Wisconsin wanted to reduce or eliminate the state’s wolf population.

### *Advocates, Conservationist and Native American Tribes*

An affiliate of Idaho Conservation expressed his struggles with the state and Idaho Fish and Game on wolf management. Delisting of wolves from the Endangered Species Act gave states control over wolf management again. The state and Idaho Fish and Game refused to allow Idaho Conservation to participate in wolf management decisions. This exacerbated the conflict between the two groups and disheartened conservationists.

As stated earlier, wolves have been highly symbolic to Native American cultures. The Nez Perce tribe in Idaho believes that reintroduction has “renewed a sense of empowerment to [the tribe]”. Prior to Euro-American colonization the tribe lived in harmony among wolves and other predators. A tribe member stated that he felt responsible to work with the state and other agencies to halt the fight against wolves (Wright 2014).

### Stakeholder Analysis Diagram



### Multicultural Perspectives

A Minnesota case study is an example in which multicultural perspectives in wolf management can be seen being taken into consideration.

In 1998 a roundtable was held to bring together multiple stakeholders in the discussion of wolf management. The stakeholders consisted of environmentalists groups, agricultural interests, hunting interests, tribal representatives, northern Minnesota residents and rural Minnesota residents. These thirty-four stakeholders were given decision making powers as the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources promised to honor the stakeholders' consensus. The roundtable's plan consisted of five parts. Natural expansion of the wolf population with a goal of 1,600 individuals and no maximum ceiling was set. The public harvesting of wolves would be postponed for five years. A plan to kill or trap wolves that committed depredation would be instated. There would be an increase in livestock loss compensation and nonlethal deterrents would be combined with lethal removal of wolves. Although the stakeholders' multicultural perspectives created a plan that worked for all, it was killed in legislation and never instated (Nie 2003).

### **Conclusion**

Wolf-human relationships drastically changed with the arrival of colonists in North America. The relationship went from one of harmony to hatred. Bounties at the state level were put on wolves and populations were eliminated close to extinction. People were angry that their livestock and game population was being depleted and their own safety could be in jeopardy. Since the mid-1900s this relationship has changed as scientific evidence has shown the important role wolves play in the ecosystem. Along with the change in view on wolves, management officials began to realize how important stakeholders were in the discussion of wolf management. Multicultural perspectives on wolves have been and are being taken into consideration when constructing management plans. Officials and the public must continue to be open to hearing multiple perspectives on wolves in order to safeguard the species' existence into the future.



## References

- Browne-Nuñez, C., Treves, A., Macfarland, D., Voyles, Z., & Turng, C. (2015). Tolerance of wolves in Wisconsin: A mixed-methods examination of policy effects on attitudes and behavioral inclinations. *Biological Conservation*, 189, 59–71.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2014.12.016>
- Fogleman, V. M. (1989). American Attitudes Towards Wolves: A History of Misperception. *Environmental History Review*, 13(1), 63–94.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3984536>
- Hoffman, A., & White, A. (2018, May 12). *History of Wild Wolves*. Mission: Wolf.  
<https://missionwolf.org/wild-wolves/>.
- Kellert, S. R., Black, M., Reid Rush, C., & Bath, A. J. (1986). Human Culture and Large Carnivore Conservation in North America. *Conservation Biology*, 10(4), 977–990.
- Lute, M., Bump, A., & Gore, M. (2014). Identity-Driven Differences in Stakeholder Concerns about Hunting Wolves. *PLoS ONE*, 9(12), 1–15.  
<https://doi.org/doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0114460>
- Musiani, M., & Paquet, P. C. (2004). The Practices of Wolf Persecution, Protection, and Restoration in Canada and the United States. *BioScience*, 54(1), 50–60.  
[https://doi.org/10.1641/0006-3568\(2004\)054\[0050:tpowpp\]2.0.co;2](https://doi.org/10.1641/0006-3568(2004)054[0050:tpowpp]2.0.co;2)
- National Resources Defense Council. (2009, April). *Protecting Wolves in the American West*. NRDC.  
<https://www.nrdc.org/resources/protecting-wolves-american-west>.
- Naughton-Treves, L., Grossberg, R., & Treves, A. (2003). Paying for Tolerance: Rural Citizens' Attitudes toward Wolf Depredation and Compensation. *Conservation Biology*, 17(6), 1500–1511.
- Nie, M. A. (2003). *Beyond wolves: the politics of wolf recovery and management*. Univ. of Minnesota Press.
- Williams, C. K., Ericsson, G., & Heberlein, T. A. (2002). A Quantitative Summary of Attitudes toward Wolves and Their Reintroduction (1972-2000). *Wildlife Society Bulletin*, 30(2), 575–584.
- Wright, J.L. (2014). Lessons from Wolves: Stakeholder Perspectives and Experiences with Northern Rocky Wolf Reintroduction. *WWU Graduate School Collection*, 337.

