

5-16-2013

Who's the Big Bad Wolf: Exploring Ranchers' Attitudes on Expanding Gray Wolf Populations Across Eastern Washington Rangeland

Maddy Fisk

University of Puget Sound, mfisk@pugetsound.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://soundideas.pugetsound.edu/csoc_theses



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Fisk, Maddy, "Who's the Big Bad Wolf: Exploring Ranchers' Attitudes on Expanding Gray Wolf Populations Across Eastern Washington Rangeland" (2013). *Sociology & Anthropology Theses*. Paper 1.

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at Sound Ideas. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sociology & Anthropology Theses by an authorized administrator of Sound Ideas. For more information, please contact soundideas@pugetsound.edu.

Who's the Big Bad Wolf: Exploring Ranchers' Attitudes on Expanding Gray Wolf Populations Across Eastern Washington Rangeland

by

Maddy C. Fisk

submitted to the

Department of Comparative Sociology

of the University of Puget Sound

in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirement for the Degree

of Bachelor of Arts

in

Comparative Sociology

Faculty Advisor: *Leon Grunberg*

2013

The University of Puget Sound

Abstract

In recent years Washington has seen a striking increase in the number of gray wolves residing within the state. In the last twelve months alone the number of wolves has jumped from 27 to well over 50. This growth has sparked fierce debate primarily between conservation groups and those involved in the cattle production industry. Urban conservation groups are unified in their support for wolf protection, yet less is known about what ranchers in the eastern part of the state want in regards to growing wolf numbers. Using mixed-methods and grounded theory, this exploratory study addresses stereotypes held by urban Washingtonians about rural ranchers- that is, that ranchers are unified, unyielding, and aggressive in their desire to once again eliminate wolves from the state. By conducting interviews with eastern Washington ranchers I found these stereotypes to be inaccurate, and discovered that most often ranchers are resigned to the urban-rural power dynamic, and simply more concerned with their ability to protect their livelihoods. Additionally, this research uncovered the profound mistrust held by many in the cattle production industry when asked to discuss the “wolf problem” with outsiders. This finding has profound implications for future policy which aims to support sustainable relationships between gray wolf conservation and agricultural interests.

Introduction

According to the United States Department of Fish and Wildlife (USDFW), Washington State has seen a dramatic increase in its gray wolf population over the last five years (2012). According to a 2013 report by the USDFW, the wolf population within the state has doubled in the last year alone- jumping from twenty-seven recorded in the spring of 2012 to well over fifty individuals listed as of March 2013 (WDFW News Release). Additionally, the USDFW suggests that there may be upwards of one hundred wolves within Washington's borders, many of which simply avoided detection by government surveyors (WDFW News Release).

This dramatic increase in gray wolf population has not gone unnoticed by a broad spectrum of interested parties. It has sparked heated debate between environmental groups and rural ranchers involved in the cattle production industry. In recent months conflict has reached a boiling point in which both parties have received death threats and encountered violence as a result of their stance on the issue. These outbursts and continued unrest has lead to an increase in political pressure at the state capital where several bills have been debated over the last several months. This is a significant shift from previous decades when Washington wolf populations were seen as irrelevant after their eradication from the state during the 1930s (*Development of a Gray Wolf Conservation and Management Plan for Washington*, 2012; Wiles, Allen, Hayes, 2011).

Keeping with the trend developed in other states dealing with wolf repopulation issues, there is often a clear dividing line drawn between rural and urban areas when it comes to individuals' views on sharing their state with wolves (*Development of a Gray*

Wolf Conservation, 2013; Wiles, Allen, Hayes, 2011; Hafer & Hygnstrom, 1991).

Traditionally, individuals residing in rural areas are most affected by growing wolf populations, and are least supportive of wolf repopulation efforts (Hafer & Hygnstrom, 1991). These rural communities also often feel overlooked and neglected when it comes to policy decisions which create opportunities to increase wolf populations in the region. The purpose of this research is to investigate this perspective more deeply.

By focusing on rural communities, and specifically those involved in ranching and the cattle production industry, my research is an outlet for those with often underpublicized viewpoints on the issue. By creating an avenue by which these opinions may be expressed in a constructive and open-minded manner this research opens the door to a sustainable policy solution which finds common ground between conservation groups, advocating for gray wolf protection, and the rural communities negatively affected by their growth. Finally, this study contributes new research in the area of rural sociology, and opens up new avenues by which future sociological research may be conducted on this very contentious and timely issue.

This research attempts to answer questions such as: do ranchers feel that current state and federal policy surrounding wolf conservation does an adequate job of protecting their agricultural and social interests; do those in the cattle industry feel accurately represented to the greater public in the debate over wolf populations within the state; and more generally, what do Washington ranchers want to do about growing wolf populations? These questions will be answered below.

The findings of this study are two fold. First, ranchers are often not as militantly aggressive towards wolf populations as urban media depicts. Rather the

ranchers interviewed seemed resigned to the presence of the species, and were instead most concerned with how government policy could do a better job of protecting their economic livelihoods. Second, I found that ranchers do not feel that their perspective is accurately represented to the greater Washington public. This was particularly evident by the surprising levels of mistrust, and conspiracy theories held by the individuals interviewed.

Following this introduction I will give a brief overview of the existing literature available on the subject of gray wolf conflict within the Pacific Northwest, as well as the conceptual framework upon which this research is based. Next the methods will be outlined in detail, as well as the potential limitations of this study. Key findings will be presented and discussed at length in the “Findings and Discussion” section, followed by a brief suggestion for future research.

Conceptual Framework and Review of Existing Literature

The United States has always struggled to maintain a sustainable balance with the natural world (Sharpe, Norton, Donnelley, 2001). Since the days of Manifest Destiny we have seen a variety of large mammals be pushed to the brink of extinction across the West as a result of increased human interaction (Sharpe, Norton, Donnelley, 2001). Many of these animals are top-level predators (such as, the mountain lion, grizzly bear, and wolf), which are directly targeted because of the potential harm they impose on people and their livelihoods (Sharpe, Norton, Donnelley, 2001). Over the next couple pages I will review some of the previous research conducted on the tumultuous relationship between gray wolves and Pacific Northwest communities. In

many instances I will analyze research based outside of the Pacific Northwest simply because there is very limited research that focuses specifically on the state of Washington. I conclude that there is a gap in sociological knowledge surrounding the desires of ranching communities in relation to the presence of wolf populations in the state.

Media Bias

When conflict over Washington wolf populations is at its highest, the bias represented in the media is most evident. A clear example of this comes from newspaper articles published in the fall of 2012 when the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife decided to eliminate a wolf pack living in the far northeastern corner of the state that had come to subsist primarily off of livestock in the area (Associated Press, 2012; Bentjen, 2012; Marzluff, 2012; Todd, 2012).

Most articles published in major newspapers surrounding the October elimination of the Wedge pack seem to take a similar position on the event: the killing of the pack was a terrible act, and a misuse of government funds (Todd, 2012; Marzluff, 2012; Bentjen, 2012). Only a few scattered local voices were presented advocating the other side of the issue, and in support of the lethal measures taken by the USDFW officials. This example highlights not only the bias within newspapers across the region but also the dichotomy which exists between rural and urban populations when it comes to predator repopulation of the west. The widespread urban newspapers, far removed from species interaction, tend to support conservation efforts, while those who are directly affected by these animals are often left to express their

opinions' in rural editions with a greatly reduced reader base. (Sharpe, Norton, Donnelley, 2001; Todd, 2012; Marzluff, 2012; Bentjen, 2012).

Management Plans

Over the last two decades there has been a mountain of research published on how best to manage the reintroduction of gray wolves into the American West. Conducted by both academic and government bodies, with public and private access to funding, this research has advanced many policy proposals. Conservation groups tout the biological data, which suggests the positive outcomes that result from increasing wolf populations, while rural communities continue to be skeptical of the idea (Treves, Wallace, White, 2009; Willard, 2008; Musiani & Paquet, 2004).

Many of the more detailed management plans such as those composed by either state or federal government organizations address the critical voice often adopted by rural advocates fighting wolf repopulation (Wiles, Allen, Hayes, 2011). This opposition is most commonly attributed to the negative effects on ranchers' livelihood—such as cattle depredation, and reduced elk populations enjoyed by hunters and other wildlife enthusiasts. However there has been surprisingly little research focused specifically on the subject (Wiles, Allen, Hayes, 2011). Additionally it is often hard to tell where the current data originates. For example, in the 2011 “*Gray Wolf Management Plan*” devised by the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, the authors discuss only briefly the potential attitudes of ranchers towards the species. Their views are not cited, nor followed up by additional information. Of the limited academic articles available on the subject, analysis of rural communities' beliefs are not well represented (Musiani and Paquet, 2004). I would like to fill this gap in the

research, and provide policy makers with a more complete information base so that successful management plans may be devised.

Rural Communities' Attitudes towards Predator Reestablishment

There is surprisingly little academic research on the subject of rural communities and their desires surrounding predator repopulation, particularly in the field of sociology, and focused within the Pacific Northwest. A variety of studies have been conducted in northern Europe with a particular focus on Norway and Sweden (Skogen, Mauz, Krangle, 2008; Skogen, Krangle, 2003). These studies using a similar mixed-methods approach found that rural communities' attitudes towards wolves are most often affected by the species harassment of livestock and their presumed negative effects on ungulate populations (Skogen, Mauz, Krangle, 2008; Skogen, Krangle, 2003). These findings are similar to those published in the many of the USDFW management plans developed by various states across the country.

In North America, we see much less sociological literature dedicated to the topic of rural communities' attitudes towards predators, and close to nothing focusing primarily on wolf-rancher relations. However there are several articles which examine the sociopolitical context of wolf management in the United States (Dadey, 2011; Nie, 2001). These articles use a variety of methods, both qualitative and quantitative, to highlight the rural-urban dichotomy which often exists between those who support large predator conservation, and those who do not (Dadey, 2011; Nie, 2001).

One study which focuses on Nebraska sheep farmers suggests that this population often feels that predators have a larger impact on their economic vitality than is realistic (Hafer & Hygnstrom, 1991). A second commonly cited study based in

Utah highlights the difference in attitude between rural and urban residences when it comes to feelings towards wolves (Bruskotter, Schmidt, Teel, 2007). According to this study, urban residents were more likely to have positive feelings associated with the wolves in their state, in comparison to their rural counterparts who tended to have more negative feelings on average. There are currently no sociological studies conducted on the impacts of wolves within the Pacific Northwest. My research attempts to fill this gap.

Due to the limited base of sociological research conducted on the effects wolves have on rural American communities, and the even smaller body of sociological knowledge which focuses specifically on wolf-ranch interaction within the Pacific Northwest, the nature of this study is primarily exploratory. By using grounded theory this study serves as a starting point upon which following research may build.

The exploratory nature of this study requires the research questions to be broad and open-ended. Most generally this study focuses on how Washington ranchers would like to deal with the continuing increase in gray wolf populations within their state. This question also tests the stereotype that *all* ranchers hold strong anti-wolf ideologies, and are consistently unyielding in their unified desire to see wolves once again exterminated from the state.

Additionally, this research investigates how ranchers feel their opinions are represented to Washington's general public, and their relations towards government officials and environmental groups. The hypothesis here is that individual ranchers do not harbor negative feelings towards these groups to the extent that media outlets seem to portray.

Research Design and Methods

This exploratory study used a mixed-methods approach to investigate how Washington ranchers feel increasing gray wolf populations within the state affect their livelihoods, and what they would like to do about the species continued growth.

The primary subject population of this study are individuals with a direct connection to ranching in eastern Washington. This includes ranch owners, farmhands, cowboys, family members, or those with close connections to the cattle production industry, such as members of various cattlemen's associations across the region. I have chosen to focus my research on this narrow sample group because of their clear attachment to the ranching profession, and their close physical ties to the location where wolf repopulation seems to be taking place. This group is ideal for my research because they are most likely to have insightful opinions about the growing wolf populations near their communities.

Due to the nature of this study, a random sample of the subject population was impractical. Instead snowball sampling was used with several different starting locations. Several participants were found using the online website "The Cattle Pages". This is a directory for cattle producers looking to expand their herds. Listings are divided based on breed and location. By checking popular breeds of cattle and narrowing the results based on state, finding ranchers located in eastern Washington was relatively straight forward. I then used the contact information supplied by the website to directly contact the listed farm or ranch owner.

A second starting point for sampling came from scanning national newspaper articles. By setting up a daily alert through Google News I received every article

published nationally which contained the keywords “wolf” and “Washington”. These alerts served two purposes. First, they kept me up to date on what was happening politically surrounding the Washington wolf debate, and pointed me towards prominent opinion pieces on the topic. Second, by scanning these articles I was able to pick out names of people and ranches who featured prominently in the Washington debate. These people were then added to my call-list along with the individuals from “The Cattle Pages” to contact about participation in my research.

Third, I found participants by searching various Washington cattlemen’s associations on Facebook. I posted on each groups Facebook page, explaining my project and what I was asking of them. This allowed those who were interested in participating the opportunity to do so. One group was particularly responsive and their opinions feature prominently in this research.

Based on these three separate starting points I was then able to branch out, looking for more interview participants. In total I interviewed four ranchers, conducting two phone interviews, and two interviews via email correspondence. All participants were male, however they varied in location- residing in three separate eastern Washington counties. Additionally, they varied in age from thirty-five to seventy-one, and had a range of farm and ranch experiences. All had spent the majority of their lives in eastern Washington, and had strong connections to the communities there, specifically the cattle production industry.

All interviews were semi-structure in nature, and took place over the phone or by email. The participant chose the method of correspondence. A semi-structured format was chosen to assist in the exploratory nature of this research. The main topics

of the interview were picked ahead of time, however questions were left open ended to facilitate the open-ended nature of this research. If a participant preferred to be interviewed through email correspondence the main topics were formatted into broad questions, and were sent with a prompt explaining to take the questions in whatever direction seemed most pertinent. An appendix has been attached displaying the interview guide I used when conducting interviews.

Phone interviews were recorded for later transcription purposes, and verbal consent was given in each case. Similarly, email interviews were conducted only after written permission was received. Only those eighteen years or older participated in this research. There are no major ethical issues associated with this research.

Each interview was transcribed and coded using methods associated with grounded theory. This method was chosen due to the exploratory nature of this research. Common themes were grouped, analyzed, and conclusions drawn from each grouping. Two of the most prominent themes make up the “Findings and Discussion” section later on.

In addition to interviews, the mixed-method data collection included the use of media sources collected through both online newspaper archives, and public-access video archival websites. The newspaper articles were crucial in highlighting the ideological disconnect which takes place when crossing the Cascade range, and how bias exists in the media representation of this issue. Additionally the public-access footage, recorded during meetings which took place during the 2012 controversy over the elimination of the Wedge pack, was helpful as it showed several Washington ranchers clearly expressing their positions on the issue. These videos were later

transcribed in a similar manner to the interviews and included in the data set analyzed using grounded theory. Several of the quotations included in the “Findings and Discussion” section are from these video transcriptions, and are analyzed below.

Research Limitations

The most significant limitation of this study is the very small subject population (n) from which conclusions are drawn. This was due to the very low response rate of those asked to participate. The response rate of about 11 percent- a much lower rate than was initially anticipated. While this does raise validity issues for the research, it also highlights a key finding- primarily the strong mistrust of outsiders expressed by those within the cattle industry towards.

It is possible that ranchers may have been picking up on internal biases unbeknownst to myself surrounding the issues of wolves, ranching, and conservation. However, I do not believe this to be the case. First, over the course of my background work and primary research, any bias I had towards a single position melted away. Second, I took many steps to ensure all of my interactions were as balanced as possible. This was done by highlighting my interest in what they, the ranchers, had to say on the issue of the growing wolf population within the state, and by being open to their ideas and opinions. Unfortunately my good intentions were usually met with skepticism and misunderstanding.

A second limitation of this study regards the lack of random sampling when choosing the subject population. Simply due to the parameters of the study a random sample was not possible. However, a suitable substitute- snowball sampling- was chosen to create as much diversity within the sample as possible. This was successful

as those interviewed came from a broad swath of Washington's rangeland, were associated with a diverse array of ranches, and came from various educational and vocational backgrounds. However, despite this diversity within the subject population there was a strong selection bias, as the minority of ranchers who agreed to participate could represent ideas not commonly held by the majority of Washington ranchers.

Findings and Discussion

The major findings of this research are two fold. First, they address the commonly held belief that all ranchers are unyielding in their desire to once again eliminate gray wolves from the state of Washington. The inaccuracy of this stereotype will be highlighted by the discussion which follows. The second key finding outlines the realization that a deep mistrust of outsiders, verging to the point of conspiracy, plagues the cattle industry. This deeply held skepticism and mistrust towards outsiders not only greatly affected this research but also has important implications for future research and policy development.

Refuting the Myth of the Big, Bad Rancher

Media outlets located in urban centers have dominated the discussion on Washington's wolf debate. A key feature of their reporting has been to describe rural ranchers as militantly aggressive wolf haters who actively favor once again eliminating the species from the state. However my research has found this stereotype to be untrue. Rather every rancher interviewed seemed resigned to the presence of wolves within Washington ecosystems, and was instead most concerned with how government policy would protect their livelihoods, while maintaining *minimal* wolf populations.

One rancher stated plainly, “We have to learn to live with them (wolves). I think they made a mistake by trying to introduce them, but now we have them so now we got to learn to live with them.” This was a common theme among those interviewed. All resented the government’s successful attempts to reestablish gray wolf populations across the west, yet also seemed resigned to the idea that the species was here to stay. Another stated:

I think there are places for wolves, but first of all I think it was a blunder for them (the government) to introduce them... If there’s two hundred square miles of nothing but wilderness I don’t see a problem with that. But when they start bouncing around here and dropping down (on to the rangeland), that’s getting a little bit much.

This quotation highlights two key themes. First, the resignation experienced by the ranchers interviewed. While they don’t agree with the government and its attempts to increase wolf populations, they also realized there is very little they can do about it. Therefore they have settled for the next best option. As long as the wolves are not interfering with their livelihoods they don’t have a problem with them.

Second, this quotation highlights the necessity for conservation policy which addresses the needs of those involved in cattle production. Ranchers stated over and over that they don’t have a problem with wolves, rather they have a problem with the negative effects they have on their livestock. Therefore if policy is written which recognizes both this concession and point of contention, policy makers may be able to move towards more stable ground on this highly contentious issue. For example there could be laws which takes steps to limit wolf populations where livestock production is

vital to the local economy, and which gives greater concessions to ranchers who are negatively affected by wolf populations in the area.

Unfortunately, ranchers do not have the political influence they desire in Olympia and beyond. All of those interviewed expressed frustration with the imbalance of political power held between rural and urban counties. “However King and Pierce county votes, that’s the way the state goes” stated one rancher. Because western Washington is much more liberal and tends to support conservation policy, this power dynamic makes it unlikely that rurally located, conservative ranchers will benefit from policies which successfully pass in Olympia.

One frustrated rancher stated:

Government regulations will always be skewed. The decision makers are forced to make the decisions and laws for whoever has the strongest lobbying groups at any given time... It’s hard to stop conservationists. They have the money and lawyers to stop all kinds of decisions that they don’t believe in.

This quotation highlights the frustration the ranchers interviewed feel towards government, and the policies it creates. They feel that they had no say in the reintroduction of wolves back into the West, and now have no power to protect their own livelihoods from the species continued encroachment. Ranchers attribute this imbalance of political representation in part to the immense power conservation groups hold in Washington. They are richly funded, and backed by strong public support across western Washington (Cripne & Thomas, 2006; *Seattle Environmental and Green Groups*, 2013) When compared to the sporadic representation of ranchers in

Olympia, and the weaker cattle industry lobby, it is no wonder that Washington policy has tended to lean towards conservation.

Ecological conservation is not the only way Washingtonians propose to protect the state's ecosystems. One rancher stated: "I believe in keeping our country beautiful, but not the way most eco types folks go about it." This quotation seems to get at the heart of the issue. How best to care for the state, and who should get to decide? Due to governmental design and the demographic makeup of Washington the western side has been dealt the advantage. However this does not mean policy makers should forget, or disregard rural Washingtonians opinions. Future government policy should do a better job of keeping this population's needs in mind, and build policy that supports both the state's need to conserve it's native species, as well as support it's citizens economic livelihoods.

What would such policy look like? The ranchers interviewed unanimously wanted more flexible management solutions, and particularly the ability to protect their livestock from wolves visibly attacking their cattle.

I really believe we should have the right to shoot them (wolves) if they do start messing with our cattle. And its very important that it doesn't matter if it has a collar on it or not. If it's in my cattle I have to pull the trigger. I swear to God I would. I've invested twenty years in this so far, and I have to defend it.

Similarly,

There's a lot of money hopping around out here and it's scary. It scares us more than anything that they can introduced wolves and there's

nothing you can do about them. You can't shoot them. Three or four isn't going to do a huge amount of damage. But fifteen or twenty, that could really get costly.

Both these quotations highlight key points of contention as well as frame the ranchers' perspective. First, every rancher interviewed express the need to be able to protect their livestock from imminent attack. In other words "If it's in my cattle I have to pull the trigger." Additionally, two stated that they would fire on a wolf even though it is currently illegal to do so. It is simply too large of a risk for them to not to do so.

A policy change allowing livestock protection for cattle under imminent risk of attack was imperative for those ranchers interviewed. In their eyes it would allow them to protect their livestock without decimating the gray wolf population, as only individuals actively preying on cattle would be targeted. As noted above, they have no issue with wolves, just the negative effects they have on cattle. Additionally, such a policy suggestion from ranchers supports the finding that ranchers are not militantly aggressive towards wolves as a whole, as urban media suggests.

The second quotation additionally highlights both the resignation and acceptance ranchers feel towards wolf reintroduction, as well as the frustration they harbor towards a government which has a tendency to lean liberal in its adoption of conservation strategies. From these statements it becomes apparent that ranchers are not happy with current policy, and have clear opinions on what should be changed.

One rancher summed up a common sentiment, "I think they can manage it if they want to. If they have the political will and the good will they can manage it. They definitely need to do better with management."

Conspiracy and Mistrust within the Cattle Production Industry

The most unexpected finding coming from this research involves the deep mistrust imbedded within the cattle production industry of eastern Washington. During the research process this was expressed as skepticism and mistrust over the research which led many to refuse to participate. This scenario played out over and over when ranchers were asked for their involvement, and severely obstructed the data collection process. It is my belief that this mentality had a great effect on this research's surprisingly small subject population (n).

Ranchers' skepticism can be categorized into two types: social skepticism and scientific skepticism. Social skepticism refers to the mistrust of people and ideas outside of the participants' close-knit and ideologically unified community. During the course of this research participants' feelings seemed to range from mild mistrust, which was easily overcome, to well formed theories of conspiracy which laid the foundation for long lasting ideological isolation and refusal to participate in interviews.

One rancher put it quite clearly, "You get a lot of the government conspiracists. You'll find that pretty heavy in the cattle industry." This quotation came from an interview which took place early on in the data collection process, and at that point the idea of conspiracy within this community was still new to me. However over the next several weeks it became evident how correct this rancher had been in this statement.

For two weeks I was in steady communication with a cattlemen's association located in the far northeast reaches of the state. Initially they were very receptive towards my research and enthusiastically agreed to help however they could. This

included looking over my interview guideline, giving suggestions, social connections and inviting me to their monthly member's meeting.

This association's reaction was somewhat surprising as one rancher had previously told me, "Up there north of Colville you got the people with their pretty strong conspiracy theory stuff. Governments bad and all of that." It was this sentiment which raised concern that the strongly held beliefs within this community might affect participation rates. Unfortunately these fears were justified and during my third week of communication with the cattlemen's association their willing involvement suddenly disappeared.

I received an email stating, "After speaking with our President, our members will no longer be available for interviews." When I enquired about still attending the meeting, this response was received, "Our meeting on the 7th is primarily for work by the board of directors and is not set up to be a public meeting." These last two emails essentially cut off any access to ranchers associated with the group. Additionally, not only was I unable to contact ranchers through the association, but my guess is that the groups warned other cattlemen about this project, as ranchers I had previously been in the process of setting up interviews with and who had more distant connections to this particular association promptly also cut off communication as well after originally being receptive.

This incident clearly outlines the powerful mistrust and social skepticism which is so pervasive among cattle producers in eastern Washington. After initially being open to my work, the group's profound mistrust of outsiders, and skepticism of my good intentions, clouded their ability to feel positive about their decision to be

involved. This clearly highlights the strong social skepticism which seems to be pervasive among the group's members.

This idea is supported by the fact that after the association revoked their interest in participation they felt the need to take it a further step and warn less involved members of their community. These actions highlight the deeply embedded mistrust held by community members towards those perceived to be outside of their ideological bounds, as well as the strong unity binding the cattle production industry together. By warning less involved members of the community they thought they were looking out for the entire group's wellbeing.

The following quotation comes from a rancher who was quite open during his interview, and seemed to have less social skepticism than his colleagues within the cattle industry. At this point of the interview we were discussing the trouble I was having in gaining the trust of potential participants.

He states:

Be sure to tell them this is just for your thesis, this isn't to prove anything; its just for your thesis and isn't going to get used against them... Its not to be used for any political gain one way or another, it's just for your thesis, right? I would be sure to reiterate that point to them. Make sure they know you aren't going to turn it over to the wolf foundations.

This passage is interesting primarily for two reasons. First, because even after my many assurances that this is a completely confidential project and only for my thesis, he still questions me on that fact, qualifying his previous statements with a "right?"

This highlights that even the most open of ranchers still harbors some reservation towards consorting with people outside of his ideological base on an issue as contentious as wolf conservation.

Second, this passage displays the deep mistrust and polarizing nature of wolf conflict in Washington- those who support conservation verses those that do not, with rampant mistrust reserved for those belonging to each opposing party. It was of utmost importance to this participant that what he was saying was only to be used for my own academic growth, and only under those terms was he willing to talk to me. It was imperative to him, and he guessed to the other ranchers as well, that this research never be used against his community to promote increasing wolf populations within his region, or to give a bad name to those fighting against the rising populations.

The divisive mistrust of those supporting wolf conservation was a common theme expressed by those ideologically opposed to growing wolf populations. One rancher expressed it in this way, "The two species of human are too far apart in their beliefs. I think this is a problem as deep as politics or religion. People are threatening to kill each other over the wolves, that's pretty significant." Clearly in the minds of ranchers this issue is of utmost importance, and social skepticism is a key component of why it is such a contentious issue.

The second representation of mistrust within the cattle production industry is demonstrated by the skepticism expressed over scientific materials which explain the positive effects wolves can have within an ecosystem. Such research has been steadily accumulated since gray wolves were first reintroduced into Yellowstone National Park in 1995, and has since been replicated across the country (Ripple & Beschta, 2004).

However many ranchers have chosen not to believe such accounts and stick to the long-standing ideological beliefs held within their community.

One rancher expressed it this way: “The negatives of the wolf is they will ruin the numbers of our wildlife. There is so much propaganda and un-truths about how the wolves will help the ecosystem that I just don’t believe anything that I read.” It is obvious by this statement that he believes that wolves have a strong negative effect on the ecosystem. Additionally this rancher has chosen not to believe scientific reports which suggest an alternative, and goes as far as to call such reports “propaganda” which should not be trusted.

The following is an excerpt from an interview in which a rancher explains his understanding of how wolves have a negative impact on the ecosystem. His explanation also coincidentally runs completely opposite to how biologists have come to understand the same issue.

If you push the cattle and sheep from public lands, deer and elk, and other critters will have more food and graze much easier. In turn predators will be more abundant and won’t get shot or injured from killing wildlife like they do livestock. Environmentalists make the claims that the cattle and sheep have ruined public lands by overgrazing; stomping out particular plants, bringing in invasive weeds and plants. Here again this is untrue. The enviro-people claim the cattle have ruined the riparian area along the creek. Not true. The only damage will be a little cow poop on the tires of your vehicle.

This rancher's key qualm with removing cattle from public land is that it allows less opportunity for predators to get shot attacking livestock (this is currently illegal in the state of Washington, but as demonstrated above, that often does not stop ranchers from protecting their livestock). By his terms changing grazing policy would create an imbalance between livestock and wildlife on public land. He also believes that livestock do not have any negative impact on the ecosystem, and thus seems to adopt a why worry about it attitude.

Both types of skepticism, social and scientific, have serious implications on the effectiveness of government policy on gray wolf regulation and conservation efforts. In terms of social skepticism it is hard to gain access and build constructive relationships with those within the cattle industry. This is perhaps why so little academic research has focused on this particular group. However, if successful policy is to be written which balances the needs of agricultural interests and those who support conservation it is imperative that both sides of the debate are represented. However, this is difficult if agricultural interests are too skeptical to even come to the table. In terms of scientific skepticism the consequences of such an ideologically base are also significant. It will be very hard for both sides of the current debate to come together on any sort of sustainable agreement if each is operating on completely different ideological planes, and is too skeptical to entertain the other's point of view. Therefore it is vital that both sides find some way of *accurately* understanding the other's perspective. Until this happens neither side will be satisfied, and the tumultuous debate over wolf conservation will continue to rage.

Possibilities for Future Research

A key finding of this research focused on the mistrust expressed by ranching communities when asked to open up and express their opinions on increasing wolf populations within their state. At times these reservations seemed much more than social shyness and were expressed in terms of “conspiracy theories” by ranchers on several different occasions.

It does not seem that the role of conspiracy theories in the debate over wolf conservation has been investigated by the social sciences. This was an unexpected finding, and I feel that this research serves as a first step in investigating a subject that has thus far been overlooked. Additionally, by creating a better understanding of the ranching perspective and the way that conspiracy theories affect their opinions, policy makers are better equipped to both write policies which take such ideas into consideration, as well as equipped to communicate with ranchers and other rural community members which may be using conspiracy theories as important tools in framing the issue.

Additionally, a more long-term ethnographic research model could easily mitigate the trouble with the small response rate and access to participants experienced using this research’s methodology. A study with a similar subject population yet without the time and access constraints limiting this research could do an excellent job of further highlighting the issues which have been brought up in this study. Such a study would be both timely and valuable in its ability to affect policy and work towards a sustainable balance between the cattle industry and wolf conservation.

Conclusion

This exploratory study attempted to fill a gap present in social science literature surrounding the social implications of growing wolf populations across the West. It focused specifically on the effects on Washington ranchers, and served to answer these questions: do ranchers feel that current state and federal policy surrounding wolf conservation does an adequate job of protecting their agricultural and social interests; do those in the cattle industry feel accurately represented to the greater public in the debate over wolf populations; and more generally, what do ranchers want to do about growing wolf populations within the state of Washington?

The primary findings of this research were two fold. First, that ranchers are often not as militantly aggressive towards wolf populations as urban media depicts. Rather the ranchers interviewed seemed resigned to the presence of the species near their communities, and were instead more concerned with how government policy would help support their economic livelihoods. The ranchers' biggest issue with current policy was that it does not give them the ability to protect their cattle-livelihood- from spontaneous wolf attack. It was particularly important to those interviewed that indiscriminant attention be paid to the attacking wolf's collared status. In other words, if they see a wolf attacking their cattle, ranchers feel it should be well within their rights to shoot the animal- with or without a research collar. Currently this belief is not represented in either state or federal law where it remains illegal to shoot the species under any circumstance.

Second, I found that ranchers do not feel that their perspective is accurately represented to the greater Washington public. This belief was highlighted by the

extreme amounts of mistrust harbored towards outsiders from within the communities involved in cattle production. At times those interviewed went so far as to identify this mistrust as fully developed conspiracy theories. This finding was particularly unexpected, and has key implications for both future research within such communities, and the development of successful wolf conservation policy.

These primary findings have implications if Washington is to find a balance between supporting ranchers' economic livelihoods, and safeguarding its ecosystems. The deep mistrust found within the cattle industry is not only an impediment to scientific research within these communities, but also creates a significant speed bump in the policy making process. Successful policy will never be written if both parties are not accurately represented at the table. More long-term ethnographic research is needed within Washington's cattle production industry if their perspectives' are to be truthfully represented to the greater Washington public and government officials. A more accurate and open representation of their opinions will help to break down the boundaries of mistrust built around these communities as well as promote open conversation on the issue of wolf conservation. This will aid the production of sustainable wolf policy, which keeps both conservationist's and rancher's needs in mind.

Appendix I

General Interview Guide:

Outline of Topics and Key Points Discussed During Interviews

- 1) Background- ranch details, employment history, current position , hobbies, etc.
- 2) Direct Experiences with Wolves
- 3) Wolves and Hunting
- 4) Wolves and Family Safety
- 5) Economic Effects
- 6) Area's Cattlemen's Association- views on wolf populations
- 7) Relationship with Government Officials/Organizations
- 8) Wolves in the News
- 9) Conservation Groups
- 10) Current Policy
- 11) Potential Solutions- what would you do? Middle ground between conservation groups and cattlemen?

Works Cited

- Associated Press. "Killing of wolf pack draws scrutiny from Washington lawmaker." *The Oregonian* [Portland] 2 Nov. 2012: n. pag. *Oregon Live*. Web. 12 Dec. 2012.
- Bruskotter, J. T., Schmidt, R. H., & Teel, T. L. (2007). Are attitudes towards wolves changing? a case study in Utah. *Biological Conservation*, 139(4), 211-218.
- Bentjen, S. (2012, October 27). Wolf killing is overreaction - Spokesman.com - Oct. 27, 2012. *The Spokesman-Review - Spokane news and information at Spokesman.com*. Retrieved April 28, 2013, from <http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2012/oct/27/wolf-killing-is-overreaction/>
- Cripne, S. L., & Thomas, J. W. (2006). Maintaining viable farms and ranches adjacent to national forests for future of wildlife and open space. 2. Working towards a solution. *Rangelands Archives*, 24(1), 13-16.
- Dadey, J. F. (2011). *Perspective taking and its implications for best practices in collaborative governance: The Oregon wolf conservation and management plan process*. *Dissertation Abstracts International, A: The Humanities and Social Sciences*, , 1136-1136. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.ups.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1018344062?accountid=1627>. (1018344062; 201216688).
- "Development of a Gray Wolf Conservation and Management Plan for Washington | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife." *Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife*. Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, n.d. Web. 13 Dec. 2012. <http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/gray_wolf/mgmt_plan.html>.
- Hafer, D. J., & Hygnstrom, S. E. (1991). Attitudes of Nebraska sheep producers towards predators. *Great Plains Wildlife Damage Control Workshop*.
- Heberlein, T. A., & Ericsson, G. (2005). Ties to the countryside: accounting for urbanites attitudes toward hunting, wolves, and wildlife. *Human Dimensions of Wildlife*, 10(3), 213-227.
- Marzluff, J. M. (2012, October 28). Op-ed: We didn't have to kill the Wedge Wolf Pack | Opinion | The Seattle Times. *The Seattle Times | News, sports, weather, events in the Northwest*. Retrieved April 28, 2013, from <http://seattletimes.com/html/opinion/2019>
- Musiani, M. & Paquet, P. C. (2004, January). The practices of wolf persecution, protection, and restoration in Canada and the United States. *BioScience*, 54(1), 50-60.

- Nie, M. A. (2001). The sociopolitical dimensions of wolf management and restoration in the united states. *Human Ecology Review*, 8(1), 1-12. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.ups.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/60439245?accountid=1627>
- Peluso, N. L. (1993). Coercing conservation?: The politics of state resource control. *Global environmental change*, 3(2), 199-217.
- Ripple, W. J., & Beschta, R. L. (2004). Wolves and the ecology of fear: can predation risk structure ecosystems?. *BioScience*, 54(8), 755-766.
- Seattle Environmental and Green Groups. (2013). *Seattle Networking Groups and Events*. Retrieved May 11, 2013, from <http://www.iloveseattle.org/categories.asp?CATEGORYID=6>
- Sharpe, V. A., Norton, B. G., & Donnelley, S. (2001). *Wolves and human communities: biology, politics, and ethics*. Island Pr.
- States wolf population nearly doubled last year, according to annual survey | WDFW News Release. (2013, February 15). *Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife*. Retrieved May 7, 2013, from <http://wdfw.wa.gov/news/feb1513a/>
- Skogen, K., & Krange, O. (2003). A wolf at the gate: The anti-carnivore alliance and the symbolic construction of community. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 43(3), 309-325. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.ups.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/60467351?accountid=1627>
- Skogen, K., Mauz, I., & Krange, O. (2008). Cry wolf!: Narratives of wolf recovery in france and norway. *Rural Sociology*, 73(1), 105-133. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1526/003601108783575916>
- Todd, N. (2012, October 20). Washington state wrestles with how to prevent more wolf kills. *The Oregonian*. Retrieved from http://www.oregonlive.com/pacific-northwest-news/index.ssf/2012/10/washington_state_wrestles_with.html
- Treves, A., Wallace, R. B., & White, S. (2009). Participatory planning on interventions to mitigate human-wildlife conflicts. *Conservation Biology*.
- Wiles, G.J., H.L. Allen and G.E. Hayes. 2011. Wolf conservation and management plan for Washington. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Olympia, Washington. 297 pp.
- Willard, A. L. (2008). *Presenting wolves as wolves: educational outreach in the debate about wolf management in the west*. (Master's thesis, Washington State University), Available from Google Scholar.