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I've been studying this issue in an Environmental Science class. The essay I've attached sums up my feelings as a citizen of Washington State. To ensure my opinion is heard, I'll state here that ranchers shouldn't use public resources to profit, especially not in prime wolf habitat, the wolves are a keystone species and they belong here, and Washington State should not be in the business of killing animals just because a private citizen wants it.

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## Essay: Gray Wolves in the Pacific Northwest

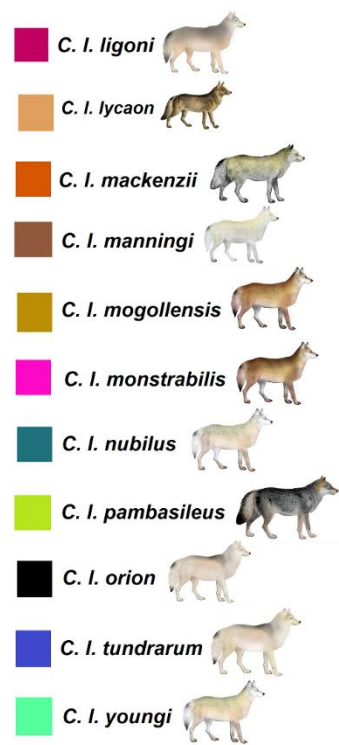
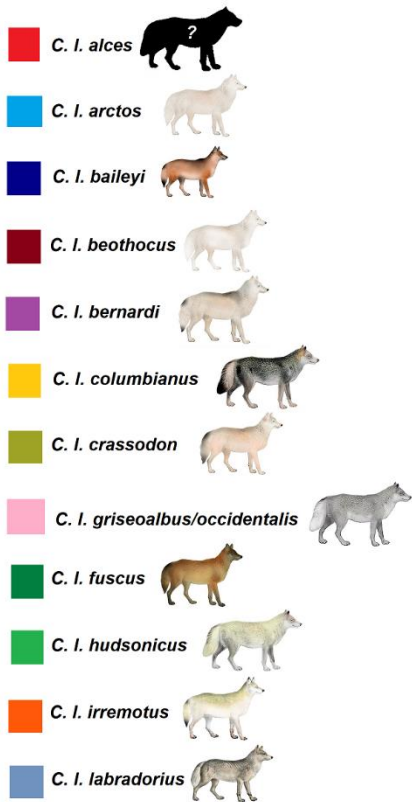
The issue of Gray Wolf reintroduction and protection is a contentious one. People on many sides of the issue have very impassioned and emotional ideas of what should be done, if anything, and often the data on the impact of wolves with civilization and in the environment is not considered with the same weight. I'm not going to pretend that I don't have emotional opinions on this issue, most everyone does even when they're using data in a way that backs their feelings up, but I tried to find resources that were supported by more balanced studies as I explored the issue.

It is a fact that wolves were nearly eradicated from the United States. This was intentional, and even many notable naturalists thought that killing wolves would be good for the rest of the ecosystem and the economy. People in places like Yellowstone would even poison the carcasses of wolf prey to kill them, disregarding the rest of the animals in the ecosystem this would affect. By the 1950s, the eradication was nearly complete, and most people in the United States still held on to anti-wolf sentiments. Part of the reason for this culling was the perception that wolves are a danger to livestock and that people have more of a right to livestock than wolves have the right to exist. Much of the encounters between wolves and livestock happen in prime wolf habitat, which are poor areas for grazing cattle and sheep. The livestock isn't suited to the natural flora in the area, so they have to range widely to find suitable food, and eat a lot of it. Because it's difficult for a person to own the kind of rangeland this livestock needs, a lot of the livestock is ranged on public lands. These public lands should be protected for the common good, but instead the profit needs of a few are prioritized, and so we have conflicts with wolves in wolf habitat on land which is owned by the public. The ranchers are prioritized and the wolves treated with disdain to the point where the state of Wyoming had grey wolves off of the endangered species list for only one year (2009) before sport hunting relisted them.

## Historical distribution



## Present distribution



I have a personal problem with the concept of the public subsidizing the business of the rancher, while the rancher keeps the profits and is able to dispatch public resources to eliminate a natural animal in the environment. But also this is a waste of resources, and one could conceivably make the argument that the wolf belongs to all of us, so the rancher is destroying something belonging to us instead of accepting the costs of ranging their animals in wolf habitat. In the paper *Modeling Biodiversity Benefits and External Costs from a Keystone Predator Reintroduction Policy*, The costs and benefits of wolves in the environment are put into equations and the maximum value point between wolves and ranchers is graphed so that we may see in an easily digestible way that “some wolves” has more value than “no wolves” and that there are ways to solve this problem with economics. Subsidies for ranchers are a part of these equations, and it is suggested that subsidies for preventative measures might have more emotional impact of ranchers than compensating them for lost livestock. So, ranchers’ opinions are probably not the thing to base wolf policy around, but they can be made more favorable with consideration for their challenges, and also mitigation such as not grazing their animals in primary wolf territory.

Our text materials and simulations have done a good job of demonstrating the value of wolves in the ecosystem. When they are present, they regulate primary consumers in a way that allows for more stable and diverse ecosystems. They eat prey larger than themselves, so they prey on relatively few numbers of animals, but their kills leave carcasses which benefit many other species – coyotes, foxes, eagles, ravens, and even bears benefit from the presence of wolves in a direct way because they are able to feed on carrion left behind. Examples from reintroduction to Yellowstone show that elk overpopulation was devastating the deciduous tree populations, because they fed on the saplings of aspen and willow so much that mature trees were rare and these forests were depleted. Wolves force the elk to move and be more cautious, so they have diversified their diet again and don’t stay in one place to decimate their favorite foods anymore. One area hadn’t had a new adult aspen since the 1920s, until the wolves were brought back.

Honestly, I came into this issue being in favor of wolves being allowed to do their thing and regulate their own populations, and I only felt more that way throughout this case study. Wolves are a natural part of the environment – a “keystone species” and deserve our respect and

appreciation, not our disdain. There are several ways to resolve the conflicts wolves have with people, mainly ranchers and their livestock, which do not require eradicating an animal from the environment. We've learned a lot since the days where naturalists were advocating for wolf culling, and we should be doing better by this point. We should rejoice at the success of the wolf. Every state has different regulations on wolf protection and/or hunting, and regional approaches might make more sense as wolves do not pay attention to borders. I suspect, though, that nothing much will change without changing public opinion.

#### References:

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