

# America Must Protect the Wolf To Save Our Soul

Hunting and persecution of the majestic animals should stop, before they disappear.

*By  
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“I am in favor of animal rights as well as human rights. That is the way of a whole human being.”

-Abraham Lincoln

“We have doomed the wolf not for what it is, but for what we deliberately and mistakenly perceive it to be — the mythologized epitome of a savage ruthless killer — which is, in reality, no more than a reflected image of ourself.”

-Farley Mowat, "Never Cry Wolf"

It is no coincidence that a poem called “Howl” by Allen Ginsberg helped define a generation. Most people today cannot see “the ancient starry connection to the starry dynamo” let alone commune with the four-legged ones of the wilderness. America has flayed so much of what was once the sheer magnificence of its forests and wildlife that it is indeed in danger of becoming the industrial wasteland the poet T.S. Eliot foresaw in the 1920s.

Two generations after “Howl,” America is fighting to hold onto a vestige of its conservation ethos, a country whose national park system was the envy of the world.

In America today, a rabid lupophobia is haunting the backcountry. In May 2011 the Obama administration lifted endangered species protection for the grey wolf in the Great Lakes and northern Rockies. The parochial assassins of the innocent in medieval fashion now hold shooting contests to see how many coyotes or wolves they can bag. What is being imperiled is not just the wilderness, it is the entire moral fabric of a country fast losing its environmental compass.

Let us not forget that dogs bred from wolves as far back as 30,000 years ago helped humans hunt and survive the Pleistocene period and even outsmart the Neanderthals. With their ability to communicate and read the sclera, the white portion of the eye, wolves connected with our gaze and helped us coordinate hunts and prey on the larger mega-fauna of the Northern hemisphere such as elk, bison and maybe even mammoths. Without the wolf, humans may not have fared quite as well over the millennia defending themselves against other carnivores such as lions and leopards. We are indebted to them as few other creatures on Earth. They truly are and have been our best friends emotionally and evolutionarily for millennia. Our alliance with the canine family enabled us to realize our potential as a world-dominating species. In our consistent persecution of these beings in recent European and American history, as with all other predators, we risk becoming the only large carnivore on Earth.

Loren Eiseley, the remarkable nature writer, wrote, "One does not meet oneself until one has seen one's reflection in an eye other than human." With no other being in the American West is this more true than the wolf. And yet, across the West the wolf is facing morally bankrupt state bureaucracies like that in Oregon that wants to delist the wolf from the endangered species list. The 100 or so wolves in that state have barely recovered. The wolves in neighboring Idaho have been mercilessly gunned down as if they were the target for a free for all killing frenzy from the OK Corral. In the last few years after the federal government stripped Endangered Species protection from the wolf in 2011 about 1,600 wolves have been decimated as vermin. The state of Idaho even put up \$400,000 dollars at one point to kill 500 wolves. The Governor, Butch (the butcher) Otter, even wanted to be the first to shoot a wolf.

It has taken the U.S. 40 years to recover some figment of the wolf population. How will the recently spotted wolf pack in northern California fair? Wolves have recovered little in the Great lakes and in the northern Rockies. Congress was under the belief that the states could responsibly manage their populations. When I learned that my state, the so-called Land Of Enchantment, was fast becoming the state of entrapment, willing to raise the quota to kill hundreds of black bears and mountain lions, I knew New Mexico's soul was in trouble. At a recent meeting with Game and Fish, one woman on the board was "terrified" at the prospect of more Mexican Grey wolves (the world's rarest) being released into the Gila. No one was allowed to speak on behalf of New Mexico's bear, lion and wolf populations. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service now wants to take away protection for wolves in all the lower 48 states. The persecution of the wolf continues the age-old devastation and ruthlessness our species has imposed on the entire outback of the American landscape ever since Lewis and Clark heard there might still be mammoths roaming out West more than 200 years ago.

Wolves have been hounded, literally, since the onslaught of the "godless" wilderness early in America's history. They were considered not just ravenous but suggesting a character that was excessively lustful, dangerous and even wicked. Wolves were perceived to be agents of criminality. Wolves ate livestock as communities were compared to the proverbial sheep in the Bible who had to defend themselves against the rapaciousness and rabidity of the outback as personified by wolves. Wolves were often associated with the Devil, as Native Americans were associated as godless heathens and savages. Few bothered to understand the extraordinary wisdom the natives embodied, as the very people who could save the environmentally unconscious pioneers from themselves. When the tens of millions of bison were destroyed by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, in part to destroy the native livelihood, so too were the wolves. The colonists could not stand the idea of rival predators and shot wolves for fur, out of sadism and sheer arrogance.

Today the livestock industry continues the killing mania and ethos of the early Americans. Wolves perceived as agents of wicked intention became a stand in for the pioneers' own wickedness. And that wickedness goes forward undaunted and unabated. If humanity should ever lose the wolf, the tiger or the increasingly challenged lion of Africa, it will be humanity that is considered the ultimate "cosmic outlaw," as Henry Beston once exclaimed.

I speak for the wolf and the life force it engenders not as an expert. I have only seen them once in the Lamar Valley in Yellowstone when my wife was pregnant with our son Lysander, who is now doing a report, of all beings, on wolves. He knows he was being created before great creatures whom we now realize have provided a great service to the larger eco system of Yellowstone since reintroduction in 1995. He is aghast at those ranchers and trophy hunters who

recently were poised just outside of the park boundaries ready to shoot wolves to oblivion. He does not understand the adult world that is taking his world away from him. His is a very special period in time when the very species he has grown up with, the very animals he reads about in school and which have helped him speak, read and formulate the complexities of human language, are being massacred in droves. The fear and greed towering in the persecutors' minds will have to answer the children of tomorrow if we should lose what is left of the West in the body of such creatures as the wolf. Mary Midgley, the grand dame of moral philosophy with regards to the animal world, wrote that, "man has always been unwilling to admit his own ferocity, and has tried to deflect attention away from it by making animals out to be more ferocious than they are."

The cry of the wolf is one of the most haunting, and penetrating, sonic landscapes in the world. Many people long for it and seek it out. For, it is the song of the wilderness. Woe betide a country of 500 million Americans with no wolves or grizzlies or cougars. "We must save them, if at all, because without them we are lost," wrote the human ecologist Paul Shepard. Without the others there will be no point on being on this earth anymore. The paroxysm of evil that is eliminating anything that is not human is metastasizing seemingly beyond repair. In an age of climate disruption beyond anything humanity has ever witnessed, the last thing wildlife of any kind needs is belligerent, fanatical humans as the only predator on earth.

Will the wolf survive the rabid impulse of murder the cattle industry fosters in America? Wolves are making a comeback in Europe where they are protected in Norway, France, Germany and elsewhere. So, what is America's excuse? In Europe farmers have to tolerate wolves. Indeed, children will ask, where has all the wildlife gone? And children, with what vestige is left of childhood, will be led by the hand of all their well-meaning soccer moms and dads who will say to their kids, look honey, this is where the wild things were. The children of 2050 will ask, with tears in their eyes, is this your legacy to us? The adventures of Snoopy in Peanuts and Disney movies will hardly fill the gap for a wilderness-starved youth.

Go and listen to the wolves and remember why you were put on this Earth. An elder Samburu, that remarkable tribe in northern Kenya, who honor the elephant, said it best: "If we were to lose the elephant, and the other animals of this world we will lose our minds. The only thing left will be to kill ourselves." Ditto for that innocent longtime survivor of the canid world, the wolf, who has had to bear so much bloodlust from a ruthless, out-of-balance, neophyte species called man.

Wolves have been demonized like few animals in history. Yet incidents of viciousness in wolves are too few and rare to mention. Yes, one lone jogger was killed in 2010 in Alaska. Between 1915 and 2001, 39 instances of aggressive behavior were recorded and twelve from rabid wolves. And who can say what provoked the wolves? Yearly, more bees and dogs kill people than wolves and sharks combined by a long shot.

In the next few years of this decade, much of the fate of the world lies in the balance. And much of humanity's destiny lies in the hands of those beings that are still free, its wildlife, those who have paws and fins and claws and wings. It is time humanity saw the forest for the trees lest we fall off the cliff of time as a ground-breaking, soulless creature with an overbearing intellect and diabolical ego who pulverized everything in its way. We are pining for the stars, but it is here on Earth that life beckons from every corner. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., who understood man's inhumanity to man and animals better than most, "One day the absurdity of the

almost universal human belief in the slavery of other animals will be palpable. We shall have discovered our souls and become worthy of sharing this planet with them.”