

EAGLE POST 45

The newsletter of **ESWA - EAGLE SUMMIT WILDERNESS ALLIANCE** (formerly Friends of Eagles Nest Wilderness) apprises you of important activities in and around Eagles Nest, Holy Cross, and Ptarmigan Peak Wilderness Areas.

EagleSummitWilderness.org or fenw.org

[VIEW IN BROWSER](#)



BEFORE WE BEGIN... Applications are now being accepted for **Volunteer Wilderness Rangers (VWRs)**. A required one-day training class will be held in early June. If you value Wilderness, consider giving back by becoming an official representative of the United States Forest Service - you'll wear the **same patch** (right) on your sleeve that they do - and you'll have a lot of fun as you meet, greet, and teach Wilderness visitors. Visit the application page [HERE](#).



February 2020

Dear *|FNAME|*

Greetings! This month, we address a pressing issue:

WOLF REINTRODUCTION IN COLORADO

By **ERIC WASHBURN AND JAMES PRIBYL**

INTRODUCTION:

This month's essay outlines the argument for Colorado ballot initiative 107, which calls for a plan to reintroduce the grey wolf in Colorado, as they have been reintroduced in our neighboring states to the north (see map). We all will have to decide how to vote on the issue. There's plenty of heat out there, but what's crucial is to find the light - especially the science that can best inform our decision. Below, two distinguished, experienced public servants describe clearly the issues, which lead them to support unequivocally the ballot measure that would reintroduce the



grey wolf to Colorado.

While Eric and Jim's essay, below, looks broadly at many of the important issues, we'll focus first on quantifying two of the more contentious ones: wolf predation on cattle and elk. For example, what percent of cattle would you consider to be an acceptable loss of cattle for the reintroduction of wolves? 1%? 5%? 10%?

1. CATTLE predation by wolves: In counties with both wolves and cattle present in ID, MT, and WY, **wolves killed 0.03% of the cattle**. Those counties contain about 1.1 million cattle, and wolves killed 300 of them. That's a loss of about 1 in every 3800 cattle to wolves, or 0.03%. (Numbers appear to be similar for SHEEP, although data are less complete.)

2. ELK predation by wolves: The bottom line is that over the past 25 years, **elk populations have increased significantly** in ID (by 4%) and MT (by 96%), and elk harvests (a proxy for population) likewise have increased in WY (by 41%), so hunters don't seem to be suffering from the reintroduction of wolves in these states. In **Yellowstone** National Park, wolves were reintroduced 25 years ago. They have been closely monitored, producing a detailed, nuanced picture of the entire ecosystem. Says Doug Smith, the park's top wolf biologist, "Yellowstone is a better place with a fully intact carnivore guild." Read more from the Bozeman Chronicle [HERE](#).

Eric and Jim, via their colleague John Murtaugh, have provided the [graphs](#) that underlie these numbers.

Wolf Restoration: An Opportunity to Improve the Health of our Colorado Mountain Ecosystems

Eric Washburn & James Pribyl

In early January, Colorado's Secretary of State certified initiative #107, which calls for Colorado Parks and Wildlife to develop and implement a scientific plan to restore the grey wolf to Colorado, for the 2020 November ballot. At nearly the same time, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) reported a pack of up to six wolves in NW Colorado, including a brief film of them taken by a hunter. These two events have turbocharged the debate in Colorado about wolf restoration.

Wolves lived in Colorado for many thousands of years before the last one was killed in the 1940s. Since then, we have had a few isolated reports of wolves, but no viable wolf population has developed. The Colorado wolf management plan adopted 15 years ago by CPW rejected efforts to restore grey wolves to the state. Instead, it simply restated Colorado's current duty under the Endangered Species Act to protect any wolves that might wander down to Colorado from the Northern Rockies. That makes little sense. If we want the benefits of wolves, then we will need to do that which was done a quarter century ago in Yellowstone National Park and Idaho, and deliberately restore them to Colorado.

The recent siting of half a dozen wolves in Moffat County is a cause for joy. It underscores the

point that Colorado remains excellent habitat for wolves, where they previously spent thousands of years living in balance with other species in this ecosystem. But while six wolves spending some time in the state is an encouraging start, it is a far cry from a sustainable population of hundreds of wolves that we need to regain the many ecological benefits that they can contribute. Achieving that goal will mean taking deliberate steps to restore wolves and protect them from the threats that we are already seeing from some shortsighted members of the public.

The Ecological Benefits of Wolves

The greatest threat to Colorado's mountain ecosystems in the 21st century will be climate change, which is shifting the ranges of species and the habitat on which they depend, reducing snowpack, which is our natural freshwater storage system, and generally pushing species closer to extinction. The more we can do today to improve the overall health of our mountain ecosystems and the species that live here, the more resilient they will be to the growing threats from climate change. That is where wolves come in.

We know from research in Yellowstone National Park that the restoration of wolves leads to a more balanced and healthier ecosystem. For example, the presence of wolves can change elk behavior, keeping them from grazing stream-side vegetation out in the open. Scientists call it a "[trophic cascade](#)." (see drawing below) By allowing aspen and willows to recover along those streambanks, song-birds return and beavers recolonize these areas, building dams, improving water storage and trout habitat. Wolves are not a panacea but restoring wolves to their natural habitat in Colorado undoubtedly will, in the long term, send positive ripples through our mountain ecosystems.



By targeting diseased prey, wolves will help control Colorado's serious and growing Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) problem that we are now struggling to contain. According to CPW, 57% of Colorado's deer herds, 37% of its elk herds, and 22% of its moose herds are infected with

CWD, an always-fatal disease. CPW notes: "Not only are the number of infected herds increasing, the past 15 years of disease trends generally show an increase in the proportion of infected animals within herds as well. Of most concern, greater than a 10-fold increase in CWD prevalence has been estimated in some mule deer herds since the early 2000s; CWD is now adversely affecting the performance of these herds." A 2011 study by the National Park Service, Colorado Division of Wildlife and Colorado State University in the *Journal of Wildlife Diseases*, noted that "as CWD distribution and wolf range overlap in the future, wolf predation may suppress disease emergence or limit prevalence." In fact, today in the Rocky Mountains, where there are large concentrations of wolves - in places like Yellowstone, Idaho, and western Montana - we find relatively little or no CWD.

Cutting through the Anti-Wolf Disinformation Campaign

In the November election, it will take a well-educated public to see beyond the caricature of wolves that has developed over hundreds of years through stories like Little Red Riding Hood and the Three Little Pigs - myths that have gained a strong foothold in human culture and imagination.

In fact, the myth of the wolf is so strong that it often overwhelms the public discussion with dramatic distortions that survive through constant repetition.

For example, many have claimed that wolves will be a threat to the state's livestock, despite the fact that in the Northern Rockies, the roughly 1800 wolves that live there have taken less than one-tenth of 1% of the livestock that they share range with. Initiative 107 mandates fair compensation for those rare cases where Colorado livestock could be lost to wolves.



As to the oft-heard charge that wolves will "devastate" Colorado's elk population, science speaks clearly. In the Northern Rockies, there are more elk today than there were in 1995 when wolves were first reintroduced to the region. In fact, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming all officially report more abundant elk and mule deer herds and larger hunter harvests than 30 years ago.

Some have blamed wolves for the decline of moose in the Northern Rockies, but that has been due to massive wildfires that wiped out much of their habitat and to climate change, which is adversely impacting southern portions of their range. In fact, in the Northern Rockies, moose make up less than 1 percent of the wolves' diet.

We have heard claims that wolves will be a threat to human safety. But during the last 25 years, there have been no wolf attacks on people in the Northern Rockies, despite over 100 million people visiting, hiking and camping in Yellowstone National Park among its wolves.

During the last many months, anti-wolf forces have charged that initiative #107 is "ballot box

biology,” as though voting were a bad thing. All wildlife management is based on human values. And there is no better way to discern those values than through American-style direct democracy at the ballot box, which will supplant the unfortunate past decisions of a handful of politically appointed CPW commissioners.

The ongoing cascade of misinformation about wolves in Colorado reflects a larger national debate playing out over truth in social media. During the 2016 elections, the Russians used social media to reach hundreds of millions of Americans with dishonest propaganda on Facebook, Google and Twitter. Because we now live in the age where so many Americans get their news from social media sites, they have become the Wild West of disinformation. As a result, the public is getting fed up and is pressuring these social media companies to clean up their acts. In October, Twitter agreed to ban all political ads. Its CEO, Jack Dorsey, said that “political ads, including manipulated videos and viral spread of misleading information presented challenges to civil discourse.” Google followed suit a few weeks later stating that it would not allow users to make “demonstrably false claims that could significantly undermine participation or trust in and electoral or democratic process,” including claims that seek to mislead people into making certain choices in elections. Facebook, unfortunately, has yet to adopt any meaningful reform.

In Colorado, we can do better. The dishonest propaganda about wolves amounts to barstool biology, repeated legends that have no basis in scientific fact or reality. The truth is that we can restore and manage wolves in a manner that is respectful of the needs and concerns of all Coloradans. We owe it to future generations to restore Colorado’s natural balance by making room, once again, for wolves.

ABOUT ERIC WASHBURN & JAMES PRIBYL

Eric Washburn, a fifth generation Coloradan and avid big game hunter, lives in Steamboat Springs. He is the proprietor of Windward Strategies, LLC, a natural resource consulting firm. Prior to becoming a consultant, he co-founded the [Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership](#), a coalition of more than 50 national hunting and fishing and land conservation organizations working together to promote natural resource conservation policy. For ten years, Eric worked in various capacities in the United States Senate. He was a Senior Policy Advisor to U.S. Senate Majority Leader Thomas A. Daschle, where he oversaw the development and U.S. Senate passage of the Energy Policy Act of 2002. Prior to that, he worked for Senator Harry Reid as the Democratic Staff Director for the Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee. Before joining the EPW Committee, he was the Legislative Director for U.S. Senator Daschle for four years. His initial service in Congress was as Legislative Assistant to Senator Daschle, where he led the development of Senate Democratic Caucus strategy on a range of environmental and energy issues, including federal lands management, clean air and water, endangered species protection, and global climate change. He has been a Bullard Fellow at Harvard University Forest, and holds an MFS from



Eric Washburn




Yale University, and an AB from Bowdoin College. Presently, he, his wife, and two sons reside in Steamboat Springs.

James Pribyl, former Chair of the Colorado Park & Wildlife Commission, lives in Summit County. James provides government public policy management services, specializing in natural resources, communications, and technology. During his 35 years in the telecommunications industry, Jim served in state and federal government affairs positions at Northwestern Bell Telephone, US West Communications and MCI Communications. He capped his career as the chief federal government affairs executive at Level 3 Communications, a global internet network carrier based in Colorado. An accomplished political and policy strategist, Jim has served as Chief of Staff to a governor and has worked for two U.S. senators. He has consulted on election campaigns for governor, U.S. Senate and President. He serves on the Board of Directors of Conservation Colorado, the state's leading environmental advocacy organization. A graduate of the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, MN., Jim is a former U.S. Air Force officer. He and his wife, Pat Heinz-Pribyl, a former public school educator and principal, live in Frisco and Louisville. They have three daughters and six grandchildren.

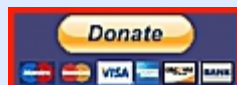


A huge thanks to [ARAPAHOE BASIN SKI AREA](#). For more than two decades, A-Basin staff have donated generously to their **Employee Environmental Fund**, of which ESWA has been a steady beneficiary. Last year, more than 150 employees donated, led by A-Basin Director **Alan Henceroth**. Our enduring THANKS!

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Join us! Next **Planning Meeting**
Thursday, February 13, 5:30 PM,

Check out other [recent monthly eNewsletters](#)



The Fall 2019 hard copy newsletter was mailed several weeks ago. If

you didn't receive one, then we don't have your mailing address. Please send it to us at

info@eaglesummitwilderness.org

The newsletter contains about two dozen fun and informative articles about us - past, present, and future.

NEW VENUES: A video link between

* SUMMIT COUNTY: (REI, Dillon) and

* EAGLE COUNTY (Eagle River Water District, 846 W Forest Rd, Vail)

Details

at www.eaglesummitwilderness.org/

CITY MARKET COMMUNITY REWARDS PROGRAM

Please [register](#) your City Market Value Card, linking it to FENW, which will send rebates to us without compromising your earned fuel points. Please note that each card holder may only sign up for one tax exempt organization. **THANKS!**



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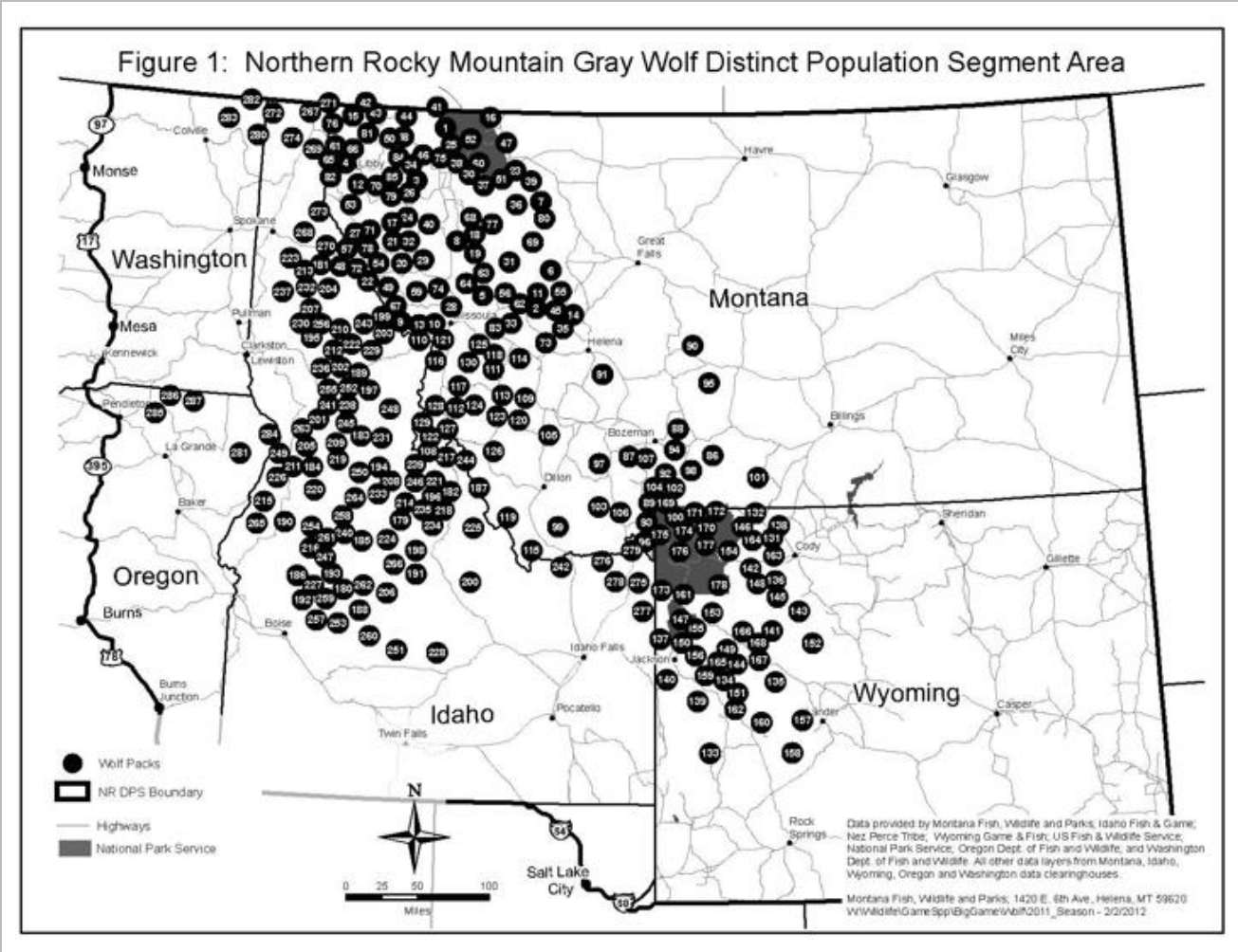
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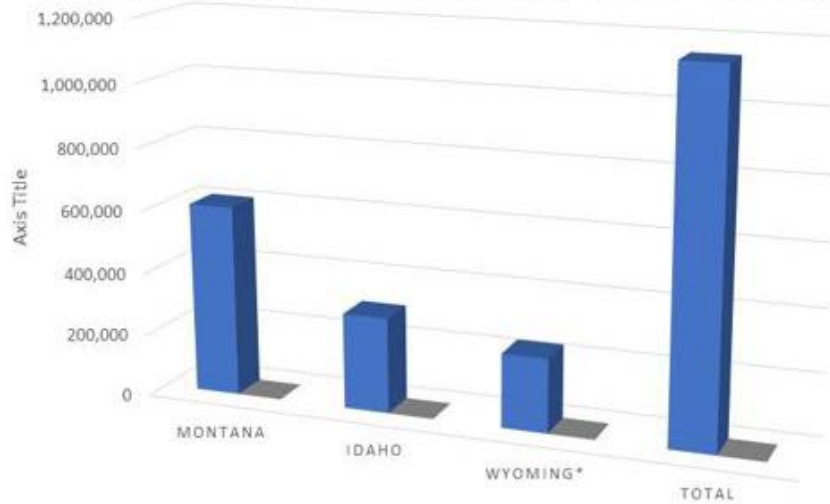
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1. Locations of wolf packs in the Northern Rockies



2. Cattle predation by wolves in counties with wolf packs

2017 Cattle in Northern Rockies (Only Counties with Wolf/Cattle Overlap)



	Montana	Idaho	Wyoming*	Total
Total Cattle	609,200	305,400	235,733	1,150,333
Loss to Wolves	71	175	54	300

*2016 data used for Wyoming based on available data

*Cattle population and losses sourced from USDA National Agricultural Statistics Services <https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov/>

*Losses to wolves from each state's game department reports

Editorial comment: As shown above, overall wolves killed 300 of the 1.1 million cattle in counties with wolf & cattle populations in ID, MT, and WY. That's 0.027 percent of the total.

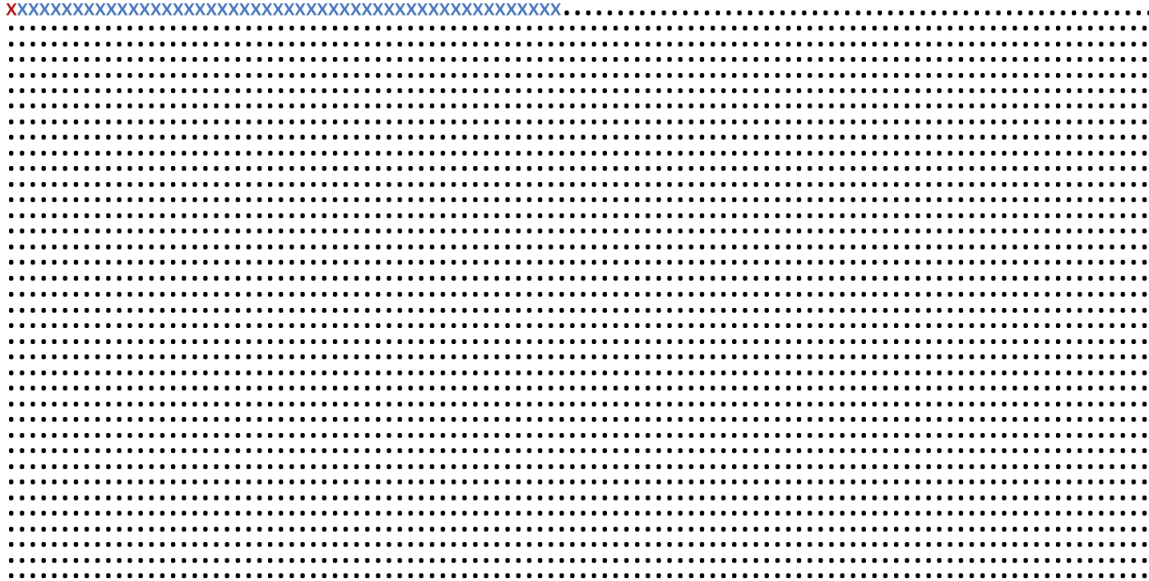
One wonders: how many cattle die from other causes, like weather, sickness, accidents, and so forth? The data from wolf-cattle counties are not available, but the data from ALL counties in ID, MT, and WY (not just ones with wolves) show that 86,000 cattle died out of a population of about 6.2 million cattle. If we *assume that the same fraction of cattle died* in wolf-cattle counties as in all counties, then about 14,000 cattle would be lost in those counties, 300 of which (2.1%) would be due to wolf predation. Thus, if all wolf predation were stopped, cattle losses would still be about 98% of what they had been before. These numbers lead to the graphic below.

In counties in ID, MT, and WY that host both wolves and cattle, for every 3800 cows, about 50 (1.3%) die from all causes (weather, disease, accidents, etc.), one of which is due to wolf predation.

● = COW

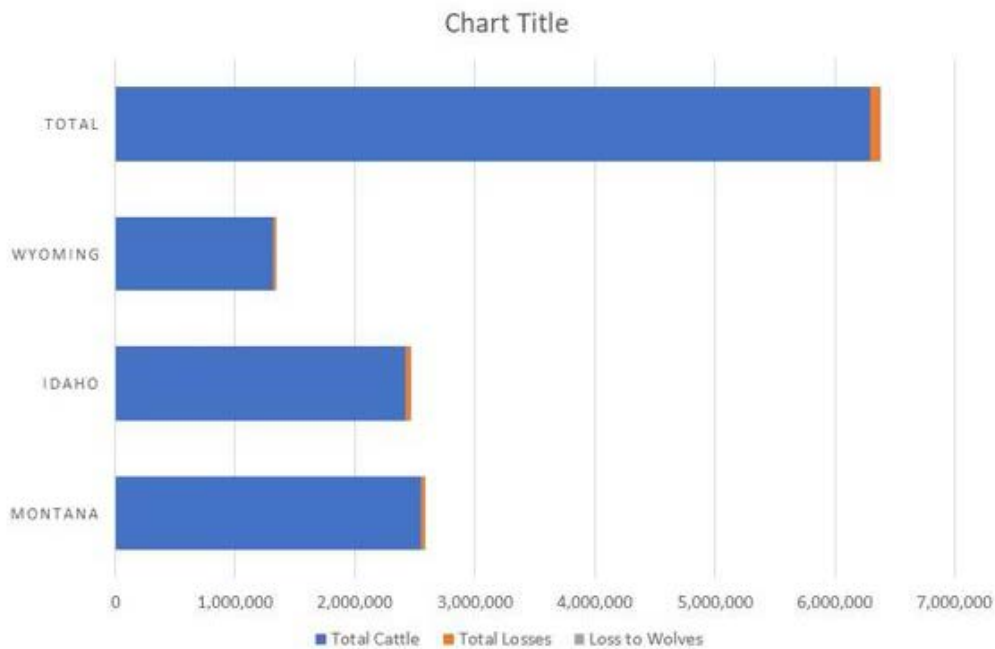
X = dead cow (all causes)

X = dead cow (wolf predation)



3. Cattle population (all counties) & losses (losses to wolves is too small to see on the graphs)

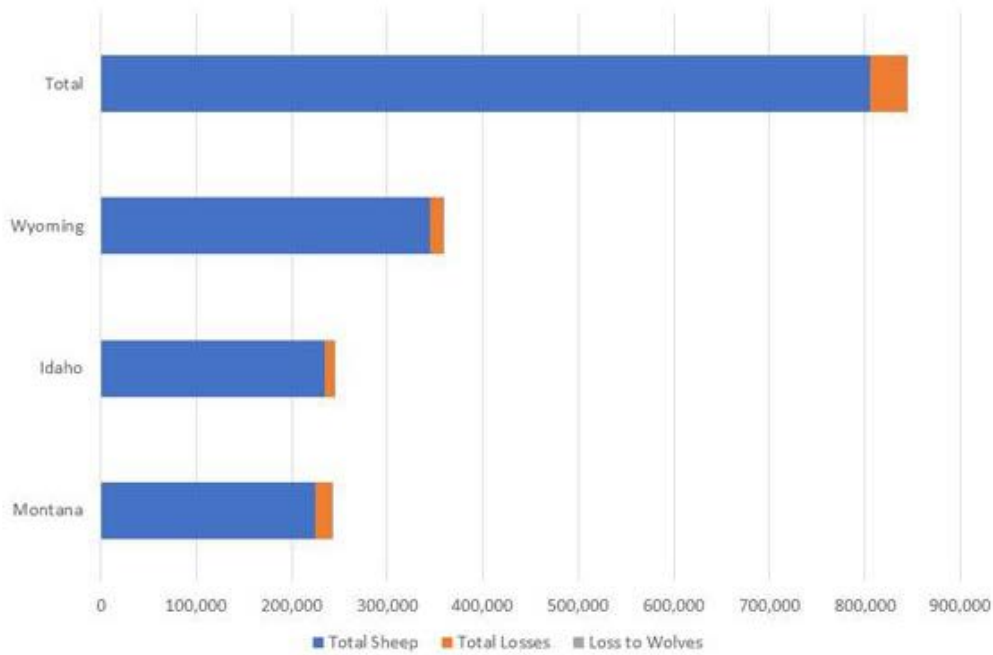
2018 Cattle in Northern Rockies



*Cattle population and losses sourced from USDA National Agricultural Statistics Services <https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov/>
*Losses to wolves from each state's game department reports

4. Sheep population (all counties) & losses (losses to wolves is too small to see on the graphs)

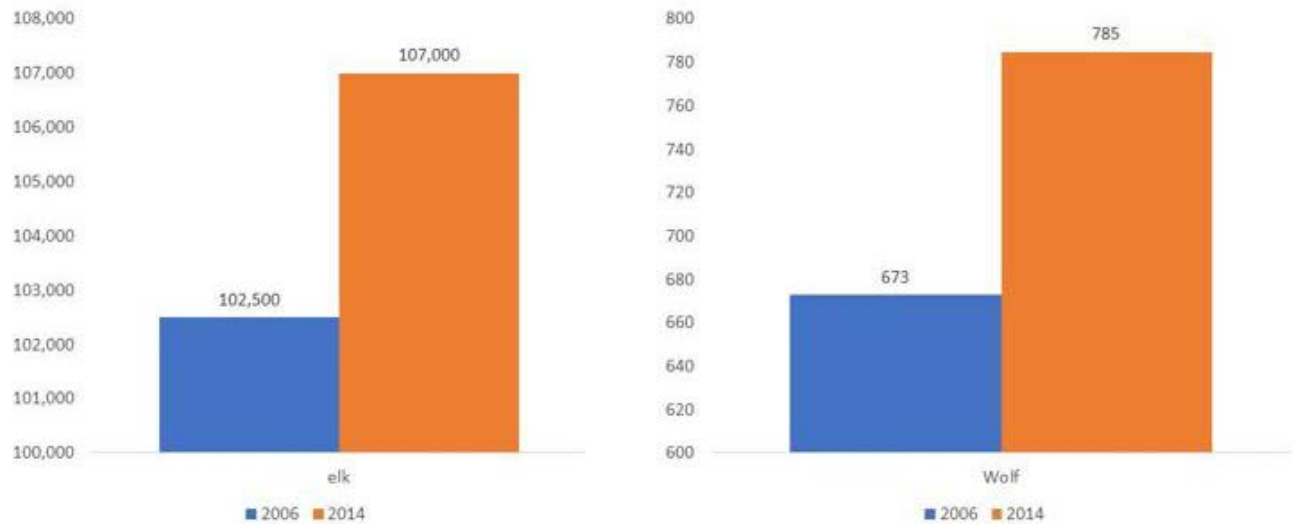
2018 Report Sheep in Northern Rockies



*Sheep population and losses sourced from USDA National Agricultural Statistics Services <https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov/>
 *Losses to wolves from each state's game department reports

5. IDAHO ELK (left) and wolf (right) populations in 2006-2014

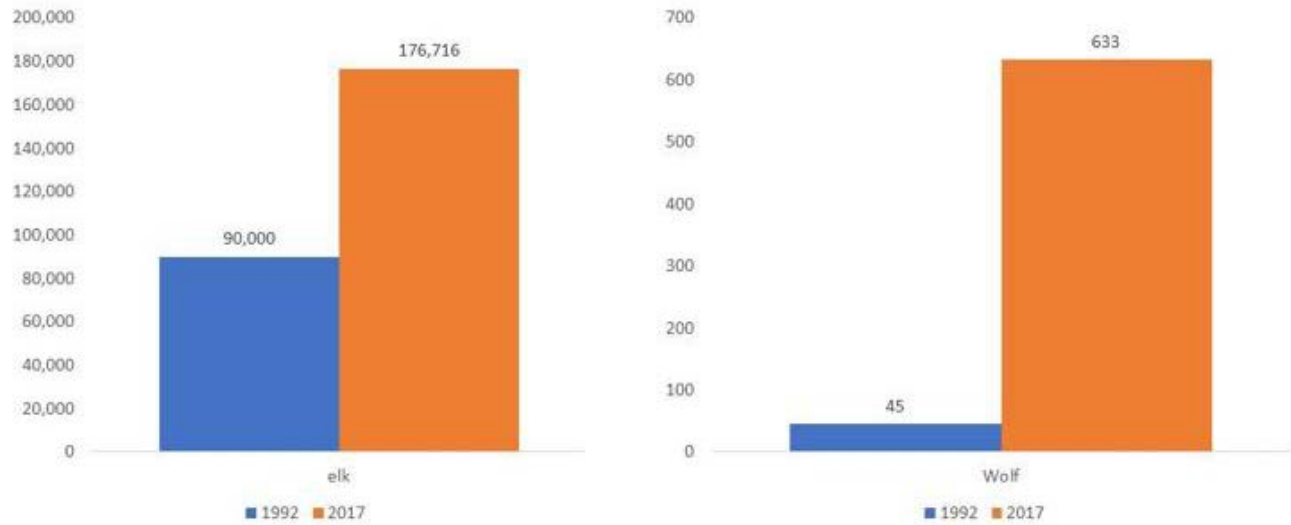
Idaho*



*Note- Year ranges vary based on available data
 Elk populations <https://idfg.idaho.gov/press/big-game-outlook-similar-numbers-elk-and-whitetails-fewer-mule-deer>
 Idaho Wolf Management Report <https://idfg.idaho.gov/public/wildlife/wolves>

6. MONTANA ELK (left) and wolf (right) populations in 1992-2017

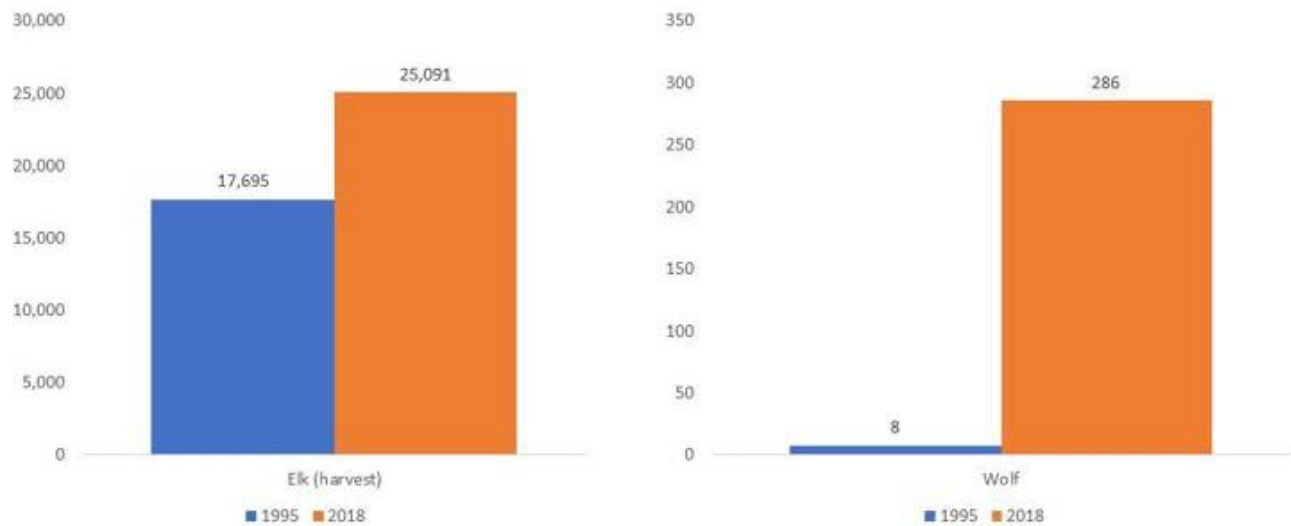
Montana*



*Note- Year ranges vary based on available data
Montana Elk populations <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/elk/>
Montana wolf populations <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/wolf/population.html>

7. WYOMING ELK harvest and wolf reports in 2006 and 2014

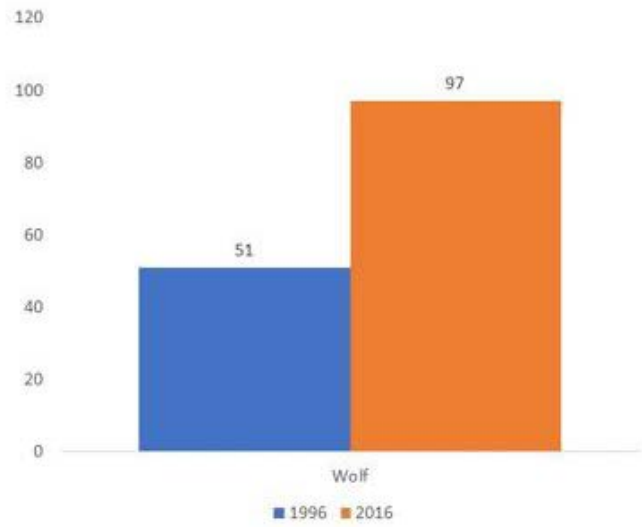
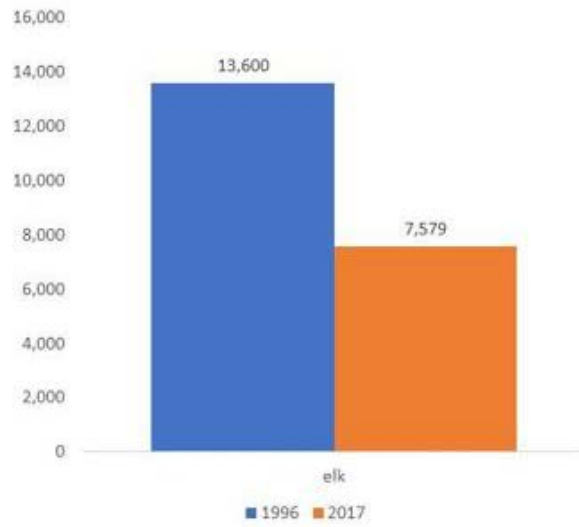
Wyoming*



*Note- Year ranges vary based on available data
Wyoming Annual Harvest reports <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Hunting/Harvest-Reports/>
Wyoming Wolf Reports <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Wildlife-in-Wyoming/More-Wildlife/Large-Carnivore/Wolves-in-Wyoming>

8. YELLOWSTONE ELK and wolf populations in 1996 and 2016 (wolf) or 2017 (elk)

Yellowstone*



*Note- Year ranges vary based on available data

Elk populations by Northern Yellowstone Cooperative Working Group <https://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/nature/elk.htm>

Wolf populations by NPS <https://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/nature/wolfreports.htm>