



Our Wolves Are in Trouble

news

by Jay Mallonee

FOR TWENTY YEARS I HAVE RESEARCHED AND taught about wolves, which has required interacting with management agencies. I have found that managers have an appalling lack of knowledge about these animals, along with a disregard for science. They dispose of wolves as if these predators were weeds to be pulled from the environment. Agencies like Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) still view wolves as a nuisance and somehow unworthy of respect, despite the emotions and intelligence that wolves display. It is time for humanity to step up. If you want wolves you will have to fight for them. Use what science knows about these animals, and stop quarreling over the misinformation and opinion that guides the decision-making of most people. Understand the data. This is crucial because managers at FWP create a facade with their numbers. It will take some effort to unravel this

illusion to reveal the truth.

Last year I published a paper in a peer-reviewed scientific journal that analyzed the data found in FWP's annual reports. Their information was filled with fabricated numbers used in making management decisions, such as determining the hunting quota. Joe Maurier, director of FWP, is using the 2011 annual report to claim that the wolf population increased by 15 percent, and now wants to create policy that will kill hundreds of additional wolves during the 2012 fall hunt. When I reviewed the data I found that this claim was, once again, based on fabricated numbers. I wrote Mr. Maurier a letter that explained my findings, and I expressed that the process of wolf management is unacceptable. I have come to realize that I cannot expect FWP to act responsibly because they do not know what that means. I am responsible for wolf management. So are you. Here is what I had to say:

June 20, 2012

Dear Mr. Maurier,

As director of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, you undoubtedly know that March 14, 2012 was a bad day for wolves, but a great day for you. The 9th U. S. Circuit Court of appeals unanimously rejected the arguments of several environmental groups who claimed that wolves in Idaho and Montana lost their protection under the Endangered Species Act before their numbers were recovered. On the same day, the State Legislature in Wisconsin passed a bill to establish a hunting and trapping season on their wolves which were removed from the endangered species list last year.

These decisions, and many like them around the country, have been based on information provided by agencies like yours, and therein lies the rub. Given the information FWP provides the public, your data is wrong. I proved this in my peer-reviewed scientific paper published last year. I sent you a copy and requested your comments but heard nothing back. However, your database of fabricated wolf counts has been used to set policy, and you are now free to continue your plans of killing even more wolves in the 2012 hunt. As justification, FWP has claimed in their 2011 annual report that Montana's wolf population increased by 15 percent from 2010, despite the wolf hunt. I reviewed the 2011 data and found that fabricated numbers were used to justify your claim. I provide a summary here. The full analysis is available on my web site at www.wolfandwildlifestudies.com.

In case you don't know, when scientists study how groups of organisms change over time, they measure four basic components expressed by populations: births (b), deaths (d), immigration (i, join a population), and emigration (e, leave a population). The overall equation is:

$$\text{growth rate} = (i - e) + (b - d)$$

The diagrams on page 16 show how the Montana wolf population changed throughout the year for 2010 and 2011, according to FWP data. The number of deaths, or wolves removed from the population by other means, and births are the usual numbers reported in the annual reports. Immigration numbers are never measured. It would be virtually impossible to do so. Emigration numbers are based on a few radio-collared wolves and do not represent the actions of the entire wolf population. In the graphs this is expressed as dispersed animals. Of the four population components, immigration and emigration are basically unknown, so half of the growth equation is always missing and unavailable for analysis. Nevertheless, FWP reports a minimum total of wolves by the end of each year which is used to make management decisions. Therefore, it is unknown how FWP comes to their conclusions based on the data they present to the public. However, let's try to make sense of your information.

If three components of the growth equation are known then the fourth can be calculated using simple math, in this case immigration, with the understanding that dispersed animal numbers (emigration) are a blatant guess. As documented in my published paper, your immigration numbers cannot be verified and are only *assumed* in the annual reports. Over the last nine years, including 24 unverified wolves that supposedly emigrated, this represents 762 unaccounted-for wolves. This is an average 21.4 percent of the reported minimum wolf population annually: wolves that are being reported with no direct verifiable data to prove their existence.

In the 2011 report, the number of births (pups) was not reported as a single category as in the past. Therefore the 2011 data is not

comparable to previous years. When we contacted FWP, we were told by Kent Laudon, Wolf Management Specialist, that pup counts were taken but not reported because the public had become confused by the way these numbers were presented in previous annual reports. Instead, pack sizes are now reported as pups and adults together. Laudon told us that 164 pups was the minimum count for 2011, but added that this was only a ballpark figure. He also stated that none of the wolf counts were complete, which means none of the data was accurate. In reference to pup counts he added, "Therefore you can imagine that accounting for all of the pups that survive to the end of the year is literally an impossible task."

I do not doubt that obtaining an accurate pup count is virtually impossible. However, an accurate count would be necessary to claim that the wolf population increased 15 percent from 2010, because now you are stating a specified increase which you cannot prove. In the 2011 graph, your data indicates that 316 wolves must have been added back to the population over the year to achieve the reported end-of-the-year number of 653 wolves. However, none of this can be verified given the data presented in the 2011 report, because the pup count was not provided and is not accurate anyway according to Laudon, and immigration is unknown. Nevertheless, if the 164 pup count is used for 2011, immigration accounts for 152 wolves. This is 23.3 percent of the minimum population. It appears that the 2011 report follows the same pattern as previous years which I documented in my published paper: the numbers do not add up in a logical way, they represent incomplete wolf counts, and many of them cannot be verified using the data presented in the annual reports.

Assume for the moment that

FWP's numbers are correct. Where did the 15 percent increase occur? Immigration numbers are always unaccounted for, and when they are removed from the year-end totals 2010 had a minimum of 476 wolves ($566 - 90 = 476$) and 2011 had 501 wolves ($653 - 152 = 501$). So 2011 and 2010 had a difference of 25 wolves. According to your numbers, it would take 98 wolves to achieve 15 percent of the 2011 year end total. Therefore, the claimed 15 percent increase came from the unverified immigration numbers. Plus, the 21.4 percent annual error in minimum wolf population counts greatly exceeds any verifiable increase. So how did you know the population increased?

None of this makes any sense because the basis of all these

calculations comes from the assumption that the previous year-end totals are correct. However, each year-end total contains fabricated immigration numbers. Every year is inaccurate. Regardless, the 15 percent increase is still shown to have come from unverified numbers. All this is further complicated by the fact that FWP never used scientific methodology to collect their data to begin with, as stated in an email to me from Kent Laudon. This means all of FWP's numbers are questionable. This shows in the annual reports because the data cannot be used to calculate or verify the year-end totals claimed by FWP. In other words, your numbers do not add up. Yet these totals are used to make unsubstantiated claims that make policy to kill more wolves. Can

you please explain that? Your data is so terrible that even non-scientists have caught on. Below are but a few of the questions I have received from concerned citizens.

I invite you to answer all of these questions. To be fair you will receive equal time in *Act-ionLine* magazine. Priscilla Feral, President of Friends of Animals, has assured me that your response will be published in a subsequent issue of *Act-ionLine*. I do have one last question for you. Because the data FWP collects is so bad and incomplete, what numbers do you provide the federal government to determine if wolves should be on the endangered species list or not?

Sincerely,

JAY MALLONEE

WOLF AND WILDLIFE STUDIES

**Beverly Siegel,
Reno, NV:**

It is my understanding that Fish, Wildlife and Parks are accountable to the federal government, Montana legislature, and the public trust for the accuracy of the science that determines the scope of your wildlife management programs. If revenues are based on specious data (not to mention the horrible publicity Montana has received regarding the slaughter of wolves) couldn't that endanger your funding and possibly future revenue streams from tourism?

**Scott Saylor,
Edmonds, WA:**

Having carefully reviewed FWP's annual reports, it becomes evident that the numbers are largely a guess or simply fabricated. Does FWP intend at any point to actually begin a scientific process to determine the actual number of wolves and their impact on the ecosystem? Or is the agenda of wolf management to simply make revenue from their killing?

**Denise Boggs,
Livingston, MT:**

Why hasn't FWP worked to educate the public about the importance of wolves to a healthy ecosystem, not to mention the tremendous revenue potential of wolf-watchers, rather than pandering to biased and ill-informed hunters and ranchers?

**Jeannie Kennedy and Gary Kennedy,
Newhall, CA:**

Have read the email exchanges between FWP and Jay Mallonee; why have they not answered his questions regarding the flawed data used to make management decisions?

Nanette Towsley and Mark Towsley, Phoenix, AZ:

After wolves, what's next? How can we avoid the slippery slope of fudging numbers to kill off this population, then move on to the next opportunity to do the same thing to another animal that also deserves preservation for our natural ecosystem balance? Who really benefits from the FWP's hunting quotas? The hunters, no doubt?



Population Changes Throughout The Year

