



Wildlife News & Views

Fall 2003

Questioning the Wolf Cull

by Kyle Margenau
(Wildlife Educator, NWPS)

A lone howl rises out of the forest... joined after a moment by many other voices... the sound fades away and only one voice remains. For many of us that is the only interaction we will have with a wild wolf. These mysterious hunters of the forest are often misunderstood by people. This has resulted in the wolf's extirpation from more than 50% of its traditional North American range. Here in Canada we are very lucky to have wolves still present in 85% of their historical habitats.

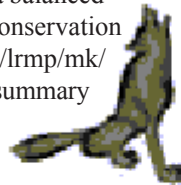
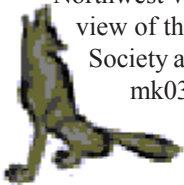
Why are the wolves so misunderstood and how has this view changed? This News & Views issue explores the proposed changes to wolf management in BC, focusing on the changes being reviewed for the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area (M-KMA) in northern BC. Currently in draft form, the BC Ministry of Water Land and Air Protection is suggesting several changes to the way large predators, especially wolves, cougars and bears are managed. These changes have caused quite a stir in the environmental community and we have included an article written by the Raincoast Conservation Society that expresses one side of the debate. We also contacted a pro-hunting group and the BC Ministry of Water Land and Air Protection for their views. The BC Wildlife Federation did not return our calls and the author of the governments draft management plan felt that while it was important for both sides of the story to be told, it would not be appropriate to comment on a draft proposal before the changes have been finalized.

The changes in the Management plan for the M-KMA are focused on creating stable populations of ungulates and predators. To reach this goal the plan calls for an initial cull of predator species. In the case of the wolves this means 1/4 of the wolves would be sterilized or culled. The cull would be carried out through increased bag limits for hunters and trappers and also possibly extending the open hunting and trappings season. As the ungulate populations grow the number of wolves would also be increased to a maximum of 1100. The anticipated time period for the program is ten years and the final numbers would be modified as needed.

The M-KMA management plan is controversial because it attempts to alter the natural balance of an ecosystem and create a new balance. In the plan it is stated that to increase the number of ungulate species (elk, deer, mountain sheep and others) several steps will be taken to change the current state of the area. Along with the proposed predator cull there will also be controlled burning of forested areas to create grasslands, which also provide more habitat for the ungulates. While it may seem on the surface that the area is being changed to favor prey species the reality is that without fires, controlled or natural, the area will become more and more uniform and be usable by fewer species.

There are a number of questions that need asking. What are we really trying to accomplish with the wolf cull, the increasing of ungulate populations and the changing of vast expanses of wilderness? Who is to ultimately gain from these interventions? Is it the wolves, the ungulates, the environment or just man? Why do we need to increase the ungulate population? Is the answer truthfully to help the environment or is it more for special interest groups who will benefit financially from this "management"?

Northwest Wildlife Preservation Society aims to provide its readers with a balanced view of the story. We encourage you to read the article by Raincoast Conservation Society and visit the M-KMA website at <http://srmwww.gov.bc.ca/rmd/lrmp/mk/mk0301/wildlife.html>. Please take the time to review the executive summary about the management plan and form your own opinion on this important subject.



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From the Desk of the Executive Director

The fall of 2003 is upon us and NWPS is gearing up for another school season. Last school term saw us very busy with classroom presentations and stewardship projects that were generously provided by many corporate sponsors, Chevron, Coast Capital, TD Friends of the Environment and Office Depot, to name just a few.

NWPS is exceedingly grateful to our wonderful corporate partners and schools are exceedingly thankful for the free presentations and projects that are provided by the generosity of these sponsors. As many teachers confide to our Educators, without funded programs like the ones provided by NWPS, many students would never have the opportunity to receive wildlife education programs or the hands on outdoor projects which we run.

As with all changes in seasons NWPS is again looking at changes in our office staff. Melissa Tupper moved on to other opportunities in Europe and Kyle Margenau moves on to opportunities back East. We will miss both of them and wish them all the best of luck in the future.

NWPS has been doing much in the way of awareness and fund raising this year with three different campaigns. At the beginning of the year we ran our Light Bulb campaign, which contacted over 10,000 people in the Lower Mainland promoting the use of Energy Efficient Light Bulbs. We ran the 2nd Annual Green Ribbon Campaign for the month of April and this fall we will be promoting a beautiful wildlife calendar with photographs donated by Bill Keay, a world renowned wildlife photographer. All funds will go to supporting our wildlife presentations. NWPS continues to look for ways to provide our wildlife education programs to more and more schools. We are constantly looking for dedicated volunteers and hope that our campaigns, programs and projects will entice more people to become involved. Here's to another great fall season with many more children exposed to the wonders of BC's wildlife and wild spaces.

Ann Peters

Presentation Profile: *Fantastic Frogs!!*

Northwest Wildlife Preservation Society is keen to share its knowledge of wildlife and wildlife habitats in British Columbia with all British Columbians. Over the years, we have developed exciting and interactive programs for audiences of all ages. Enjoy beautiful pictures of B.C.'s wildlife taken by award-winning photographers as you listen to informative and entertaining presentations about our animal neighbours who make British Columbia the most biologically diverse province in Canada! Continuing that tradition and expanding our program lineup we are proud to announce our newest wildlife presentation *Fantastic Frogs!*



Explore the slippery world of amphibians! In this presentation, NWPS will focus on amphibians found in BC. Specifically, we will introduce audiences to the 11 frog and 1 toad species living in British Columbia. We will discuss what makes these misunderstood animals so important and why we should make an effort to preserve them. We will also take an in-depth look at what makes these amphibians so different from other animals in BC. Audiences will have the opportunity to explore the fascinating life cycle, habitat requirements, threats to survival, and positive steps being taken to preserve these animals.

Our Sponsors are Making a Difference:

by Coast Capital Savings

Coast Capital Savings Gorge Waterway Clean-Up

The Gorge Waterway Clean-Up was held on June 1st at the Selkirk Waterfront in Victoria BC, and was spearheaded by the Coast Capital Savings Island Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) in conjunction with Foundation 2000 Plus.

The Coast Capital Savings Island Youth Advisory Committee is made up of grade 11 and 12 high school students recruited from the Greater Victoria area. During their one-year term, these students are given employment in our branches and act as our good-will ambassadors at community events. They are also responsible for completing a project that benefits the areas of Community, Education or Environment.

The Gorge Waterway Clean-Up was an amazing success, with over 110 volunteers and support staff. All sorts of things were pulled out of the Gorge Waterway, including almost a full car (engine block, tires, door frame, rear axle with suspension and license plates!), over 10 shopping carts and a lot of raw metal. The YAC would like to make this an annual project, and hope to see the number of volunteers increase as we build a volunteer database.

"This event was a huge success. To see the garbage that was once polluting our beautiful waterway going where it belongs was a great feeling. The volunteers, Coast Capital Savings, Foundation 2000 Plus, the Gorge Rowing and Paddling Centre, and all the sponsors deserve an enormous round of applause for their efforts. With the help of local businesses and generous sponsors, there is no doubt in my mind that this event will continue to grow each year," Shaun Wysiecki, Youth Advisory Committee Member 2002-2003.

Thank you to all of the Youth Advisory Committee, and especially to Shaun Wysiecki and Alicia Ooi, for organizing this event. The YAC prepared advertising, including posters and press releases, and wrote and submitted a grant application to the City of Victoria.



Good job team!
Thank you to everyone who participated in this event!





Fall 2003

Why the Wolf Cull is a Bad Idea

by Raincoast Conservation Society

The provincial government is proposing to implement a wolf control program, as well as prescribed burning, to increase ungulate populations in the Muskwa-Kechika region of northern BC. The Raincoast Conservation Society would like to offer our viewpoint regarding the draft Muskwa-Kechika Wildlife Management Plan, and specifically how it relates to wolf control and prescribed burning prescriptions.

The proposal, as written, clearly indicates the attempt of the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection to maximize ungulate populations, rather than permitting natural ecosystem dynamics to prevail. Specifically, the plan sets population targets for ungulates by proposing to reduce the number of wolves and manipulate the habitat through burning to achieve the desired ungulate population levels.

We have several strong objections to these approaches:

1. **Setting population targets and manipulating other components of the ecosystem in order to achieve those targets is not ecosystem management, contrary to the claims of the Plan.** It is management biased towards maximizing specific, preferred species to the detriment of others, and ignores the natural and dynamic ecosystem processes. The Muskwa-Kechika should not be managed as a game farm.

2. The Plan's rationale for controlling wolves in the Muskwa-Kechika is to enable arbitrarily determined population targets for ungulates to be achieved, **not because any one of these populations is in imminent danger of extirpation.** These ungulates are valued for hunting and the reason, while officially unstated, is clearly to provide more and better hunting opportunities.

3. **Wolf control is publicly unacceptable.** Given an increased ecological understanding and relatively enlightened value system held by most biologists and the provincial electorate, killing social predators as a management prescription is viewed as unacceptable in this century.

4. **Controlling wolves by lethal or non-lethal sterilization techniques is technically unsound as a long-term management tool.** Lethal control has a dubious record of success as a means of depressing numbers of wolves over time, because removing individual wolves may fragment packs and allow more wolves to breed. When entire packs are eliminated, wolves from outside the control area often immigrate to fill the void.

In the case of the Muskwa-Kechika, sterilization of wolves is contemplated, which in theory avoids the problems alluded to above, and may initially provoke less public opposition because in theory no wolves are killed. The reality of sterilization, however, appears to be something else. Its effectiveness has not been established. Problems include the difficulty of identifying the dominant breeding pair of wolves in a pack, and, even if they are identified, the changing nature of pack hierarchies means that a breeding pair one year may not be the breeding pair the next. As a result, where sterilization has been used, when the management objective of reducing wolf numbers is not achieved managers have resorted to lethal methods of control. This option is recognized in the Muskwa-Kechika Plan, which states that if control objectives are not achieved through surgical sterilization or fertility-lowering drugs, "additional methods" will be considered.

Continued on page 4

Volunteer opportunities abound!

Are you passionate about the environment? Do you like working outdoors and getting dirty while making a difference? Maybe you prefer working behind the scenes, in an office helping to make an organization work. Northwest Wildlife Preservation Society is a volunteer driven organization and we need your help. As an active part of our volunteer team you have a chance to choose the type of work you perform. We are looking for individuals who enjoy website design, office administration, wildlife research and yes, getting dirty working in nature. Every month there are opportunities in all these areas. Please contact us at (604) 713-6686 or info@northwestwildlife.com if you would like to participate. Time commitments are flexible and we can work around most schedules.

Thanks for your support we couldn't do this without you!!



Green Ribbon Campaign

The Green Ribbon Campaign is an environmental awareness and fundraising campaign administered by Northwest Wildlife Preservation Society (NWPS). NWPS uses the support generated from the campaign to provide environmental education programs to children and adults within BC.

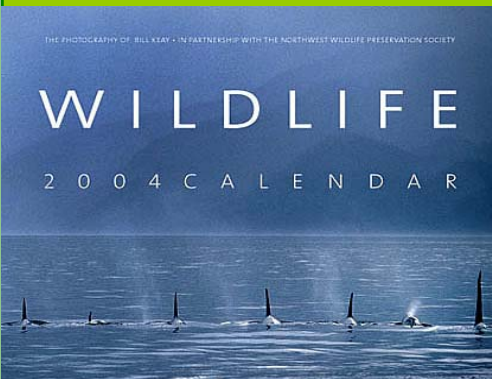
Our second annual Campaign was a huge success! We are already looking ahead to Earth Day 2004 and plan to distribute ribbons throughout BC raising awareness of environmental issues. We hope you'll show your support of the environment and celebrate Earth Day by wearing a green ribbon.

If you would like more information on our campaign, or to get involved as a volunteer, distributor, sponsor or Corporate Star, please feel free to contact us at (604) 713-6686, email info@greenribbon.ca or visit our website at www.greenribbon.ca



Wildlife Calendars on Sale Now!!

NWPS is proud to announce our 2004 Wildlife Calendars produced in partnership with Keay Photography. These full color, 18 x 10 calendars feature stunning images taken by world renowned wildlife photographer Bill Keay. Each month features full page pictures from around Canada along with stories about the unique animals found here. For more information on how to purchase the calendar contact either Northwest Wildlife Preservation Society at (604) 713-6686 or our website www.northwestwildlife.com or Keay Photography at www.keaywildlife.com. If you would like to sign your business or school up as a distributor please contact NWPS at the above number or email info@northwestwildlife.com.



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News & Views is published by Northwest Wildlife Preservation Society #605-1112 West Pender Street Vancouver, BC V6E 2S1 (604) 713-6686; (604) 713-6698 Fax: (604) 713-6696 www.northwestwildlife.com info@northwestwildlife.com

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Contributors: Coast Capital Savings, Kyle Margenau & Raincoast Conservation Society
NWPS is a registered charity and a non-profit society. Our mandate is to develop and provide educational, research, and advisory services that advance the public's awareness and knowledge of wildlife and wildlife habitat in northwest North America. In doing so, NWPS works to ensure that healthy wildlife systems throughout North America are preserved for their own intrinsic worth and for the appreciation of all. *News and Views* is intended to be a forum for discussion. Opinions of authors of articles contained herein are not necessarily the position of NWPS.

5. **The Muskwa-Kechika Wildlife Management Plan compounds the problems associated with sterilization, identified above, because it proposes allowing, and even increasing hunting and trapping of wolves at the same time.** Sterilization, to be effective at all, requires a stable pack structure. Hunting and trapping risks the loss of dominant pack members, resulting in pack fragmentation, allowing more, not fewer, wolves to reproduce.

Unfortunately, the province already has a wolf sterilization program underway in the Turnagin Valley, in which a number of wolves have been sterilized. In addition to the questions it raises from an ecological point of view, this controversial approach in the Turnagin Valley has serious implications from a public policy perspective. The program is being funded by guide outfitting interests, establishing a troubling precedent that is rife with conflict of interest.

6. **Wolf control, through its focus on numbers rather than species-specific qualitative biological features, disregards possible long-term impacts.** Potential impacts for wolves as highly evolved and complex social predators are poorly understood. In wolves, we observe a suite of social traits only shared with primates: a social hierarchy, division of labour, year-round integration of age and sex classes, cooperation during hunting, and communal care of young. Killing adults with dependent young - especially in a small pack or one with a large litter - may ultimately be the same as killing the young directly. This may interrupt the social transfer of information between generations. Disruption in learning may result in fewer and simpler learned behavioural traditions, which are critical to adapt individual family groups to the specific resources and other unique features of each area. Moreover, high levels of mortality may reduce genetic variability and affect evolutionary potential of populations. With this understanding of possible effects, it is biologically and morally indefensible to pursue management goals that encourage high levels of mortality by hunters and trappers.

7. **The proposed prescribed burning deviates (further) from the historic range of variability.** Vast areas of the Muskwa-Kechika are already burnt naturally and through management practices. To date, prescribed burning in the area has been more extensive and much more frequent than wildfire was historically. Clearly, resource managers already are practicing "ecosystem conversion" and not ecosystem-based management, using repeated, frequent fire to change forest to scrub, and scrub to grassland to inflate ungulate populations. This should be limited and certainly not increased as proposed in the plan. The concern is that human caused incremental or cumulative environmental change now poses a primary threat to this northern ecosystem.

A management rationale that relates to maintaining ecosystem processes is considerably different from that where native ungulates are intentionally managed as a harvestable crop. The appropriate management goal is to help the Muskwa-Kechika recover from previous abuses in a way consistent with its evolutionary environment, while enhancing opportunities for continued human use.

8. **The Plan, as it exists, will generate aggressive, well-organized, and global advocacy.** There is already well-documented public suspicion that the planning process is partially funded and influenced by hunting interests. Wolf control in the Muskwa-Kechika in the 1980's resulted in massive public opposition and undesirable publicity for the province internationally. One may predict even stronger pressures if wolf control again becomes a management strategy for the Muskwa Kechika in this new millennium.

The Raincoast Conservation Society will be urging the BC government not to approve the management plan in its present form.