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Wolves will Eat your Borderlines: De-Legitimizing Legitimate and Historic Violence in
Oregon's Wildlife Management Systems

On August 24th, 2015, two wolves were found dead in Wallowa County, fifty yards apart. A male and a female, they were known as the Sled Springs pair. They were one of the six breeding pairs of grey wolves then known to state biologists, meaning that they had denned the previous spring, and were raising an undocumented number of pups. After discovering their bodies, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and Oregon State Police did not release the information regarding their deaths for over a month. Though such a decision might elicit speculation about advantageous timing, the *Eastern Oregonian* newspaper cites OSP spokesman Lt. Bill Fugate as indicating that the information was withheld because the troopers did not want to “tip their hand,” and mentions that pro-wolf advocate organization Oregon Wild called the deaths “suspicious.”

Two wolf carcasses in a field is, of course, suspicious – particularly when they were blamed for the depredation of a young calf near by earlier in the spring, but had as

of yet escaped retributive justice for their kill. Investigations carried on, with myriad more vitriolic, weepy, vengeful, and confused speculation from the public. But in late October, officials declared that no verdict would be verified. The bodies had largely decomposed before officials could complete decisive necropsies, and probable cause could not be established to point toward human-caused mortality. The lack of decision hung stale in the eastern air. How else, indeed, do two healthy wolves – then an endangered species in Oregon – fall to simultaneous deaths fifty yards apart, within dashing distance of their den of pups, still too young to shake a good chance at survival? Why was the article in this newspaper, situated east of highway 395, titled, “State Police Lack proof that Wolf deaths were Human-Caused,” as opposed to the Oregonian Article on the same subject, which was written under the heading: “Oregon State Police seek answers after two dead wolves found in Wallowa County.” And why, at the local reporting of a brutal, violent, strange incident of glaring, though unproven human-carnivore interaction, was the following the comment section on the article in the *Eastern Oregonian*:



Without any prior knowledge, one can come to the conclusion that the local readership of such an article is comprised of folks who, based on their avatar selection, identify

themselves as largely white, and are proud of their rural livelihoods and pastimes. The pictures show us a man in a cryptically symbolic vigilante get-up, a dead cougar, presumably killed by the online user behind the photo, a dairy cow, and a man with a mustache and a Carrhart vest, grinning askance at the camera lens. We can also read a somewhat sardonic, yet hopeful pleasure into the reactions to the death of the Sled Springs wolves. “That’s a great start!” chirps Vern Johnson cheerily, seemingly in somewhat sharp juxtaposition to the more banal mood of the article, which doesn’t, as a newspaper article maintaining some sense of neutrality, literally condone or applaud the deaths. Yet, as the following commentators eerily echo Vern Johnson’s foreboding, eager rejoinder, the chain of responses highlights and elucidates the implicit tone of the *Eastern Oregonian* staff writer. The comments seem to be smiling, nodding, winking, and answering a direct, but veiled message in the article, the gaps and cracks in which seem to generate one expected, ritualistic retort: “Two wolves are dead: 79 more to go.”

Gina Birkmaier presses further with her comment, sarcastically tossing out the phrase “possible/unknown,” one of the classifications for determining the cause of depredation of livestock in Oregon. If a rancher (or anyone) believes that their animal has been killed by a wolf, they call up ODFW. An official comes and studies the scene, and then chalks up the cause of death to “Confirmed wolf,” “Probable wolf,” “Possible/unknown,” or “Other.” If investigation proves depredation, the state compensates the owner for their losses. The latter two categories mean, to a scientist, that there is either evidence that something else killed the animal (possible), or that there is no sign that a wolf *did* kill the animal, but there is also not proof of the actual cause of death, so wolves can’t be 100% ruled out. Many ranchers, however, read the phrase

“Possible/unknown” as a legalistic grey area: a bullshit catch-all for the state to use to avoid paying them off. From this perspective, the reliance on this vague phrasing proves the state’s allegiance to the feelings of liberal, wolf-loving environmentalist idiots in the city and discredits the voices of rural Oregonians entirely. This confusion over the connotation of scientific language produces a rupture in understanding that allows people who are legitimately protected and empowered by the establishment state to believe that they are actually oppressed. Without the tools to make scientific language legible, a rural livestock owner could easily read bureaucracy, willful ignorance, snobbery, and treachery in the phrase “Possible/unknown,” and argue that the other ideological establishment force at play – institutional science – tyrannizes and dominates the lives of an under class of forgotten, erased people out in the wild rural plains, far from coffee shops and breweries. Adopting this stance, the livestock owner can understand that violence has been done *to her*, both by trespassing wild animals, and by the state itself. Violence in response could then be ethically sound. Out of context, the phrase maintains an almost rudely willful nihilistic ambiguity in the face of violent death and huge loss, and thus, perhaps even elicits retaliation.

In her scoffing comment on the *Eastern Oregonian* article, Gina Birkmaier obliquely gestures to her assured assumptions that the Sled Springs wolves were most certainly killed by rightfully vengeful ranchers, but that the killings will never be proven. She then calls out the popular, or in this case, notorious and antagonizing wildlife organization Oregon Wild, who spear head Oregon’s wolf advocacy work and have had stakeholders in management negotiations for the past decade. Her admonishment to “choke on THAT” is violent, but passively so, simply wishing that Oregon Wild fools

would startle and trip on their own obstacles. “I hope you choke on something” is less direct than “I’m going to put something in your throat,” but it’s still visceral.

The bitterness the rural public feels around those carelessly technical words – “possible/unknown” – is reflected in an “Oregon Wolf Education” video under the same name, made by the Wallowa County Stock producers Association, and circulated to “increase information” about how wolves are going to affect *your* life. The title screen for the video, seen below, features a screen cap of a galloping wolf, hungrily looking off camera as he scurries away from the viewer in an act of simultaneous threat and shameless cowardice. Leaping across a small halo of light, the wolf is surrounded by enclosing darkness. The viewer peers at the bounding creature as if through the sight of a gun, watching it bound out of reach into a blurred, shadowy realm. Six squares are folded out beneath the wolf, each holding an object and value that the presence of this predator threatens:



Sweet, darling, innocent baby deer. Hiking white people, in khakis, with their loyal golden lab. Baby cows! *A baby human.* Noble, noble elk. And finally, a sign that appears to be lifted from a Road Runner cartoon reading “PRIVATE PROPERTY RIGHTS.” The text explains that this is a documentary about “Real people and Their

Story,” as opposed to, I guess, a documentary about fake people and some other, unrelated story.

The website responsible for this video is listed as [“www.oregonwolfeducation.org,”](http://www.oregonwolfeducation.org) which, given the context, announces a reactionary, revisionist version of “WOLF EDUCATION.” Naming this so obviously biased source such a mundane, informative sounding name is sort of silly, like if some dude named Charlie made his own website called www.charliesrealcanadiangirlfriend.com . “Nothing suspicious here!” it announces. And yet, the defiant act of that blasé, dot-org naming is an acknowledgment of a perceived lack of institutional power. *You won’t hear the real story from those hoity-toity government folks. So we’ll tell it ourselves.* Altogether, this visual informs us very clearly what the wolf is diametrically opposed to, and what Oregon ranchers want to support: the unchecked growth of ungulate populations, white families, white babies wandering around in rural areas, and PRIVATE PROPERTY RIGHTS – for “us.” While this imagery is propagandist to the point of preposterousness, the next title screen alerts the viewer to the darker realities behind it. The text warns us that we are about to be shown some extremely graphic, violent images, just in case there are children in the room. The video is going to display images of torn up livestock, probably with a lot of editing and falsification, in order to demonstrate how the acts allegedly committed by predator wolves eating sheep are illegitimate, violent transgressions, while the act of industrially raising livestock on private property to be slaughtered en masse, processed, packaged, sold and then eaten by humans in Portland and Michigan and Kentucky and Japan is framed as a something deeper even than an inalienable right – an undeniable fact of nature.

How could a wild animal, native to this biosphere, inspire such bizarre and intense rhetoric from professional organizations run by adult human beings with a sense of rationality and the ability to understand basic facts and statistics? It is, of course, not just any animal. It's a wolf. And it hasn't been back in its native place for a very long time.

Wolves came back to Oregon in 2009 – for good. They had tried before: in 1999 one was captured, and removed to Idaho. In 2000, an Oregonian shot two perceived-interlopers, seen running in the distance. A car struck another in 2007, and one more was found dead with a bullet in its body not long after. But the rumors of dens in the snow were spreading, and the northeastern corner of state soon had two confirmed, but tiny packs. The Imnaha and Wenaha groups grew, faltered, stymied, bred, spread, and slowly multiplied, with numbers cautiously rising as they slowly pushed south and west into Union, Grant, Baker and Umatilla Counties. The first confirmed wolves in the state since the last pelt was turned in for bounty in 1946, these pilgrims and pioneers straggled into Eastern Oregon's hostile territory from even more vitriolic grounds in Idaho and Montana, continuing the westward press began several wolf generations before, when thirty one wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park in 1995-6.

Those two and a half dozen creatures, set free after twenty years of planning and intense struggle, issued forth a spiraling, spreading growth of descendants. The new generations led the encroaching settlement of Idaho and Oregon, marching determinably west across the mountainous western territories. They traversed and occupied foreign, vacant grounds, where their presence was perceived as an immediate threat, and their

modes of consumption cultural systems balefully conflicted with the social systems of the world they ostensibly invaded. Their notion of property and boundaries bore no resemblance whatsoever to that of the population they met with on their advance. The new conflict of wolf and farmer/rancher uncannily echoes the narratives of Euro-American settlement and colonization of the western-united states.

Six years after their official return, the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW) voted to remove grey wolves from the protections provided by Oregon's State Endangered Species Act (OESA). With 81 known wolves in the state, and more than four known breeding pairs, the Wolf Management Plan that the agency adopted in 2006 allowed the council the opportunity to de-list *Canis Lupus*, and enter the next phase of wildlife management.

The de-listing decision on November 9th was as expected as it is controversial. To folks who vaguely enjoy the idea of wild animals and the forest, the numbers that allowed for a change in status sound shockingly low. Even as I sat here, writing this paragraph, a friend wandered up to me, and noting the pile of books at my table, inquired: "How's our wolf population doing?" I gave her the numbers and the updates, reminding her that our wolves come from a source population that includes animals in Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, and even Canada, and that the current wolves we have now dispersed from the Northern Rocky Mountain zone over the past decade. Wolves might recognize and intensely avoid freeways, rural highways and even gravel forest roads, and thus have limited opportunities to successfully traverse over the large expanses they need, but they certainly don't care about state boundaries – or national park ones, much to the

misfortune of Yellowstone's famous, and famously execrated pack members. And, of course, I remind my friend – a former Alaskan who now lives in the outskirts of Stayton, a township comprised of only outskirts in the middle of the Santiam Canyon, along a river corridor and perched between clear-cuts and old growth – our wolf estimates are based on a minimum verified count. So that means, these counted wolves are collared wolves, or wolves who live with collared wolves, and others whose existence has been confirmed. There's almost definitely at least a few more hanging out: dispersing lone travelers, like our old pal OR-7, who now has his own pack in the Rogue River wilderness. Or, they're ones who've been scarcer, quieter, stealthier, harder to catch or even catch a glimpse of during the past several years of intense wolf study by biologists, and intense wolf tracking by nerve-racked ranchers. Perhaps they're the wolves who have been here all along, padding across hills unseen in winter snows, escaping into the corners of mossy valleys behind burnt out trails and collapsed and washed out roadways, or sticking to high, empty places deep in inaccessible public lands, where cows don't wander, hikers and hunters don't climb, and deer, while not plentiful, only sometimes stray.

Still, 81 seems like a small number. Doesn't it? Yes, I said. It does. And that's because the numbers in the Wolf Management Plan that opened up the possibility for delisting – four breeding pairs, who breed for three consecutive years, at least 67 total wolves (adults, pups, females, and males not counted specifically or weighed with a sense of reality and significance) within state lines – aren't based on ecological principles, or scientific research. Nor are they completely arbitrary. Those numbers reflect ODFW's actual goals, which are not to maintain and manage wildlife according to sound science

that protects natural resources and allows for ethical public use, but to pacify and ward off the lawsuits and public ire brought on by conservation non-profits and biologists. With those troubles dealt with, the agency can fulfill its two veiled purposes. First, they control wildlife for the purposes and demands of the small number of Oregonians who fund the fish and wildlife department via purchase of hunting tags. Second, they cater to the needs and requests of the politically and economically powerful cattlemen of the east, who have an historic alliance with the agency to “manage” wildlife for the purpose of improving beef sales and securing inalienable property rights for the few and the wealthy landed.

In other words, the job of ODFW, when read closely, is to highlight illegitimate violences –kills by wolves, depredation, poaching, property violation – and shield, with the blinding blanket of law, the contemporary “legitimate” violences: the persistence of private property boundaries on occupied land, the slaughter of cattle, the shooting of animals for sport or unnecessary feed, the domination of the land, the laws and the government by white men over 70, the overwhelming press of conservative majority, and all of the resulting cultural and social violences that are dispersed in such a land against women and people of color. ODFW is not responsible for the lack of abortion clinics east of Bend, or the all white city councils and bad enforcement of equal protection rights, of course. But by utilizing their power to consistently promote certain kinds of violence as legitimate, and other kinds of violence as horrific, their power radiates downward to validate and accept all these other things.

The anti-wolf rhetoric, from “Smoke a Pack a Day!” and “Shoot, Shovel, and Shut Up!” bumper stickers with a scraggly cartoon of a howling canine in crosshairs, to

the old-boys-club-y, “look here now sirs, we had a deal”, hand-shaking, big-hat chuckling buckle hoisting boot-rocking smirking, sighing pandering, paternalistic hee-haw that is produced on the Cattleman’s Association websites and smilingly spit out by bought and sold senators at commission meetings is violent, bald-faced and visceral – striking in its uniformity from internet forums in Alaska to farm bureau conventions in Oregon, and shocking in its reprisal of the same 19th century language that was used to build Oregon statehood on white supremacist capital power and thoughtfully arranged racial genocide.

The department of fish and wildlife is a peculiar institution, plagued with vague, antique prescriptions for animal habitat and a history of pioneering species and ecosystem annihilation. The plight of the gray wolf and its shockingly violent demise at the hands of the federal government have been well-documented. However, the history of the wildlife management systems that exterminated the gray wolf have not been thoroughly explored – particularly in regards to how these systems engaged in the project of nation-building at the edges of the frontier. After the establishment of the Plymouth Colony, it took only ten years for the colonists to draw up a bounty system for wolf hides. As the frontier moved across the United States, a pattern developed, where new governments in far-flung territories were consistently created and convened by the “problem” of the local wolves.

In Oregon, the first-ever governmental meetings of European-Americans occurred in Champoeg and Gervais in 1843, where a gaggle of propertied men agreed on a bounty system for predator mammals. Although exchange rates for coyotes and mountain lions were also implemented, the gatherings are known colloquially as the “wolf meetings.” Indeed, wolf furs fetched the highest pay-off, regardless of the

predator's proportional capacity for damage and loss. But the haunting, hunted figure of the wolf thus gained prestige, and special status as an enemy of propertied people. And the absence of wolves marked the civilization of former wilderness, and the arrival of a new dominant culture.

Concurrent with the eradication of the wolf in the west, European Americans established a system of private property ownership that fundamentally disavowed the humanity, society, culture, history, and laws of the people who already lived on the suddenly occupied territory. As more indigenous people and peoples of the west were murdered, removed, assimilated, silenced, and severed, the symbolic spectre of the wolf as the savage, cruel, unsettlingly persistent beast that lingers on the borders of known worlds took shape. It's impossible to ignore this connection, and this history needs to inform how we move forward in our environmental policy today. Decisions about land use are inextricably mixed with the politics of race, community, and identity, and the power that decides what kind of land use is prioritized above others.

The wolf is, now, the stranger in our midst: conspicuously foreign, oblivious to local custom and courtesy, and marked with criminality. Our new wolves are the descendants of the re-introduced Yellowstone wolves, and their opponents are not going to forget it. The claim persists that those animals, brought in from Canada in 1996, were in fact *totally different* from the "real" native wolves that used to occupy the lower forty-eight. When one visits the forums and message boards of folks who oppose wolf existence, phrases like "stop the importation of Canadian wolves!" or "Stop the invasion of these foreigners!" are commonplace. They are accused not only of violent destruction and causeless obliteration, but of criminal otherness. People say that these "new" wolves

are different from the ones that used to live in Oregon – a bigger, bloodthirsty, dangerous, pack-hunting cruel breed that kills for pleasure indiscriminately – that should be dealt with immediately, lest they infest the countryside and take over the world as we know it.

Such wide-eyed declarations against the horror of a predator’s return reverberate with history. They mirror the language that’s been used repeatedly for centuries to vanquish the non-European history from the land we live on, and that was employed to legally obstruct black Americans from moving to this state in the 19th century. These syllables are haunted with the traumatic memories of the west that inform our lives everyday. And such rhetoric chillingly echoes the present racist hysteria that marks immigrant bodies as inhuman criminals, and resurrects the pressing ideology that people of color are a constant, inherent threat to the dominant whiteness of America.

It’s one thing if a coyote kills a dog, or a neighbor’s dog kills a sheep, a duck, or a calf. But when the wolf – this “newcomer” – to a country claimed righteously and obdurately by the century-old boot prints of blustering white men stomping down fence poles on the prairie – takes livestock, it’s an active threat to the capitalist containment of property, and the ultimate idol of productivity above all else. Lobbying groups and movements like the Oregon Outdoor Council cry out for the defense of the “rights” of people whose rights, you might think, were not currently being assailed. The story of the wolf as a danger to children, deer, cows, elk, and the purity of daughters invokes the image of a scourge of invading, insidious criminals, swarming safe *American* homesteads and dragging their claws along the precious liberties of brave white hunters. It echoes the rhetoric of anti-immigration campaigns, and the droning whines about the terrible oppression of “political correctness.” How dare *you* come in here and threaten my rights,

my liberties, *my freedom*? It's something *different* coming in, to a place where we already got rid of it, and now it is trying to take something back.

Famously shy and skittish of humans, environmentalists (and biologists) will tell you that wolves are unlikely to cross roads, live close to people, or extend any accidental interaction. But that story is often revised in the narratives of people who live or hunt in wilder country, and don't want any wolves around. They say that the danger of the wolf is actually massively underestimated. They *are* dangerous to people, report countless internet comments, forums, personal blogs, and activist websites with sections on "dispelling the myths" outrageously spread by the conservationist animal-huggers. Wolves *aren't* afraid of us, these sources warn. It stood on the crest of the hill, and looked right at us. It saw us. But it didn't run.

Over everything else, the wolf's storied refusal to scatter in terror is the thing that is too much to bear. Its final, unforgivable crime – a fiction, invented by its enemies – is its lack of submissive deference to a noted greater power. It's one thing to joyously and contentedly gaze out at the wild through the rearview mirror in a truck, the scope of a rifle, the lenses of binoculars, or the window of a cabin in the rain. Pleasure can be experienced with the feeling of stable human dominance firmly set in place. But what unsettles the hierarchy, and terrifies the dominant establishment to its core, is when the wild thing suddenly looks back. With this history, and its present reverberations in mind, we need to think about how the past has informed our current conversations regarding wildlife, public land, natural resources, people, capital, and what responsibility we owe to the pieces of dirt we live our lives on. And then, we need to accept that what we plan now, and what agencies and institutions we keep, shape the future of Oregon.

Oregon's current wolf management plan states that the purpose of the document, as is the same for any other returning or endangered specie, is to "protect wolves in the early stages of implementation so that the species can be delisted and a self-sustaining population persists" (iii). However, the current plan's function as a device of compromise between interest groups, with a lack of scientific goals at its base, makes it a questionable document, particularly due to the cultural history of wolves in the United States. The current plan asks us to rely on centuries old anecdotal data, like the journals of pioneers or hearsay in the writings of William Clark, more so than scientific findings to establish a sense of historical population of gray wolves.

The plan's "History Section" - Section I.A., page 4, notes the wide amount of variance within even those unreliable, erratic bits of evidence. The following quotations, meant to establish an idea of the historical presence of wolves in the state, come from two 19th Century naturalists and one mention of wolves in the journals of Lewis & Clark, and as is indicated in footnote 3, were collected from two other books: *The Wolf in North American History*, by S.P. Young, and *The Wolves of North America*, by S.P. Young and Edward Goldman. While Young and Goldman were renowned mammalogists who compiled extensive studies, we should question the choice to frame wolf history via accounts collected and contained in other books – especially ones from the 1940s. These examples suggest that a multitude of important information has quite possibly been excluded – or never even considered.

The history section continues, and mentions a 1936 book from biologist Vernon Bailey, who described wolves as (formerly) "present in most timbered areas in Oregon," – optimistic, but vague – and to be "most common" on the western slope of the cascades,

an observation the management plan obliquely questions, then leaves aside. The final source, a 1972 endangered mammals report by Olterman and Verts, focuses on an attempt to establish a historical record of wolves in the state, but concludes that the “distribution [of found specimens] is not representative of the range originally occupied by the wolf in the state because the species probably was eliminated from some areas before 1913, when specimens were first preserved” (5).

Accounts of wolf sightings, interactions and speculated rumors were not delivered in vacuums, or by the breathless narratives of passenger train tourists exploring the exotic west: wolf news and history has been regularly preserved and accounted for alongside the histories of European Americans developing agriculture, ranching, and establishing a system of land use based on property ownership. The choices of the historical source material in the current management plan, paired with the recognition that no good evidence is available for grasping the historical population size and range of wolves, reveals that this plan has virtually no scientific foundation regarding wolf population. It would be preposterous to consider delisting a species based on the findings of a document that admits it has no scientific grounds regarding historical population size, and uses information to explain the history of the species gathered largely after the species was already extirpated.

This wolf plan’s overabundant emphasis on the potential meetings of wolf and livestock reflects an uneasy presence of this faulty, conflicted history: this document uses the term “livestock” 396 times and “depredation” 191 times in its 395 pages, whereas the management plan for cougars mentions “livestock” 178 times, and “depredation” only ten. The manner in which this plan dwells on agriculture, the risks of predation on

livestock, and related policy – to a far greater extent than in the plans of other endangered species, or other non-endangered native predator species – alerts the reader that such an emphasis is not actually based on realistic risks and dangers of a wolf population in Oregon, nor is the plan dedicated to, first and foremost, establishing a viable population of gray wolves in the state.

Oregon's decision to de-list wolves skirted the edges of the management plan, but, fundamentally, followed it properly. But although it will lead to more vulnerabilities in the future, it won't be a disastrous loss for wolves, in the long run. It is an empty victory for ranchers. It won't end up decreasing depredation, especially if wolf-culling becomes more easily accessible as retributive justice, because packs with bad leadership are more likely to make bad decisions and feed on livestock in dangerous places. And anyways – it's not going to win. We're not going to wipe out wolves from the United States, ever again.

The decision's main impetus and power is to re-assert the historic relationship of a certain type of landowner and state government, and to attempt to re-stabilize the world based on 19th century design. But it won't work – because the more often ODFW makes decisions based so obviously on niche interests, and the more people clearly notice how their budget works, and what kind of influences are designing their decisions, the more readily the public will endorse campaigns to disrupt and change the institution itself. And that, rather shockingly, might happen.

In an essay composed some time in the mid-1940s and published posthumously in the collection *A Sand County Almanac*, conservationist and ecologist Aldo Leopold

writes a sub-heading called “Thinking Like a Mountain.” The title prepares the reader for a call to shift the ground they are looking from as they read, and the text delivers. He describes a moment, when, in employ of the United States Forest Service, he gleefully shot an “old wolf” and a “half-dozen grown pups” (138) with the help of a gaggle of other USFS men. He explains how reasonable it seemed at the time, but then, upon watching the living creatures fade into corpses, notes his immediate regret. This moment, he clarifies, transformed his ideas of ecology, humans, and “natural resources.” “We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes,” Writes Leopold. “I was young then, and full of trigger-itch. I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters’ paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view”(138-9). The shocking poignancy and poetic imagery render the passage memorable and powerful, and prevent it from turning to cliché, despite its common invocation. But it is most useful to conservationists because it illustrates the beginning of a dramatic shift in wildlife management ethics, and a transformative instant in the social perception of “nature,” the environment, and the function of ecosystems.

Through the 1940s, the federal government empowered forest service workers and state agencies to carry out extensive predator extermination campaigns, effectively ridding the lower forty-eight states of entire species, like the grey wolf Leopold shot, and almost entirely destroying populations of cougars, grizzlies, and other carnivores. The idea, as Leopold iterates, was that predators are pests that kill deer and domestic livestock. They compete with humans, and thus, are bad and should be removed – with extraordinary measures, when necessary. Scientists, and some members of the public,

now understand that these methods were shockingly short sighted, terribly incomplete models for understanding eco-systems as *communities*. This view seems so obvious now in some parts of society that it is difficult to remember how revolutionary it was in the 1940s, how new it is today, and how many people still adamantly oppose living out the ethics such a change in perception demands.

When Nathaniel Reed called a governmental meeting in 1972 to discuss the possibilities of a plan for reintroduction, and then when USFW biologist John Weaver wrote, in 1978, that

The wolf niche appears essentially vacant.

Therefore, I recommend restoring this native predator by
introducing wolves to Yellowstone

They were continuing the work that Leopold started. And that work is a *radical* reimagining of re-ordering the world. The people who set off the re-introduction program imagined *such* a radically reorganized world that they simply took wild animals, who functionally consume capitalist commodities to stay alive, and set them *loose into the wilderness*. Have at it, wolves, they said. Take it back. Shake it up. Do something. Off you go. In Jon Coleman's book on folkloric perceptions of the wolf in America, he argues that the conflict over wolves is the thing that keeps them alive. But I disagree. I think their power comes from the radical insanity of their extirpation, and the catastrophic violences it represented and contained, and then, the radical reorientation of public opinion that allowed for them to start to come back. This slow success allows us to radically question other institutions that suddenly don't seem so natural, and it reveals the veiled intentions and affects of the institutions around us that exist right now. Because of

their success, and its obstacles, Oregon conservationists are starting to talk about getting rid of ODFW as an agency altogether.

In this light, the cry of the ranchers and hunters, who don the regalia and bask in the fantastical, fanatical imagery of the white vigilante and outlaw of the 19th century, seems more reasonably fearful. But the contradictions of being anti-government and anti-establishment, while invigorating the supreme righteousness of the range-land property owner above all others and else are more stark. The powers of the state – in this case, the Department of Fish & Wildlife – are not only singly invested in supporting the needs and desires of this very tiny, specific class of people, the state was *designed* for it. And because the foundations of the state of Oregon itself are likewise comprised of a substitution of wildlife regulation for state power, that structure is relevant and prevalent today. The Oregon Cattleman's Association and the county commissioners of rancher-owned districts must carefully balance the irony of *being* the historic and present establishment, while propagating their power via anti-establishment positions, and they do this by trying to monopolize the discourse of violence.

While we may be bending toward a future of new possibilities, where the anarchic, chaotic presence of wolves challenge the privatized, commodified system of resource land management and ownership, we are still living in a dangerous moment in which violence proliferates in remarkable and shocking ways. We must remain vigilant of how every violence we read it about is framed and presented, because the way we describe violent force is how we invent its legitimacy – and thus, how we might be blinded to its presence, and its victims.

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