ONTARIO WOLVES UNDER THREAT!

The Call for a Provincial Wolf Protection Plan

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Earthroots' Wolves Ontario! Project - Ontario Wolves Under Threat! - April 2002

This publication made possible through grants from the EJLB Foundation, the George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation and the McLean Foundation.

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The Call for a Provincial Wolf Protection Plan

"I have high hopes for the future of wolves in North America. Many men will cease to think of them as vermin and see them as they are - one of the most interesting and intelligent animals that have ever lived on our globe. Do you dare to become involved in such a noble cause?"

- Noted wolf conservationist, Dr. Doug Pimlott.

Coexistence with wolves is possible but it requires human tolerance and education. Earthroots' Wolves Ontario! Project seeks to change the way this province looks at wolves. By teaching people about the important role wolves play in Ontario's ecosystems and dispelling the many myths we have of these animals, Earthroots works to build public participation in pressuring the government for province-wide protection for wolves and their habitat.

THE WOLVES ONTARIO! PROJECT

Earthroots created "The Wolves Ontario! Project" in August 2000 due to the dire situation facing wolves in this province. The goals of the Wolves Ontario! Project are the following:

1) Raise public awareness of the threats to Ontario wolf populations.
2) Actively engage the public in the campaign to pressure the government to change current policies governing wolves and wolf hunting, trapping and snaring in the province.
3) Through public advocacy, achieve meaningful legislative protection for wolves and their habitat.

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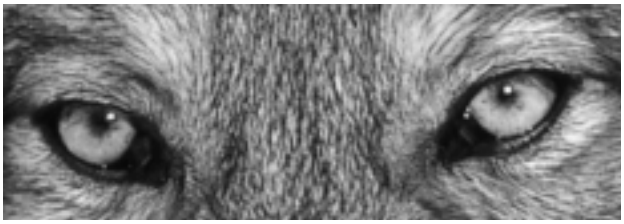
Acknowledgments:
The creation of this report would not have been possible without the contribution of our advisors, friends and volunteers. We would like to especially thank Benoit Ayotte (C.L.A.N) and John and Mary Theberge for the use of their photographs, Bob Huggan for his superior editing skills and Monika Melnychuk for her illustration of the "Big Bad Wolf". We would also like to thank the many people and organizations that have provided Earthroots with information and support.



ONTARIO WOLVES UNDER THREAT!

The call for a Provincial Wolf Protection Plan

FACT. Wolves in Ontario are persecuted through snaring, shooting and habitat destruction — and sometimes illegal poisoning.

FACT. Outside the few Provincial Parks and Game Preserves that are off limits to hunters and trappers, wolves can be trapped and hunted all year, except for two summer months in Northern Ontario when hunting is not allowed.

FACT. All you need is a small game license to hunt wolves in Ontario.

FACT. 328,000 Ontarians have a small game license.

FACT. There are no limits to how many wolves each licensed hunter or trapper can take.

FACT. There are 16,000 licensed trappers in Ontario.

FACT. Livestock depredation in Ontario occurs mostly in areas where coyote density is high and wolves exist in low densities or not at all.

FACT. There has never been a documented case of a healthy wild wolf killing a human in North America.

FACT. Rabies, though common among raccoons and foxes, is rare among wolves.

FACT. Raccoons in Ontario are afforded more protection than wolves.

FACT. There is no provincial protection plan for wolves in Ontario.

Ontario is currently the worst jurisdiction in North America when it comes to wolf protection.

WANTED: *A provincial wolf protection plan.*

The Plan: A Summary

Wolves deserve no less management consideration than any other hunted and trapped wildlife species in Ontario. A provincial wolf protection plan is long overdue.

Earthroots, an Ontario-based non-profit environmental organization and leading advocate for wilderness preservation in Ontario since 1986, has developed a set of recommendations for just such a plan – appropriate, workable policy changes and actions to improve wolf protection in Ontario. They are summarized here:

1. Ban wolf snaring. Many jurisdictions throughout the world have declared that the indiscriminate nature of snaring is unacceptable, particularly for wolves. The vast majority of Ontarians are against the use of snares.

2. End the open season on wolves. There is no biologically justifiable reason for controlling wolf populations so drastically. There must be an end to the open season on wolf killing and the unlimited number of wolves each licensed hunter and trapper can kill.

3. Conduct a true population and habitat viability assessment of wolves on a provincial level. Research is needed to determine the true status and health of wolves as well as their prey and habitat.

4. Require that *all* wolves killed in Ontario be reported to the Wildlife Branch of the Ministry of Natural Resources. Currently, there is no mandatory requirement to report the number of wolves killed unless the pelt is sold commercially. These wolf mortality reports will be an important source of data for any wolf population study.

5. Expand Provincial Parks and other protected areas beyond those stipulated under Ontario's Living Legacy agreement. Few parks are of a sufficient size and quality to sustain viable wolf populations. Currently wolves are protected on just 3% of their range in the province.

6. Manage protected areas such as Provincial Parks with the objective of ensuring the long-term viability of wolf populations. High-impact recreational activities and resource development should be prohibited within all of Ontario's protected areas.

7. Protection must extend beyond park boundaries. Protected corridors must be created to connect the scattered parks across the province.

8. Farmers should continue to be given full compensation for any losses due to wild predators. However, non-lethal alternatives should be employed to prevent livestock depredation.

9. Invest in wolf ecotourism projects in remote communities and in educational programs that teach people about the important role wolves play in the ecosystem. Coexistence with wolves is possible but it requires human tolerance and education.

Photo: Karen Hollett

The Big Bad Wolf

Today, many see the wolf as the symbol of unspoiled wilderness, yet this animal has been historically viewed and managed as vermin. Sadly, Ontario maintains the same archaic view of wolves that has led to their extermination from many regions around the world. The following quote from an Ontario government publication underlines how human attitudes towards wolves can differ quite significantly:

"*These predators are often either viewed by man as competitors or as species deserving of complete protection. This ambivalence leads to the imprecise nature of management objectives.*" [1]

Illustration: Monika Melnychuk

There is no provincial protection plan for wolves in Ontario. There is not even a policy statement on how to conserve wolf populations on a provincial level. Wolves are afforded less protection than raccoons. Issues surrounding wolf recovery and management are often controversial and highly polarized due to people's attitudes toward or fear of the wolf, and also because of an abundance of inaccurate information.

Wolves are affored less protection than racoons

The wolf's image as a predator is the major reason it has been hunted, trapped and poisoned to near extinction. Wolves have been held responsible for declining deer, moose and caribou populations despite the fact that wolves and their prey have successfully lived side by side for thousands of years.

Stories such as Little Red Riding Hood and many of Aesop's Fables have not been kind to the wolf. Myths about wolf attacks and folklore about werewolves have greatly influenced public perception. Many stories depict the wolf as a voracious predator, killing anything that comes across its path.

Stories such as Little Red Riding Hood and many of Aesop's Fables have not been kind to the wolf.

These stories certainly influenced historical wolf-control legislation. In 1572 in Dole, France, a municipal law was passed to extend the hunting season and encourage the extermination of werewolves.[2] An "Act to Encourage the Destruction of Wolves and Bears" existed in Ontario circa 1793.[3] The last municipal wolf bounty in Ontario was only eliminated in 1991.

Photo: Jim Brandenburg

In order to help people lose their fear of coexisting with wolves, the myths of the Big Bad Wolf must be dispelled. Predators fulfill an indispensable role in the ecosystem by keeping prey populations in check, ensuring that the fittest survive. Wolves also keep herds of caribou and other ungulates on the move, thereby protecting habitat from the destruction of overgrazing. When a wolf takes down a deer or a moose, ravens, eagles, wolverines and bears all share in the feast. According to biologist Robert Crabtree who conducted studies in Yellowstone National Park, USA, reintroducing wolves to the park resulted in an explosion of species richness.[4]

[1] Mike Buss and Maria de Almeida. 1997. A review of wolf and coyote status and policy in Ontario. Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. Fish and Wildlife Branch. December. p 24.

[2] Robert H. Busch. 1995. The Wolf Almanac. Fitzhenry & Whiteside. Markham.

[3] Douglas H. Pimlott. 1961. Wolf control in Ontario - past, present and future. Presented at the Twenty Fifth Federal-Provincial Wildlife Conference. Ottawa, Ontario. June 15 and 16.

[4] Jim Robbins. 1998. Wolves change an ecosystem. *Zoogoer*. May/June. http://www.fonz.org/zoogoer

Wolves: Threatened Globally

Wolves used to be the most widely distributed group of terrestrial mammals found in the Northern Hemisphere, inhabiting much of North America, Europe and Asia wherever there were abundant prey populations. Unfortunately wolves were also the most misunderstood mammals and because of this, were heavily persecuted through predator control programs.

Wolves are now extinct in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Great Britain, Ireland, Switzerland and the Netherlands. They no longer exist on 95% of their former range in the United States.[5] The remaining populations have been significantly reduced. Wolves are highly endangered in Sweden, Norway, Finland, Greenland, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Egypt, Lebanon, India, Italy, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, and in Mexico there may be as few as 10 wolves left.[6] For this reason, wolves have been classified as a 'vulnerable' species by the World Conservation Union (WCU). The WCU's definition of 'vulnerable' is "a species that is likely to become endangered in the near future if the causal factors of its decline continue to operate." In the lower 48 American states, the Gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) is protected under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

Wolves have been extirpated from the Canadian prairies, the maritime provinces and the southern regions of Ontario and Quebec due to changes in the landscape and peoples' efforts to exterminate them. Wolves ceased to exist in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick as of 1870 and in Newfoundland as of 1911.[7] When the bison were extirpated from the prairies in the early 1900's, the wolves went with them.

Wolves have been persecuted through poisoning, snaring, shooting and habitat destruction.

The total wolf population in Canada has been estimated between 50,000 and 65,000.[8] World-renowned wolf researcher, John Theberge, believes 14% of the country's wolf population is killed every year: approximately 8,000 animals.[9]

Photo: John & Mary Theberge

The Status of Wolves in Ontario

There are two species of wolves in Ontario: The Gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) and the Eastern Canadian wolf (*Canis lycaon*). The Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), which is responsible for wildlife management issues in Ontario, has estimated that there are between 8,000 and 9,000 wolves in the province.[10] However no reliable survey method has ever been employed.

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[5] Busch. p. 16.

[6] J.R. Ginsberg and D.W. MacDonald. 1990. Table 6: Current Status of Wolves in North America. *In* Foxes, wolves, jackals, and dogs: an action plan for the conservation of canids. IUCN/SSC Canid Specialist Group. Gland, Switzerland. p. 37-38.

[7] Monte Hummel and Sherry Pettigrew. 1991. Wild Hunters: Predators in Peril. Key Porter Books. Toronto, Ontario. p. 109.

[8] Ibid. p. 110.

[9] Ibid. p. 114.

[10] Buss and de Almeida. p. 3.

The following is the MNR's response to Earthroots' request for studies substantiating their wolf population estimate:

"As is the case in most jurisdictions, a variety of information was used to establish the Ontario population estimate of 8,000-10,000 wolves. Wolf density data from capture-mark-recapture research studies conducted in the Parry Sound area and Algonquin Provincial Park area by Ontario scientists such as Doug Pimlott and George Kolenosky provided density estimates for these areas of one wolf per 26 km^2. This estimate was extrapolated across the wolf range, taking in account the variability in habitat and prey across this large area. Reports from trappers and other field observations, prey density trends, and information on wolf densities from scientific literature were used to assess the estimate. The ministry recognizes that the estimate of the size of the provincial wolf population is an approximation." [11]

Research conducted in the 1940s-1960s led Doug Pimlott to estimate the maximum Ontario wolf population at 10,000.[12] At this time Pimlott and other researchers agreed that the average density of timber wolves in Ontario was much lower than one wolf per 26 km^2.

The provincial estimate is a huge extrapolation based on only two regional studies conducted over 40 years ago. Though wolf territory has been subsequently degraded by large-scale clearcuts, mineral extraction, roads and highway extensions, the MNR continues to assure the public that the status of wolves has remained unchanged.

A letter signed by Ontario Minister of Natural Resources John Snobelen, states:

"*The distribution of wolves throughout Ontario has remained largely unchanged since the end of the nineteenth-century. Wolves occupy forested areas throughout most of Ontario, from the southern edge of the Pre-Cambrian Canadian Shield north into Hudson's Bay Lowlands. At the provincial level, the wolf population is estimated at 8,000-10,000 animals and is considered healthy.*" [13]

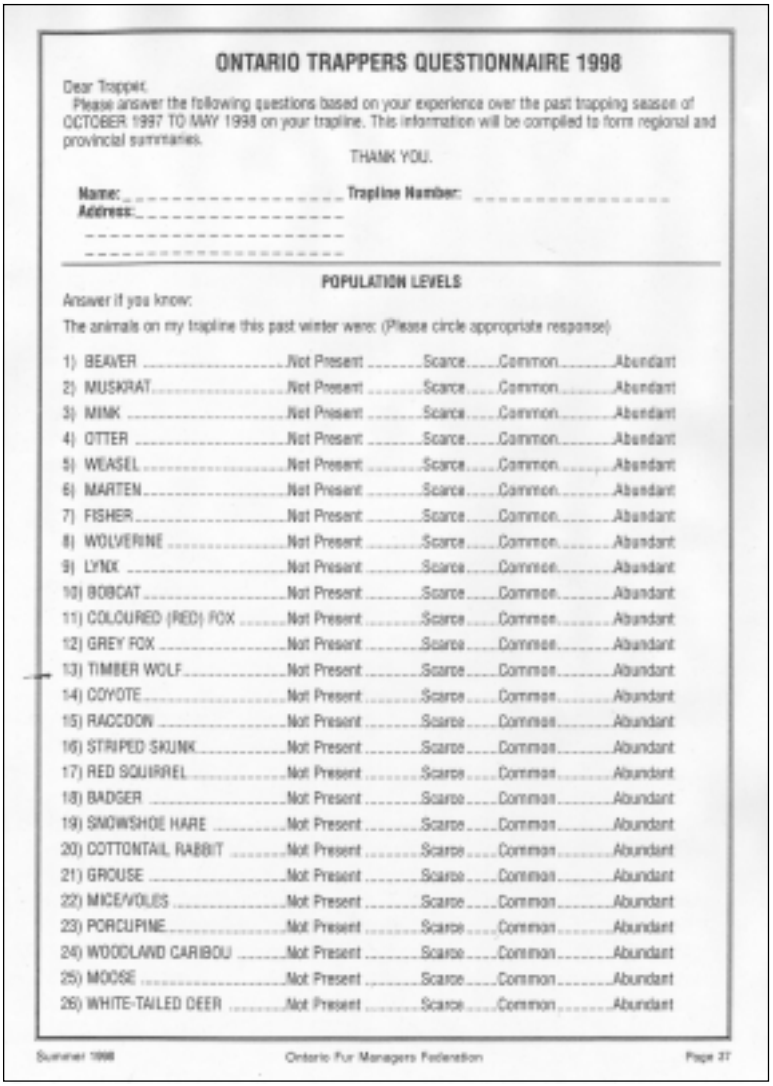
The only recent investigation on the provincial status of wolves was conducted through surveys sent to MNR district offices and filled out by hunters and trappers in 1993. The following table is a section of these results:

	# hunters or groups	Estimated Harvest/Year	Map	Hunt Camp Questionn.	Method	Status	
						wolf	coyote
Almagain	5 groups	25	yes	yes	moose surveys	stable to increasing	stable to increasing
Muskoka							
Pembroke							
Mountain River	10 groups	125	yes	yes	N?A	increasing	increasing
Madawaska							
Champlain							
Sault Ste. Marie							
St. Mary's	Unknown	Unknown	yes - private and farmlands east of Sault	yes	N/A	decrease Sta→Ga	increasing
Ranger Lake							
Ogidaki							
North Channel	1 wolf outfitter = 2-4 hunters	1	yes - southern 2/3 of WMU 41	yes	N/A	stable (mange)	high (mange)
Hinckler			yes	yes			
Kindiogami			yes	yes			
Sudbury							
Espanola/North Shore	8 hunters	15-20 coyotes	agricultural land along Hwy 17	none	N/A	stable (peaked)	stable (peaked)
Greater Sudbury	N/A	N/A	none	none	N/A	present	increasing
Lower Spanish Espanola	none 1 bear operator	10-15 wolves	Yes	none	N/A	stable to increasing	
Manitoulin	1 group = 6-10 hunters	10-15 coyotes	west end of Manitoulin	none	N/A		stable
Trout Lake	12	25-30	none	none	N/A	present	increasing

[11] Deborah Stetson. Letter to Earthroots. October 23, 2001.

[12] Pimlott. 1961.

[13] John Snobelen. Letter to Earthroots. January 11, 2001. (2000-03177-MIN)



ONTARIO TRAPPERS QUESTIONNAIRE 1998

Dear Trapper,
Please answer the following questions based on your experience over the past trapping season of OCTOBER 1997 TO MAY 1998 on your trapline. This information will be compiled to form regional and provincial summaries.

THANK YOU.

Name: _____ Trapline Number: _____
Address: _____

POPULATION LEVELS

Answer if you know:

The animals on my trapline this past winter were: (Please circle appropriate response)

1) BEAVER	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
2) MUSKRAT	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
3) MINK	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
4) OTTER	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
5) WEASEL	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
6) MARTEN	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
7) FISHER	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
8) WOLVERINE	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
9) LYNX	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
10) BOBCAT	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
11) COLOURED (RED) FOX	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
12) GREY FOX	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
13) TIMBER WOLF	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
14) COYOTE	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
15) RACCOON	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
16) STRIPED SKUNK	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
17) RED SQUIRREL	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
18) BADGER	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
19) SNOWSHOE HARE	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
20) COTTONTAIL RABBIT	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
21) GROUSE	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
22) MICE/VOLES	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
23) PORCUPINE	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
24) WOODLAND CARIBOU	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
25) MOOSE	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant
26) WHITE-TAILED DEER	Not Present	Scarce	Common	Abundant

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Information received from this survey led MNR Wildlife Biologists to conclude that the wolf population was "stable" or "increasing" in the majority of areas surveyed. The assumptions were based on the number of wolves seen during aerial moose and deer surveys but the vast majority of respondents stated that the method they used was "N/A". Some respondents even admitted that no method was used to calculate the status of wolves in the area. It is thus reasonable to conclude that the results of this survey were based largely on opinion.

A questionnaire printed in the Ontario Fur Managers Federation Magazine (see left) is supposed to provide the Ministry with reliable data to assess the status of the Ontario wolf population. The following is a summary of the results published in the summer of 1999 from a survey to which only 6.4% of all licensed trappers in the province responded:

"Wolf – generally common in the 3 most northern regions, scarce to common in the northeastern and Algonquin region and absent to scarce in the remaining regions. Populations generally considered stable." [14]

One of the reasons why we don't know how many wolves there are in this province is because of the difficulty of coordinating a comprehensive study. Capture-mark-recapture studies and radio telemetry are expensive, intrusive and time-consuming. Wolves are hard to track down and it is difficult to estimate their numbers over a large area as they are not evenly distributed throughout the province. The accuracy of population estimates is also compromised by the difficulty in distinguishing between different species of wolves, coyotes and hybrids.

However, population numbers alone are not the sole indicator for the long-term viability of a species. All factors affecting the ecological integrity of the wolf's habitat and the status of prey species, along with factors influencing the social integrity of the wolf pack must be considered.

As noted conservationist and wolf researcher, Doug Pimlott once said, "the management of any species can only be as good as our background knowledge of that species."[15]

Population numbers alone are not the sole indicator for the long-term viability of a species.

The Status of Ontario's Protected Areas

While the accuracy of the government's population assessment can be argued, the fact that wolves are safe from bullets, traps and snares on only 3% of their range is enough reason to be concerned.

Wolves are safe from bullets, traps and snares on only 3% of their range.

There are 280 Provincial Parks in Ontario: each is classified as either a Nature Reserve, Wilderness, Natural Environment, Waterway, Historical or Recreation Park. These categories reflect the landscape features and the ecological significance of the area. However, there is an increasing trend to ignore the classification scheme in terms of the activities that are allowed to occur within the park's boundaries.

[14] Ontario Ministry of Natural of Natural Resources. 1999. Trapper's questionnaire results. Ontario Fur Managers Federation. Summer. Volume 4, Number 1. p. 23-24.

[15] Douglas H. Pimlott. 1961. Wolf control, management and research in Ontario. Paper presented at Conference Workshop in Algonquin Park, Ontario. Research Department, Ontario Department of Lands and Forests. September. p. 11.

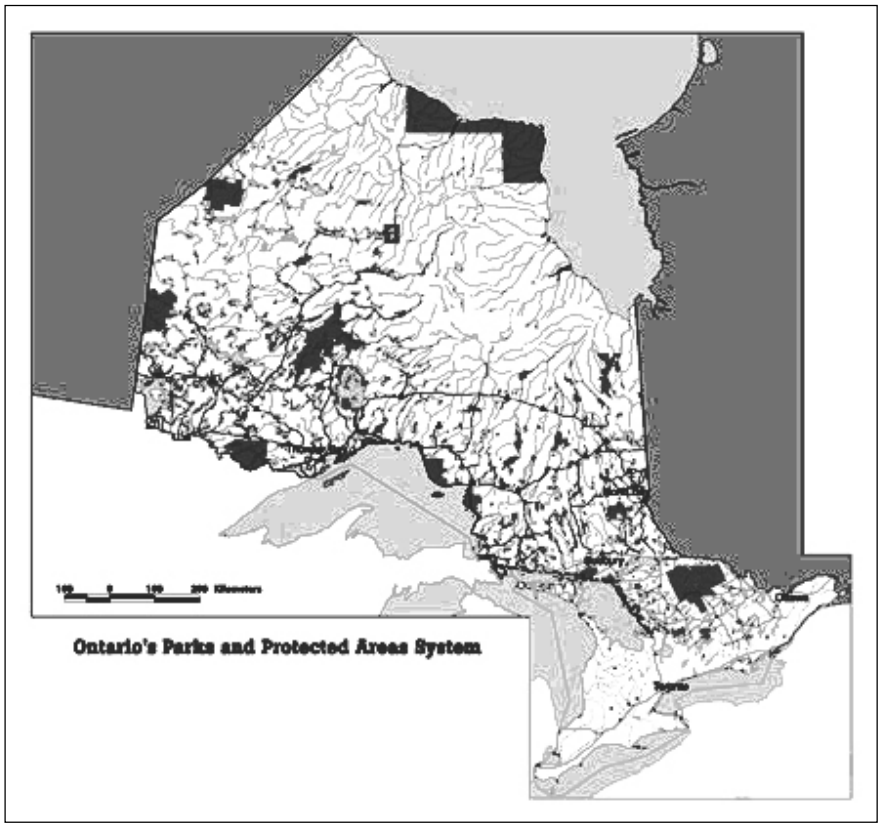
Wolves have large territories, and are capable of covering 75 km per day, requiring large, contiguous areas of unspoiled wilderness to survive. Theberge has estimated that an area of at least 500 km^2 is needed to ensure the viability of a wolf population.[16] This is the approximate area of Isle Royal National Park on Lake Superior where wolf-prey relationships, uninterrupted by hunters and trappers, have been the subject of long-term research. It is the smallest isolated area recognized for supporting a sustainable Gray wolf population.

Wolves have large territories, and are capable of covering 75 km per day, requiring large, contiguous areas of unspoiled wilderness to survive.

According to Theberge, there are only four areas in Ontario, protected from hunting and trapping, that are large enough to support a sustainable population of wolves. These include just 2 Provincial Parks: Algonquin and Lake Superior, and 2 Game Preserves: Chapleau and Nipissing. These total a mere 3% of protected sanctuary within the wolf's range.

Outside of the few Provincial Parks and Game Preserves that protect wolves, it is virtually a year-round season for hunting and trapping wolves and there are no bag limits or quotas to regulate this.

Ontario's protected areas are islands with no protected corridors joining them to each other. Habitat fragmentation exposes wolves to human-induced killing. When protected areas are broken up by human development or other disturbances, it facilitates access into previously remote areas. Increased road development or more frequent use of existing roads often leads to higher hunting and trapping activity in the area. The potential for more vehicle collisions with wildlife also increases. According to research noted by the MNR, wolf populations diminish or cease to exist in areas with road densities exceeding 0.58 km/km^2.[17]



Ontario's Living Legacy

In March 1999, the Ontario Government announced *Ontario's Living Legacy* (OLL) - a plan to create 378 new protected areas in the province, which equates to two million hectares of Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves. Unfortunately, the vast majority of these areas are protected in name only. All but 13 protected areas allow sport hunting and nearly half of the newly protected areas have mine claims staked in them. To add to these threats, snowmobile and all-terrain vehicle clubs are aggressively lobbying for more access in protected areas.

If we cannot provide a healthy environment for wolves in our parks, where can we?

[16] John Theberge. 1991. Ecological classification, status, and management of the Gray wolf, *Canis lupus*, in Canada. *Can. Field. Nat*. 105(4): 459-463.
[17] Buss and de Almeida. p. 11-17.

The Plight of the Algonquin Wolf

Algonquin became Canada's first Provincial Park in 1893. With an area of 7,600 km^2, it provides the largest protected habitat for the Eastern Canadian wolf. Presently, 78% of the park is open to logging.[18]

Doug Pimlott, former Director of Environmental Studies at Innis College, Toronto and one of Canada's foremost conservationists, began wolf research in Algonquin Provincial Park in 1959. The research was continued by John and Mary Theberge in 1987, making it the longest, most intensive wolf study in Canada. The Theberges studied these wolves for 14 years and are considered the eminent experts on the Algonquin wolves' ecology.

The Theberges used radio telemetry to locate and track the park's wolf packs. They learnt about predator-prey relationships, the distance the average park wolf travelled while hunting, how wolves behave when confronted by people as well as how people behave when confronted by wolves.

Photo: John & Mary Theberge

From 1899-1959 Park Rangers were killing 55 wolves per year (or 18% of the population) in order to increase the already abundant number of deer.[19] Though killing wolves within the park became illegal after 1959, wolves that crossed over the park boundaries were frequently shot or snared.[20]

Since the mid-1960's the wolf population residing in the eastern half of the park has been cut in half – there may be only 150 wolves left.[21] Still, wolves were being killed primarily because of their role as a predator of deer and competitor with human sport hunters. MNR Hunting Activity Reports have indicated that on average, 33 wolves are killed each year in Central Ontario (Eastern Canadian wolf's range) during moose and deer hunting season.[22] These kills are defined by the MNR as opportunistic encounters. However incidents such as these (where wolves are killed to enhance sport hunting opportunities) are often not reported.

The Theberges' research team discovered that a significant number of wolves, were being killed within the townships of Hagarty, Richards and Burns. Snared wolves were found just outside of the park boundaries; the vast majority near Round Lake, a popular deer-wintering area. It was calculated that humans were directly responsible for two thirds of all wolf mortality.[23] During the winter of 1986-87, 29 wolves were killed by just one hunter in the Round Lake area.[24]

Although the wolf packs in the east side of the park were more intensely studied, the Theberges found that wolves were travelling from all regions of the park to get to the Round Lake deer yard, where the highest levels of wolf killing were occurring (41%).[25] Half of the wolf packs in the park have territories that extend beyond park boundaries. It was evident that the park wolf population was not self-sustaining and a political decision to protect these wolves was needed.

Geneticists Discover Algonquin Wolves are a Distinct Species

As the Theberges were discovering the factors affecting the declining wolf population, geneticists were discovering something else about the park wolves. Mitochondrial DNA samples from wolves in Algonquin Park, other parts of Ontario and

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[18] Ontario Parks. 1998. Algonquin Park management plan. Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.

[19] Algonquin Wolf Advisory Group. 2000. The wolves of Algonquin Provincial Park - a report to the Honourable John C. Snobelen. December. p. 8.

[20] G. Kolenosky, J. Shannon and R. Standfield. 1964. Some facts about predator research and management in Ontario. A progress report on the results of research on timber wolves and coyotes. Research Branch. Ontario Department of Lands and Forests.

[21] John Theberge. 2000. An Ecologist's Perspective on Wolf Recovery in the Northeastern United States. *In* J. Elder (ed), The Return of the Wolf: Reflections on the Future of Wolves in the Northeast. Middlebury College Press. London. p. 42.

[22] Buss and de Almeida. p. 39.

[23] John Theberge and Mary Theberge. 2000. The Algonquin Park Wolf Population 1987 to 1999. Data display and analysis related to species conservation and management in and around Algonquin Provincial Park. University of Waterloo, Ontario. p. 67.

[24] Graham Forbes and John Theberge. 1995. Influences of a migratory deer herd on wolf movements and mortality in and near Algonquin Park, Ontario. *In* L.N. Carbyn, S.H. Fritts and D.R. Seip (eds), Ecology and Conservation of Wolves in a Changing World. Canadian Circumpolar Institute. Edmonton, Alberta. Occasional publication (35):303-313.

[25] Ibid. p. 303.

the United States were being analyzed and compared. A team of 15 geneticists and wolf biologists, including the Theberges assessed the laboratory results and published their findings in the Canadian Journal of Zoology (Volume 78). They concluded that the Algonquin wolf, previously known as *Canis lupus lycaon* is actually not a subspecies of the Gray wolf *(Canis lupus)* but is a distinct species. They also concluded that the wolves in Algonquin Park share a common evolutionary history to the highly endangered Red wolves *(Canis rufus)* in the southeastern United States. The scientists proposed that the wolves in Algonquin Park be referred to as Eastern Canadian wolves *(Canis lycaon)*.[26] Though the MNR has acknowledged the new genetic evidence they have not yet officially accepted the new taxonomic classification for this wolf.

Due to the occurrence of coyote-wolf hybridization, the park wolves are the purest remaining population of Red wolves in the world.

The expected range of the Eastern Canadian wolf is across central Ontario, stretching from Timmins to Haliburton, coinciding with the northern limits for deer. Algonquin Park is the largest area where these wolves are protected. Due to the lower occurrence of coyote-wolf hybridization, the park wolves are the purest remaining population of Red wolves in the world. This discovery makes the declining park wolf population a significant biodiversity issue and increases the urgency for an Algonquin wolf protection plan.

Political Response

In 1993, the Ministry of Natural Resources closed the hunting and trapping season for wolves in three townships adjacent to the east side of the park (Hagarty, Richards and Burns) between December 15th and March 31st. Wolves could still be killed during the spring and summer when pups are being raised and during the fall when hunting activity is the highest. Though the annual mortality rate dropped after the ban was implemented, it still exceeded 25% and caused a decline in the park wolf population.[27]

Photo: John & Mary Theberge

In 1998, John Snobelen, the Minister of Natural Resources, directed the newly created Algonquin Wolf Advisory Group (AWAG) to recommend a long term Adaptive Management Plan. The group included members of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, the Ontario Fur Management Federation, Algonquin Park biologists, MNR biologists, the Federation of Ontario Naturalists and John Theberge. The main purpose of the Adaptive Management Plan was to reduce human-caused mortality.

On January 15th 2001, AWAG announced their recommendations. A full year round closure for hunting and trapping wolves was *only recommended for 4 of the 39 townships* immediately surrounding Algonquin Provincial Park. These townships: Finlayson, McClintock, Livingstone and Airy, border the southern gates of the park. Killing the wolves within these townships would affect the success of the popular public wolf howl.

On November 6th, 2001, Minister Snobelen announced a 30-month moratorium on the hunting and trapping of wolves in all of the 39 townships. The moratorium went into effect on December 20th, 2001.

The year-round closure goes beyond what the Minister's advisory committee had recommended and increases the size of area for wolf conservation by 50%. However, the length of the moratorium is not long enough to reverse the negative population trend. The moratorium is set to automatically expire after 30 months. Unfortunately this decision is not based on the principle of conservation biology but rather on political expediency.

[26] Paul J. Wilson, Sonya Grewal, Ian D. Lawford, Jennifer N.M. Heal, Angela G. Granacki, David Pennock, John B. Theberge, Mary T. Theberge, Dennis R. Voigt, Will Waddell, Robert E. Chambers, Paul C. Paquet, Gloria Goulet, Dean Cluff, Bradley N. White. 2000. DNA profiles of the Eastern Canadian wolf and the Red wolf provide evidence of a common evolutionary history independent of the Gray wolf. *Canadian Journal of Zoology.* 78: 2156-2166.

[27] John Theberge and Mary Theberge. 1999. Conserving the Gray wolf in Ontario: A different view. *Global Biodiversity* 8(4). Canadian Museum of Nature. Ottawa, Ontario. p. 21.

Earthroots remains concerned about the enforcement of the moratorium. As it is difficult to distinguish between a coyote, an Eastern Canadian wolf and a wolf-coyote hybrid, there is a high risk for accidental wolf killings. Since the snare is a very non-selective trapping device, snares set for other animals could potentially kill Algonquin wolves. As long as it is permissible to kill coyotes or set snares in the new protection zone, the Algonquin wolves will remain at risk during the 30-month moratorium.

Hunting and trapping coyotes and the setting of snares must be prohibited in the protection zone. These measures would make the wolf killing prohibition enforceable. For instance, poachers would not be able to escape penalties by claiming they mistook the protected wolf for an unprotected coyote. These measures would also reduce the likelihood of true accidents.

Coyote *(Canis latrans)*

Gray wolf *(Canis lupus)*

Impact of Algonquin Wolf Protection on Sport Hunting

Photo: Thomas Kitchin

One of the main reasons why wolves are being killed outside of Algonquin Park and elsewhere in Ontario is because they are blamed by some sport hunters for declining deer populations.

There has been no evidence to suggest that the Algonquin Park deer populations are currently in decline, though harsh winters in 1958-1959 and 1970-1971 caused more than 60% of Ontario's deer herds to die of starvation.[28] [29] Despite concern over declining deer herds, during the Fall 2000 Hunting Season, 4,275 permits were issued to sport hunters for killing *antlerless* deer in the Algonquin Park Region.[30]

Wolves eat whatever they can catch, which is usually the sick, young or weak animals or healthy animals disadvantaged by the weather conditions or other environmental factors. Contrary to popular belief, wolves only kill 10% of what they chase.[31] What Algonquin Park wolves eat varies with the season and availability of prey. While deer is a common food source in the winter, beaver is the major component of the wolf's diet during the rest of the year. After analyzing wolf scats for over a decade, John and Mary Theberge have concluded that beaver, moose and deer each comprise one third of the Algonquin wolf's diet.[32]

Wolves usually eat sick, young or weak animals and, contrary to popular belief, wolves only kill 10% of what they chase.

[28] Paul Paquet and J. Vucetich. 2000. The demographic population viability of Algonquin wolves. Prepared for the Algonquin Wolf Advisory Committee.

[29] Graham J. Forbes and John B. Theberge. 1996. Response by wolves to prey variation in central Ontario. *Can. J. Zool.* (74). p. 1512.

[30] The number of deer (antlerless and antlered) taken during the fall 2000 hunting season.

*WMU sites are divisions of the province used by the MNR for regional wildlife mgmt.

WMU 54 (Livingston, McClintock, SW side of Park) - 443 deer/year

WMU 55B (SE of Park: Hagarty, Richards and Burns townships, Round Lake) - 380 deer/year

WMU 55A (Whitney in Airy township) - 293 deer/year

WMU 48 (townships north of the park) - 289 deer /year

WMU 50 (West side of Park) - 184 Antlerless deer/year (no info for extrapolating Antlered Harvest)

WMU 59 (Eastern side of Park, along the Ottawa River right down to Arnprior) - 1133 deer/year

* statistics were received from the corresponding District MNR offices and Table : Extrapolated Deer Harvest Estimates and Standard Error. District Deer Questionnaire Postcard Survey – 2000 Hunt: Final Report prepared by Bracebridge Ministry of Natural Resources.

[31] Doug Pimlott. 1993. Wolf. L.N. Carbyn (ed). Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada.

[32] Theberge and Theberge. 2000. p. 35.

Impact of Algonquin Wolf Protection on Algonquin Area Farmers

Photo: Melissa Tkachyk

The problem of livestock depredation in the Algonquin Park region, though a minor one, needs to be addressed. Some farmers in Chisholm Township, which borders the northwestern section of Algonquin Park believe Algonquin wolves are killing their sheep.

There are 6 counties that border Algonquin Park: Nipissing, Parry Sound, Muskoka, Haliburton, Hastings and Renfrew. According to an analysis submitted to the Algonquin Wolf Advisory Group by researcher Euguene Fytche, Renfrew and Hastings have a significant livestock industry. In 1996, a total of 61 cattle and 163 sheep were killed or injured by wild predators the 6 counties combined.[33] Unfortunately, these statistics do not distinguish between wolves and coyotes. As well, the numbers represent incidences that have occurred throughout the entire county and not just within the townships bordering the park; Hastings County extends all the way to Lake Ontario and is predominantly coyote territory.

Endangered Species Protection

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) is a National Committee with representatives from the federal and provincial governments, private agencies and individual experts. The committee assesses the status of species at risk, using the following classifications:

Extinct: A species that no longer exists

Extirpated: A species that no longer exists in the wild in Canada, but occurs elsewhere.

Endangered: A species facing imminent extirpation or extinction.

Threatened: A species that is likely to become endangered if limiting factors are not reversed.

Special Concern: A species of special concern because of characteristics that make it particularly sensitive to human activities or natural events.

Not At Risk: A species that has been evaluated and found to be not at risk.

Data Deficient: A species for which there is insufficient scientific information to support status designation.

On May 3rd, 2001 COSEWIC listed the Eastern Canadian wolf as a S*pecies of Special Concern*. Unfortunately the list has no legal influence since there is, as of yet, no federal act protecting endangered species. The Committee On the Status of Species At Risk in Ontario (COSSARO) exists within the Ontario Parks Branch of the MNR. Though the Committee recognizes the Eastern Canadian wolf as *Vulnerable* (equivalent to COSEWIC's designation of *Species of Special Concern*) they have not yet made this designation official.

Earthroots will continue to pressure the MNR to protect Eastern Canadian wolves throughout their entire geographical range in accordance with the Ontario Endangered Species Act, until there is scientific evidence proving that this species is no longer at risk.

Since the Gray wolf is listed on the International Species at Risk List, a special permit is required to export dead or alive gray wolves or any articles made from them. The Gray wolf is not listed by COSSARO.

Photo: John & Mary Theberge

[33] Eugene Fytche. 2000. Table 3: Predation statistics in six counties/districts. (OMAFRA statistics on compensation grant payments) Livestock in the area surrounding Algonquin Park. Fytche Enterprises, Almonte, Ontario.

Public Wolf Howls

"For many wildlife enthusiasts, to look into the eyes of a wolf, or to hear it cry from a distance is to experience the thrill of touching another world, a world where wildness still exists." [34]
- Matthew A. Wilson

Howling is the glue that keeps the wolf pack together. Each wolf has a characteristic howl that other pack members can recognize. Since wolves travel such vast distances, the howl facilitates communication among pack members. Wolves are careful about where and when they howl, so as not to make their presence known to other wolf packs that may threaten their territorial rights. Some researchers have analyzed different wolf howls and related the pitches to different characteristics and messages.

Since wolves travel such vast distances, the howl facilitates communication among pack members.

A rendez-vous site is usually a flat, dry area near a water source where wolves return to sleep. Wolves are less hesitant to howl within their rendez-vous site and the other well-known areas as opposed to less secure surroundings. Wolf pups are not very cautious and will howl at just about anything. Pups are often left at rendez-vous sites for longer periods of time during the late summer. This is why public wolf howls are most successful in August.

No one can deny that the busiest night in Algonquin Park is on the eve of the public wolf howl. Doug Pimlott was the first to learn that wolves respond to a human imitation of their call. His discovery significantly improved wolf research as the location of packs could be determined just by hearing them. This led to the conception of public wolf howl events, the most successful ecotourist attraction to the park. The event is scheduled to occur every Thursday evening in August.

Public wolf howls have attracted more than 100,000 visitors to Algonquin Park since they first took place in 1963.[35] The large public turn out at these events is evidence that the wolf remains a significant feature of Canadian wilderness. On the evening of a public wolf howl, as many as 1,600 people have waited in silent anticipation to hear wolves respond to an imitated call. Though they are not guaranteed to hear the wild howl, let alone catch a glimpse of a wolf, visitors come from across the province and beyond, intrigued by the awesome potential.

Public wolf howls have attracted more than 100,000 visitors to Algonquin Park since they first took place in 1963.

The ecotourist benefits of the public wolf howl are significant in terms of aiding in increased wolf protection. When the Algonquin Wolf Advisory Group proposed a full year-round closure on hunting and trapping wolves in only four townships bordering Algonquin Park, it was due to their proximity and thus importance to the popular public wolf howl. (Note: Minister Snobelen went beyond the recommendations proposed by AWAG and implemented a full ban in 39 townships). Though the local economic benefits derived from the Algonquin wolf howl have not been assessed, the benefits of wolf-ecotourism in the U.S. have been.

Total tourist expenditures in Ely, Minnesota, which are directly attributable to the International Wolf Centre amount to approximately US $725,000.[36] Wolf ecotourists represent a unique population but are part of a much larger trend towards increasing non-consumptive wildlife use. A large and growing segment of Ontarians are actively pursuing wildlife viewing as a form of outdoor recreation, an activity that is steadily outpacing traditional forms of interaction with wildlife such as hunting and fishing. Of course, the benefits of any wilderness activity must be weighed against the negative impacts on the wilderness character of the landscape.

Photo: Jean-Luc Schmitt

[34] Matthew A. Wilson. 1995. The human dimensions of wolf ecotourism in North America. Departments of Sociology and Rural Sociology. University of Wisconsin. Madison, Wisconsin.
[35] Dan Strickland. 1997. Wolf howling in Algonquin Provincial Park. Algonquin Park Tech. Bull. No. 3. The Friends of Algonquin Park, Whitney, Ont.
[36] David T. Schaller. 1995. The Ecocenter as tourist attraction: Ely and the International Wolf Center. Dept. of Geography, University of Minnesota.

Human Safety

Although wolves certainly possess the ability to kill humans, there has never been a documented case of a healthy wild wolf killing a human in North America

Although wolves certainly possess the ability to kill humans, there has never been a documented case of a healthy wild wolf killing a human in North America. Non-socialized wolves are instinctively afraid of humans. Researchers have approached den sites where adult wolves were guarding the pups and the wolves have run away.

There have been a few cases where "fearless" wolves were encountered in Algonquin Park. In most cases, the wolf was seen as being curious rather than aggressive. Half a million people go through Algonquin Park every year. Only a few hear wolves, let alone see them. In the past, any fearless wolf found in the park was killed immediately. Some have speculated that once it became illegal to kill wolves within the park, fearless wolves were able to survive and pass on this characteristic to their offspring. The other speculation is that unwanted wolf-dog hybrids released in the area were responsible for these rare experiences.

There is always the speculation that problem or fearless wolves have rabies. Though common among raccoons and foxes, rabies is rare among wolves. There have been reports about rabid wolves in the Cochrane area during January and February 2001; these wolves were found and shot.

Wolf-dogs

Breeding wolves or wolf-dog hybrids for pets in Ontario is prohibited but unregulated. Many people who buy wolf-dogs as pets, do not research or understand the amount of care they require. Hybrids are very social and demand a serious commitment. When the wolf-dog hybrid reaches sexual maturity (usually at 2-3 years of age), they will try to exert their dominance over their human caretakers or other animals, an instinct purposefully bred out of domesticated dogs. Wolf-dogs should never be released into the wild because they lack the necessary survival skills , which in turn leads them to search for "easier" food sources. Furthermore their release threatens the genetic purity and social integrity of all healthy wild wolf packs. Unfortunately, few wolf-dog owners have the patience to care for them and few sanctuaries accept those that are unwanted.

Livestock Depredation

When wolves kill livestock, they are seen to have overstepped the boundaries of legitimate predation. The risk of livestock depredation is the reason why many wolf populations no longer exist in Europe and throughout much of the United States today. Scandinavian countries, where there are very few wolves left, are pushing the wolf to the brink of extinction in order to protect livestock. The Norwegian government spent more than $35,000 for each wolf killed during the month of February 2001 due to complaints that wolves were preying on livestock and would remain a constant threat unless the government intervened.[37] However, wolves were responsible for only 2.6% of all livestock mortality in the region. Scandinavian environmental groups have estimated that there are less than 30 wolves left in Norway.

Photo: Melissa Tkachyk

Farmers in Ontario can legally hunt and trap wolves without a licence under Section 31 of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act. There is no requirement to report wolves killed in defence of one's property unless the pelt is sold commercially, in which case a special licence is needed. Ontario farmers receive compensation for any farm animal killed or injured by a wild predator under the Livestock, Poultry and Honey Bee Protection Act. Payments are based on the type of animal that was killed or injured, the weight or age and the current market price.

[37] Reuters Newswire. Lone wolf survives controversial Norway hunt. April 6, 2001.

The following chart shows the compensation claims paid for by the Ontario government for injured or dead livestock due to attacks by wolves and coyotes.

NUMBER AND VALUE OF CLAIMS PAID FOR 15 FISCAL YEARS (April 1 – March 31): [38]

Year	# of claims paid	# of Farm Animals killed/injured by coyotes & wolves	Amount
1986/1987	776	1432	$193,296
1987/1988	805	1397	$202,051
1988/1989	1088	2076	$319,062
1989/1990	1352	2409	$368,363
1990/1991	1450	no data	$450,408
1991/1992	2441	4498	$676,450
1992/1993	2624	4419	$729,332
1993/1994	1878	3085	$544,649
1994/1995	2214	3738	$684,076
1995/1996	2436	3800	$793,194
1996/1997	2428	3685	$735,100
1997/1998	2008	2985	$654,500
1998/1999	1580	2890	$505,985
1999/2000	2147	3759	$578,392
2000/2001	1664	2825	$509,263

According to researcher Eugene Fytche, livestock depredation in Ontario is mostly a concern in the counties that occur between Simcoe and Lake Ontario, where coyote density is high and wolves exist in low densities or do not exist at all.[39] Other problems such as weather hazards, disease and birthing difficulties account for a greater percentage of livestock losses in Ontario than that caused by wild predators.

Livestock depradation in Ontario is mostly a concern where coyote density is high and wolves exist in low densities or do not exist at all.

Valuers sent out to assess the predation problem are not required to distinguish between wolf and coyote attacks. Furthermore, because losses attributed to feral or domestic dogs are the responsibility of the municipality, there is reason to believe that some of these attacks are falsely reported to the province as a "wolf or coyote problem".

Predators have distinctive killing styles so a trained authority could determine whether the predator is a coyote, wolf or other animal by examining the carcass. It is necessary to determine what predator is the source of the problem before deciding on future protective measures. Coyotes kill by strangulation and/or by severing the jugular vein. They attack the throat, leaving puncture wounds below the lower jaw.

In a typical wolf attack on cattle, the first bites are at the base of the tail. The second and third bites are in the flanks, generally both sides. Wolves have a natural ability to spot the slightest weakness in their prey.

Dogs tend to run through a flock, maiming as many animals as they can catch. Animals that are not maimed or killed may be in shock from being chased. The victims often carry multiple wounds, and frequently little of the animal is eaten.

Coyotes, adapting well to human activity, have claimed much of the wolf's previous range.

Since wolves tend to shy away from humans, they are being pushed further north because of development. Coyotes, adapting well to human activity have claimed much of the wolf's previous range. Coyotes only entered Ontario in the early 1900's and have successfully expanded their habitat. This is directly attributable to wolves being pushed further north due to human encroachment and development. Given that the majority of Ontario's agricultural land lies south of the wolf's common range, livestock depredation is almost exclusively a coyote issue.

[38] Data compiled from Table 1; compensation statistics 1986/87 - 1997/98. Farm Assistance Programs Branch, OMAFRA., Personal Communications with Robin Chandra, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs March 2001, and Buss and de Almeida, Table 3. p. 47.

[39] Eugene Fytche. Letter to Earthroots. August 5, 2001.

An agency should be established to encourage proactive measures for reducing the likelihood of livestock depredation. Such measures should include:

1. Educating people about the difference between wolves and coyotes
2. Making the latest research on predation prevention accessible and affordable to farmers
3. Encouraging farmers to use non-lethal control mechanisms for predators.
4. Increasing compensation payment but only pay full amount if reasonable effort was made to prevent the situation from occurring.
5. Keeping an accurate record of the cause of livestock depredation by distinguishing between wolves, coyotes and dogs.
6. Keeping record of the number of wolves or coyotes killed out of property defence.

The following non-lethal predation prevention measures have been suggested by a variety of different sources (Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency, Ontario's Cattlemen's Association, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, The Animal Protection Institute and scientists and farmers who have been using these techniques for years):

NON-LETHAL CONTROL MEASURES FOR PREDATORS

- Guard animals.
- Stronger fences or fences with electric deterrents.
- Keeping sick, injured, or young animals inside.
- Repellents and frightening devices.
- Penning livestock at night or keeping animals close to residences and well-lit areas.
- Quick and proper disposal of garbage and dead farm animals.

The concept of "Predator Friendly" labelling is increasing in popularity across the United States. The labelling system recognizes farmers who coexist with native species under non-lethal predator management.

Wolf Bounties

Wolf bounties are financial incentives paid out by the provincial or municipal government for each wolf killed. The provincial bounty program began in 1793 and was rescinded in 1972 as there was no evidence that it was effective for controlling wolf populations and furthermore there was no evidence that there ever was a wolf "problem" in Ontario. Between 1925 and 1960, the Ontario government spent $1.6 million to eradicate wolves through the wolf bounty system, with an annual kill of 1,000 to 1,500 animals.[40] Municipal bounties were finally eliminated in 1991 and are now illegal according to the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act.

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Recently, some counties (Dundas, Glengarry and Stormont) sent resolutions to the Ontario government calling for a reinstitution of wolf bounties. Earthroots obtained the legal opinion of Lesli Bisgould, Canada's only animal welfare lawyer. She confirmed:

"Bounties are prohibited and both participants, s/he who pays the bounty and s/he who accepts it, are violating Ontario law" under Part II, Subsection 11 (1)e of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act. Bisgould also stated that no provisions were made to allow any exceptions to this prohibition, indicating the level of seriousness with which it is regarded.[41]

It is already legal to kill wolves in defence of property. There is no need for an economic incentive to do so. Issuing bounties does not prevent livestock depredation from reoccurring and may even make it worse. Wolf numbers often rebound following a wolf-control program. Exploited populations usually have larger litters to compensate for the increased mortality rates. When an entire pack is killed, coyotes or other wolf packs are quick to move into the vacant niche.

[40] Pimlott. 1961.

[41] Lesli Bisgould. Legal opinion for Earthroots. December 4, 2000.

Recreational Hunting

Photo: Earthroots files.

In Ontario, a small game licence, which costs $17, is needed to hunt wolves. This allows an Ontario resident to hunt game birds (other than wild turkey), game mammals (except bear, caribou, deer, elk, moose) and fur-bearing mammals (except badger, beaver, bobcat, fisher, lynx, marten, mink, muskrat, otter, red squirrel or wolverine). A non-resident small game licence costs $80.

Sport hunters are not required to report the number of wolves that they kill unless the pelt is sold commercially. It is a year-round open season for hunting wolves throughout most of Ontario except during the period between June 16th and August 31st in all regions north of the French and Mattawa Rivers when the small game licence used to hunt wolves is not valid. Wolves are protected only by default under this small restriction.

In the last 10 years, hunter success rates have increased due to technology and practices like baiting and scented lures. Killing one wolf can disrupt the social structure of the pack.

In the last 10 years, hunter success rates have increased due to technology and practices like baiting and scented lures. Killing one wolf can disrupt the social structure of the pack, particularly when a dominant individual dies, increasing the likelihood of lone wolves wandering outside of their normal territorial ranges. Without the rest of the pack to help them, lone wolves are less effective at taking down a large animal such as a deer or moose and could become a greater threat to farmers. Some wolf researchers, such as Gordon Haber say that the social integrity of the wolf pack is just as important, if not more important than the actual number of wolves to ensure a healthy population. [42]

High exploitation levels also have an effect on the fitness of the species. For instance, the Theberges discovered that some Algonquin park wolves were not reusing den and rendez-vous sites in successive generations. The rate of den re-use dropped to 13%.[43] They attributed this change to a loss in cultural heritage: with more adult wolves being shot or snared, less information was being passed on to other pack members thereby affecting their behaviour and ultimately their survival. In cases where an entire pack was killed, the vacant territory often became re-occupied by coyote-like hybrids.[44]

With more adult wolves being shot or snared, less information was being passed on to other pack members thereby affecting their behaviour and ultimately their survival


Photo: Art Wolfe

[42] Hummel and Pettigrew. p. 99.
[43] Theberge. 2000. p. 62.
[44] Theberge. 1999. p. 22.

Commercial Trapping

Wolves can be trapped 365 days of the year and there are no limits to how many wolves each licenced trapper can take. A Gray wolf with its head and claws still intact can fetch US $350 -$450 and is most often used for a rug.[45] The pelt is also used for trim on winter coats. The pelt of the Eastern Canadian wolf is worth much less, typically US $20-$30 due to its small size, colour variations and its resemblance to the coyote.[46] The fur is used as trim on winter coats. According to the MNR, "the incentive to trap wolves is often a result of the trappers' concern for the protection of prey (eg. beaver) that are impacted by wolf predation".[47]

There are approximately 16,000 trappers in Ontario, 19% of whom are native.[48] Only Ontario residents are permitted to trap animals. A licence to trap cost $37.45 and a second helper's license cost $16.05 in 2001. Fur dealers need a license to buy or sell pelts and to tan pelts at a cost of $40 in 2001.

Average earnings for a Canadian trapper range between $428.57- $1,062.50 /year. For many, trapping is a part-time job, supplementing income from other sources.[49]

The number of wolves killed every year for fur has fluctuated significantly over the last 30 years, ranging from over 1,200 pelts to less than 200.[50] On average, 4.5% of the wolf pelts harvested each year come from hunters with a small game licence.

Photo: Benoit Ayotte, CLAN

THE NUMBER OF WOLVES KILLED FOR THEIR PELT, AND THE AVERAGE PRICE OF THE PELT FROM 1989-2001 IN ONTARIO[51]

Year	Total Pelts Obtained	Avg. Price
2000-2001	423*	$82.41
1999-2000	576	$54.45
1998-1999	550	$56.21
1997-1998	473	$44.87
1996-1997	528	$74.68
1995-1996	451	$96.29
1994-1995	707	$38.10
1993-1994	798	$64.36
1992-1993	623	$55.21
1991-1992	569	$92.57
1990-1991	508	$81.74
1989-1990	291	$92.87

* does not include the number of pelts obtained by hunters

Before January 1st, 1999, pelts could not be marketed unless they had a seal of approval from the MNR. Sealing was supposed to be a way of ensuring accurate reporting of pelts, however Ministry staff were not always capable of differentiating the pelts of different species. There were not enough staff members to continue with the sealing process due to government cutbacks. Now it is up to trappers to voluntarily submit trapping records to the MNR. The fur dealers must also submit their purchasing records. If the numbers do not match, there may be evidence of false reporting. According to Chris Heydon, the Fur Program

[45] Mark Downey, North American Fur Auction House. Personal Communications. November 14, 2001.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Buss and de Almeida. p. 39.
[48] Milan Novak and Audie Skinner. 1993. Trap ownership and use in Ontario. Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. p. 2.
[49] David Lavigne. 1989. Canada's leghold leg-pull. *BBC Wildlife*. Vol. 7. No. 3.
[50] Buss and de Almeida. Figure 9- Gray wolves sealed by trappers in Ontario, 1971/72 to 1995/96. p. 37.
[51] Compilation of data obtained from Buss and de Almeida, Figure 9- Gray wolves sealed by trappers in Ontario, 1971/72 to 1995/96, p. 37 and Figure 12- Gray wolf and coyote pelts sealed by hunters, 1979/80 to 1995/96, p. 41. Chris Heydon, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. Personal Communications. December 20, 2001.

Biologist with the Ministry, there are approximately 10 convictions for false reporting each year.[52]

A major problem with fur harvest statistics is that they do not differentiate between Gray wolf pelts and the pelts of Eastern Canadian wolves (nationally recognized as a "species at risk"). This significantly weakens the MNR's ability to assess and monitor the status of the Eastern Canadian wolf.

Snaring

Photo: L.D. Rogers

The snare is a simple noose made of aircraft-grade steel cable used for trapping animals. It is designed to tighten as the animal pulls against it; a metal catch prevents it from loosening. The animal dies through strangulation. Snares frequently have to be replaced after a capture, bent out of shape by the animals that struggled to escape.

Though snare bans are in place in 15 American states, the United Kingdom and many regional jurisdictions throughout Canada, the manual neck snare is the predominant device used for trapping wolves in Ontario.

Photo: Melissa Tkachyk

Neck snares are the most common device used to *specifically* trap timber wolves. According to the *Summary of the 1994-1995 Provincial Trapper Survey*, "Trappers relied on neck snare sets in 92.9% of wolf sets."[53]

PERCENTAGE OF WOLVES KILLED BY ONTARIO TRAPPERS IN 1989-90 USING THE FOLLOWING METHODS:[54]

65.9% were caught in neck snares.
15.3% were caught in leghold traps.
19% were shot.

Since snares are quick and cheap to make, trappers often concentrate dozens in an area to catch as many animals as possible; a method known as "saturation snaring". A set of snares located around a piece of bait or a chemical lure along well-travelled wildlife paths can effectively trap an entire wolf pack and has the potential to decimate regional wolf populations. To further increase their chances, some trappers create enclosures using branches and vegetation and regularly leave bait within them. Closed snares will be placed along the pathways leading to the enclosure but when the wolves get accustomed to the site, the snares will be open and the trapping success rate will be high.

Snares are not selective trapping devices; they are difficult to locate, remain in place for years and will kill anything that gets caught in them, whether it be an endangered species or a domestic animal. An investigation of a two year wolf snaring program conducted by the Alaskan Department of Fish and Game between 1993 and 1995 exemplifies this. The study revealed that out of the 203 animals caught in wolf snares, 94 were not wolves. Nearly half of the animals caught were non-target species: 35 moose, 14 caribou, 26 red foxes, 10 coyotes, 4 golden eagles, 2 grizzly bears and 3 wolverines.[55] [56] In a video on snaring produced by a Saskatchewan trap manufacturer, foxes and dogs were mentioned as the animals unintentionally captured in neck snares.[57] Snares can potentially harm or kill endangered species. Accidental snaring was a major factor contributing to the endangerment of the Newfoundland pine marten. There may be only 300 pine marten left in Newfoundland. Twelve percent of radio-collared pine marten died as a result of snares set for snowshoe hares.[58]

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[52] Chris Heydon, Fur Biologist, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. Personal communications. March 7, 2001.

[53] Chris Heydon. Summary of the 1994-1995 provincial trapper survey. Ontario Fur Managers Federation. Spring. p. 46.

[54] Novak and Skinner. 1993. Table 1: Proportion of furbearers captured by 695 Ontario trappers, by the different harvesting methods, over a 12 month period from 1989 to 1990. p. 12.

[55] Gordon Haber. Personal communications. March 7, 2001.

[56] Alaska Wildlife Alliance. 1988. Non-target animals snared. *The Spirit*. Fall.

[57] Brahn Trapping Company. Snares: a coyote's worst nightmare. Brahn Trapping. Meacham, Saskatchewan.

[58] Wayne Barney, Forest Resources and Agrifoods, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. Personal communications. Wednesday, December 5, 2001. Information posted on website: "Modified Snaring Zones". http://www.gov.nf.ca/forest/wildlife/hnttrapfish/trpmngearea/nfld/snaring.htm

Ontario is at the Bottom of the Pack

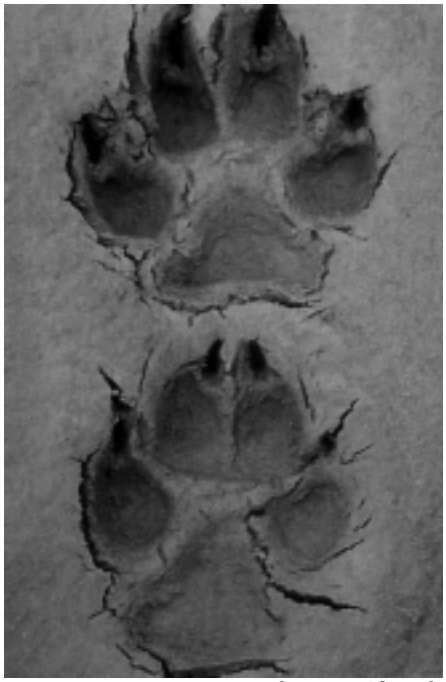

Photo: David Mech

Ontario is currently the worst jurisdiction in North America when it comes to wolf protection. This is an international embarrassment. The World Conservation Union has declared the wolf a vulnerable species due to its endangered and threatened status in many regions around the world. The provincial government must take a proactive role in wolf conservation if we are to ensure that the legacy of the wolf continues. Wolves are a naturally vulnerable species because of their low fecundity rates. They also require large tracts of undisturbed wilderness to survive, and the lack of regulation on wolf hunting and trapping adds to their natural vulnerability. It is time for provincial action!

THE WOLVES ONTARIO! PROJECT

Earthroots created "The Wolves Ontario! Project" in August 2000 due to the dire situation facing wolves in this province. The goals of the Wolves Ontario! Project are the following:

1) Raise public awareness of the threats to Ontario wolf populations.
2) Actively engage the public in the campaign to pressure the government to change current policies governing wolves and wolf hunting, trapping and snaring in the province.
3) Through public advocacy, achieve meaningful legislative protection for wolves and their habitat.

Public Opinion

It is of utmost importance that the public be informed of and involved in the decisions that affect wildlife and public lands in Ontario. Public opinion of wolves is changing: many people are concerned that if uncontrolled killing continues along with increasing human development and encroachment on previously remote wilderness areas, we may lose this symbol of wilderness forever. The opposite view, which favours the continued persecution of wolves, is held by only a small minority of Ontarians.

Minister of Natural Resources, John Snobelen, assures Ontarians that the best wildlife management decisions are made by balancing public opinion with science. A survey conducted by OraclePoll Research found that:

- 83% of the respondents were concerned that snares are legal.
- 83% supported immediate protection under the Ontario Endangered Species Act for the Algonquin Park Red Wolf if it is identified as being endangered.
- 39% believe the wolf would be an excellent choice as Ontario's provincial mammal (a significant show of support considering that there are more than 100 mammal species in Ontario).
- 75% are opposed to the fact that there is no management plan for wolves.

A Provincial Wolf Protection Plan

Wolves deserve no less management consideration than any other wildlife species in Ontario.

Most hunted and trapped species in Ontario have provincial management plans. At the very least, wolves should be afforded one as well. Currently trapping of wolves is allowed year round without any quota restrictions. Wolf hunting is just as unrestricted except for a small seasonal closure in the summer in areas north of the French and Mattawa Rivers. There is no ecological justification for this lack of restriction.

According to the MNR, a species is protected if it is subject to a season. This is because hunting and trapping have become the guiding principle of modern wildlife management. Hunting is only regulated for animals that have management plans.

A provincial wolf protection plan is long overdue. The following is a summary of Earthroots' recommendations for policy changes and actions to improve wolf protection in Ontario.

Photo: Erwin & Peggy Bauer

1. Ban wolf snaring. Many other jurisdictions throughout the world have found the indiscriminate nature of snaring unacceptable, particularly for wolves. It is time for the Ministry of Natural Resources to reflect changing attitudes towards wildlife. The vast majority of Ontarians are against the use of snares.

2. End the open season on wolves. There is no biologically justifiable reason for controlling wolf populations. The Ministry of Natural Resources should assess wolf populations across the province and implement hunting and trapping closures accordingly. There must be an end to the open season on wolf killing and the unlimited number of wolves each licensed hunter and trapper can kill.

3. Conduct a true population and habitat viability assessment of wolves on the provincial level. Research is needed to determine the true status and health of wolves as well as their prey and habitat. Since it is not feasible to radio-collar a wolf in every pack, population trend surveys should be conducted based on ground and aerial tracking; counting visits to scent stations and by counting packs by simulating howling to get a response. Population studies are more accurate when a variety of methods and techniques are employed. Relying solely on reports submitted by hunters and trappers is biased and statistically irrelevant.

4. Require that *all* wolves killed in this province be reported to the Wildlife Branch of the Ministry of Natural Resources. There is no mandatory requirement to report the number of wolves killed unless the pelt is sold commercially. Currently, pelt records do not distinguish between Eastern Canadian wolves and Gray wolves. There should be a mechanism in place to ensure accurate reporting of all wolf kills, whether due to accident, property protection, or for fur, trophy or rug. Mortality data must be available for both the Gray wolf and Eastern Canadian wolf species. These wolf mortality reports will then be an important source of data for any wolf population study.

5. Expand provincial parks and protected areas beyond those stipulated under Ontario's Living Legacy agreement. Few parks are of a sufficient size and quality to sustain viable wolf populations. Currently wolves are protected on just 3% of their range.

6. Manage protected areas such as Provincial Parks with the objective of ensuring the long-term viability of wolf populations. High-impact recreational activities and resource development should be prohibited within all of Ontario's protected areas. This means no logging, mining, hunting or trapping. Permitted activities should have minimal impact on the landscape and the wildlife that inhabit the region.

7. Protection must extend beyond park boundaries. Protected corridors must be created to connect the scattered parks across the province. If hunting and trapping activity is high around the borders of a protected area, there will always be a boundary issue that will counteract the positive effects of having a protected area in the first place. Unless controls are put on hunting and trapping pressures outside of park boundaries, the park will be essentially useless for protecting the wildlife within. Land use pressures adjacent to protected areas must be adjusted so the goal of conservation is not negated by the high rates of exploitation at the park periphery.

8. Farmers should continue to be given full compensation for any losses due to wild predators. However, non-lethal alternatives should be employed to control livestock depredation or better yet, prevent it. Electric fencing or stronger fences, guard animals or people, keeping young or sick animals indoors at night, proper carcass disposal, scent deterrents and alarms are some measures that have proven successful. Compensation should only be given if the appropriate preventative methods were employed.

9. Invest in wolf ecotourism projects in remote communities and educational programs that teach people about the important role wolves play in the ecosystem. Coexistence with wolves is possible but it requires human tolerance and education. Earthroots' Wolves Ontario! Project aims to change the way this province looks at wolves. By teaching people about the important role wolves play in the ecosystem and dispelling the many myths we have of these animals, Earthroots works to build public participation in pressuring the government for province-wide protection for wolves and their habitat.

> *"I have high hopes for the future of wolves in North America. Many men will cease to think of them as vermin and see them as they are - one of the most interesting and intelligent animals that have ever lived on our globe. Do you dare to become involved in such a noble cause?"*
> - Noted wolf conservationist, Dr. Doug Pimlott.

Some Wolf Facts

Photo: William Munoz

- Wolves live in a pack: an elaborate social network with a hierarchy dominated by the alpha pair.

- The dominant members of the pack, the alpha male and alpha female, usually breed in the third year. Wolves in the wild only breed once a year, between March and April.

- In Ontario, there are 2 wolf species: the Gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) and the Eastern Canadian wolf (*Canis lycaon*). Algonquin Provincial Park is the largest protected area for Eastern Canadian wolves.

- The Algonquin Park wolf population is estimated to be 150 – 175 wolves (30-35 packs of 5 wolves) during the winter. The park wolf population has decreased by half since research began in the 1960's and has been steadily declining for the last 12 years.

- Two thirds of wolf deaths in the Algonquin Park area are caused by humans, namely through hunting and trapping. The average litter size for wolves in Algonquin Park is 5 pups per year. For the pups that survive to become adults, average longevity is 3-4 years.

- The wolf's sense of smell is 100 times more sensitive than a human's. Canadian naturalist and author, Ron Lawrence, discovered that a wolf pup was able to pick up the smell of a porcupine eating in a meadow a mile away.

- Female wolves mature at 2 years of age; male wolves mature at 3 years.

- Wolves can go for 2 weeks without food and then eat 20 lbs of meat at the first kill.

- Wolves can cover from 600-8000 km^2 when searching for food.

- Wolves don't howl at a full moon; howling is their way of communicating to other pack members or other wolf packs competing for territory or food.

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The wolf: a symbol of unspoiled wilderness, a barometer of a healthy and diverse ecosystem, yet managed in Ontario as vermin.

IT'S TIME TO CRY WOLF!

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