



## “The Real Wolf:” Science, Politics and Economics

By Lee Fahrney

Contributing Writer

**S**ocial commentators often refer to the “real world” as a defense against idealized interpretations of events. “The Real Wolf: The Science, Politics and Economics of Co-Existing with Wolves in Modern Times,” by Ted B. Lyon and Will N. Graves, Farcountry Press, 2014, seeks to expose the illogical and romanticized image of wolves imposed on those whose quality of life and economic livelihood are diminished by this apex predator.

The timing of the book’s release could not have been more prophetic as a recent federal court case has forced Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan to abandon efforts to manage the wolf at a state level. As a result of the relisting of wolves as endangered under the Endangered Species Act, Wisconsin’s wolf-harvest program must end, as will permits allowing lethal removal of depredating wolves. And, landowners may no longer shoot wolves in the act of attacking domestic animals.

Lyon and Graves, along with an impressive array of expert witnesses, leave no stone unturned in an attempt to counter the disingenuous portrayal of farmers and sportsmen as “intolerant, fearful, uninformed, naïve, somehow inferior, mentally unsound, unethical, and even a threat to society.” Readers of this book might conclude just the opposite: With this book, wolf advocates have met their match.

Editors Linda Grosskopf and Nancy Morrison introduce each chapter with masterful statements of issues and facts and end each with a thoughtful conclusion. Then, the reader may peruse an extensive reference list of supporting documents. Remarkable, considering the hundreds of pages (351 total) of documents, facts and real-life stories about gray wolves, including more than 460 references, footnotes, and links to sources and facts.

The theme remains the same throughout, that the public has been duped into thinking we have nothing to fear from wolves. Says Morrison, “The real irony is that these same groups that promote and romanticize the wolf are blind – either by choice or ignorance – to the ecological tragedies playing out as their pet project tears limb from limb all those species that are smaller and or less capable of resisting – not restoring balance in nature, but rather destroying it.”

No amount of scientific data will convince those who favor a no-kill approach to wolf management that leaving the process up to nature will suffice. From Charles Elton, as quoted: “It is assumed that an

undisturbed animal community lives in a certain harmony.... the balance of nature. The picture has the advantage of being an intelligible and an apparently logical result of natural selection in producing the best possible world for each species. It has the disadvantage of being untrue.”

While Wisconsin’s wolves may have arrived from Michigan and Minnesota, the introduction of the species in western states has been intentional, based largely on sentiment and denial of reality regarding the natural instincts of the wolf to kill the easiest and most nutritious food available. Many responsible individuals and groups anticipated the carnage that followed as the introduction of wolves to Yellowstone Park and central Idaho in 1995 unfolded.

Jake Cummins, executive vice president of the Montana Farm Bureau Federation is quoted: “Soon the killing will start, a little at first, but growing with time. Wildlife will diminish, and hunting with it. Livestock will perish and ranches will go under. We’ll have a major problem on our hands, and our children will wonder how we could have been so stupid.”

Protestations to the contrary by wolf advocates, this includes humans. In chapter three, “The Myth of the Harmless Wolf,” Lyon says “...for decades we have been told –in colleges across North America and in countless popular books, articles and films – that wolves do not attack and kill people in North America. The reality is that this is *not* correct.”

While Lyon and Graves present their own observations of wolf behavior, perhaps more importantly, they rely on a cadre of other experts whose credentials are above reproach.

Exactly who is at risk? The reality-based approach to the current impasse explodes the misguided claims that the wolf does not pose a threat to other wildlife species or imperil the safety of humans and their domestic animals. The august lineup of contributors to the book includes award-winning author and photographer Cat Urbigkit, who has written numerous nonfiction books including “Yellowstone Wolves: A Chronology of the Animal, the People and the Politics.” Her latest book, “When Man Becomes Prey,” will be out soon.

Dr. Valerious Geist, a Ph.D. in ethology, the study of animal behavior, is the author of 15 books, dozens of wildlife policy reports and scholarly papers, and serves as a frequent expert witness in animal-behavior cases. Geist admits to a long-held belief that wolves are intelligent and wary but keep their distance from humans.

“I thought of wolves as harmless, echoing the words of more experienced North American colleagues, while considering the reports to the contrary from Russia, Europe and Scandinavia as interesting, but not relevant... I was wrong! Nothing convinces like personal experience!”

Heather Smith-Thomas is a college-educated cattle rancher who writes regularly for more than 25 farm and livestock magazines. She contributed a chapter on “Wolves, a Serious Threat to Livestock Producers.” Smith-Thomas points out that raising livestock is a way of life, more than just a paycheck.

“After spending a lifetime delivering calves or lambs, doctoring the sick ones and fine-tuning every ability and instinct to become competent caretakers of livestock the rancher won’t forsake his animals,” she said.

Next up: The Endangered Species Act, the Equal Access to Justice Act, the Defenders of Wildlife, the Humane Society of the United States, and wolf litigation as a “cash cow.”