



Wolf lawsuits serve as 'cash cow' for animal rights groups

By Lee Fahrney

Contributing Writer

The first of a two-part review of "The Real Wolf," (see *Wisconsin Outdoor News*, Jan. 23) helps debunk the myth that wolves act merely as "nature's sanitarians," ridding the landscape of the dead and dying and that the public has nothing to fear from wolves in their midst.

Co-authors Ted B. Lyon and Will N. Graves enlist the aid of numerous experts in the fields of law, biology, and animal husbandry to establish clearly that an uncontrolled wolf population imperils farmers, cattle ranchers, sportsmen, and the general public. To the notion that wolves only feed on the old and sick, Graves said, "Actually, wolves seem to prefer healthy wild ungulates, especially the young and the female."

Karen Budd-Falen is a fifth-generation rancher on a family-owned ranch in Big Piney, Wyoming and a practicing lawyer. She is licensed to practice her profession in several western states and in a number of higher courts, including the U. S. Supreme Court. In 2001, Budd-Falen was awarded Wyoming's Outstanding Agricultural Citizen.

Of the various points of view presented in "The Real Wolf," Budd-Falen offers perhaps the most enlightening. She postulates that wolf litigation is a cash cow for animal rights and environmental groups who line their pockets with legal fees after filing one law suit after another. Says Budd-Falen, "The environmentalists have taken one animal, the wolf, and used it and the Endangered Species Act to develop a profit-generating business opportunity for its lawyers."

Fund-raising appeals highlight the need to support education, administration, lobbying and litigation, Budd-Falen says, but they fail to mention that litigation itself is also a significant source of income. Even more troubling, she notes, is that attorney's fees paid to such groups go largely untracked so that the public is unaware how much money is being extracted from the public treasury.

The “gravy train,” as Budd-Falen refers to it, consists of two major sources of attorneys’ fees that can be paid to plaintiffs who prevail in court proceedings or by the Department of Justice agreeing to a settlement. The sources include the Judgement Fund, a congressional line-item connected to cases involving the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, and other statutes that allow a plaintiff to recover attorneys’ fees. This fund offers an open-ended budget with no database for tracking the payments.

The Equal Access to Justice Act is the second major source of payments to litigants, Budd-Falen says. These funds are taken from the budget of the losing federal agency. Again, she said, there is no central data system or tracking of these payments from the agencies’ budgets.

In Wisconsin, each round of litigation raises the intensity of resistance among those whose lives are affected by wolf depredation. But opposition here pales in comparison to western states, where cattlemen’s groups and sportsmen’s organizations appear to be in full-scale revolt.

More than 13,000 bumper stickers that read SSS (shoot, shovel, shut up) have been sold, according to Linda Grosskopf, “Real Wolf” co-editor and editor of the *Western Ag Reporter*, a magazine serving ranchers and farmers throughout several western states.

Said Grosskopf, “The stupid government went to Canada and spent in the neighborhood of \$3 million apiece for each wolf and then crammed them down our throats.

“They weren’t endangered,” she said. She doesn’t blame the wolves, however. “The wolf just does what God intended for it to do. It’s the people who brought them here.”

Grosskopf also notes that wolves introduced in the west are a different species than native animals.

Adds Budd-Falen, “There has been a massive amount of misinformation about wolf introduction. And this is the kind of information people in government need to have for a full understanding of wolves.

“We’ve got to do something to stem the tide,” she says. “It has nothing to do with the environment. It has to do with politics and money.”

In 2013, co-author Ted B. Lyon assembled a group of stakeholders in Bozeman, Mont., to examine problems associated with wolf management as it relates to the Endangered Species Act.

The group concluded that legislative changes are urgently needed to correct flaws in the ESA. One of the problems, according to Lyon, is that government funding for wildlife recovery is disproportionately spent on “charismatic” species, in this case the wolf. Charismatic, but deadly to not only the weak and young, but also to the healthiest.

Lyon cites a 5-year study in which the carcasses of 63 moose killed by wolves were examined. Only nine of the 63 had any defects or deviations from the normal. Of the abnormalities, five had defects with their teeth; three had defects with their antlers; and one had defective hooves. According to the authors, not only do wolves pose a threat to other wildlife species, but to domestic livestock, pets and humans.

As in other states, the failure to manage wolves in Wisconsin carries both immediate and long-term consequences for those who must live, work and recreate in areas subject to expanding populations of wolves. Those who make their living through tourism, outdoor recreation, farming and ranching face the irony of delivering their tax dollars to the very animal rights groups that contribute to their destruction through frivolous and disruptive lawsuits, the book points out.