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The Truth about Our Wildlife Managers' Plan to Restore "Native" Ecosystems

by George Dovel

In 1935 when Cambridge University botanist Arthur Tansley invented the term "ecosystem" in a paper he authored, he was attempting to define the system that is formed from the relationship between each unique environment and all the living organisms it contains.

Ecologists concluded that these individual systems evolved naturally to produce an optimum balance of plants, herbivores that ate the plants, and carnivores that ate the herbivores. Many accepted this "food chain" theory as a permanent state of natural regulation and a theory was advanced that certain "key" species of plants and animals were largely responsible for maintaining these "healthy" ecosystems.

But subsequent archeological excavations or core samples of the buried layers of periods in time revealed that these "perfected" ecosystems were actually in a continuing state of change which could be caused by changes in weather, climate or various organisms. They concluded that parasites or other organisms that were not included in their food chain charts often caused radical population changes in one or more of the keystone species.

The "Balance-of-Nature" Myth Keeps Surfacing

In 1930 noted Wild Animal Ecologist Charles Elton wrote, "The 'balance of nature' does not exist and perhaps never has existed. The numbers of wild animals are constantly varying to a greater or less extent, and the variations are usually irregular in period and always irregular in amplitude (being ample)." Yet 33 years later, in a highly publicized Feb. 1963 *National Geographic* article, titled, "Wolves vs. Moose on Isle Royale," fledgling Wolf Biologist David Mech and his mentor, Durward Allen, claimed just the opposite.

Back in 1937 as part of his doctoral program, graduate student Allen had conducted a two-year study of skunks living on a poultry farm and bird sanctuary owned by Michigan State College. During that study, Allen ignored Charles Elton's 1930 conclusion that a natural balance does not exist and wrote: "Whether we like it or not we must accept the principle that populations of

carnivores and herbivores have 'grown up' together in this world and long-standing adjustments have rendered them absolutely interdependent (dependent on each other for their existence)."

Allen's Early Opposition to Managing Predators

In his 1937 research report titled, "The Skunk: A Boon or Pest?" he wrote, "It appears that certain individual skunks will, when the proper opportunity is presented, take to killing chickens; however, this is very probably exceptional rather than the rule." His opinion was: "The skunk is of immense value to agriculture. Its sins are spectacular – its benefits easily overlooked."

Allen concluded, "The sound policy probably is to manage the chickens rather than the skunks," and added that "exterminating" local area predators would be "more trouble" and "likely unsuccessful." Now, 71 years later, Idaho wolf managers apply that same philosophy to wolf predation of domestic sheep in part of central Idaho.

Instead of reducing excessive populations of wolves, they support penning several thousand sheep in portable corrals at night and using a combination of electric fencing, guard dogs, noise makers and humans monitoring the wolves electronically to reduce killing by wolves.

Obviously this "remedy" is cost prohibitive and does nothing to regulate the killing of other less-protected livestock and wild ungulates resulting from excessively high wolf densities. Yet the influence of Durward Allen's unsupported theories is evident in every phase of current so-called ecosystem "management."

Understanding Ecosystems and Ecologists

The science of ecology represents an ongoing effort to understand and explain the relationships between various living organisms and their physical environment. Ever since those environments were defined as "ecosystems," ecologists have advanced theories in an effort to consider each ecosystem as a "superorganism" or a series of delicate "biotic communities" which can be managed or "tweaked" to restore its "health" or "integrity."

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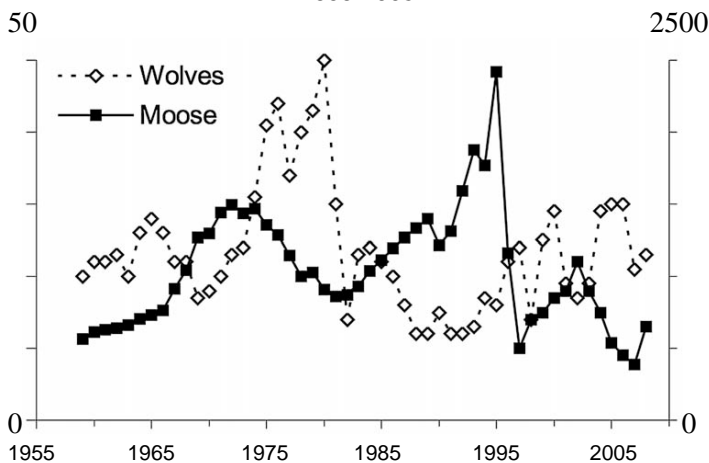
Ecosystems are usually given classifications such as “forest,” “aquatic,” etc., yet they often lack precise boundaries or components and, depending on who decides, can vary in size from a large portion of several states to a tiny pond. Every part of each organism that makes up an ecosystem must remain healthy for it to survive yet every ecosystem is in a constant state of change, with some of its parts (organisms) flourishing at the expense of others.

The theory that this is all part of a predictable “succession” to a stable climax stage where “equilibrium” eventually prevails ignores the unforeseen and, therefore, unpredictable catastrophic events that continue to occur naturally without warning. Examples of such events include disease or parasites decimating a population of wolves; an extreme tick infestation weakening a moose population thus making them more vulnerable to winter predation; algae in a pond destroying the assorted animal species that inhabit the pond; locust or mouse plagues or severe drought or wildfires destroying the forage that is wrongly assumed to be protected by predators; and, finally, extreme winters which cause massive prey species losses.

Debunking the “Balance-of-Nature” Myth

The extreme “spikes” (highs and lows) in numbers of keystone species resulting from reliance on the theory that “natural regulation” will produce a “balance” are evidence that the so-called “Balance of Nature” is a pipe dream. One fairly long-term example of this is seen in the following graph recording 50 years of wolf and moose populations on Isle Royale National Park in Michigan.

Isle Royale Wolf-Moose Populations
1959-2008



When the island’s wolves were first counted from the air by David Mech in 1959 he estimated there were ~20 wolves and fewer than 600 moose – a ratio of less than 30 moose per wolf. Aerial census flights of wolves conducted by Mech during the following three winters, and calculated moose numbers approved by his professor, Durward Allen, reflected a stable moose population and a wolf population that was increasing slightly.

The foregoing graph, copied from the 2007-2008 Annual Report of the “Ecological Studies of Wolves on Isle Royale” by John Vucetich and Rolf Peterson, included the caption: “Moose population estimates during 1959-93 (were) based on population reconstruction from recoveries of dead moose, whereas estimates from 1994-2008 were based on aerial surveys.

Four estimates of moose numbers covering only a three-year period were the major proof offered by Mech and Allen when they told the world that wolves cull the aged, weak and diseased moose and keep them in balance with their food supply. If they had waited four more years they would have seen the accelerating wolf population crash and the moose population more than double.

Wolves Enter the Picture

According to Park Service records, a small group of wolves appeared on Isle Royale following the 1948-49 winter. Whether they were transplanted as some biologists had recommended – or traveled to the island from Canada over a temporary ice bridge as some later speculated – they began to eat moose and breed.

When Mech began the study in 1958-59, wolves had already significantly reduced the moose population and the ratio of moose to wolves was declining below a healthy level. By 1965, there were only about 26 moose per wolf and wolf numbers declined by about 40% in the next four years.

Rolph Peterson Documented Surplus Killing

This resulted in the moose herd doubling, but a series of severe winters in the early ‘70s made the moose more vulnerable and the wolves began killing far more moose than they could eat*. The wolves increased rapidly to five packs totaling 50 wolves in 1980, their highest level ever, and the moose, of course, steadily declined.

Then from 1980-82 the wolves were infected with parvovirus and the population crashed to its lowest level since the study began. Even after the parvovirus ran its course the wolf population did not recover for another 14 years until moose numbers increased to 2,400 in 1995 and then crashed the following winter.

There were only 15 wolves in January 1995 but that number had increased by >40% in January 1996. In his March 1996 Annual Report, Rolph Peterson said the 1995-96 winter was the worst on record and the combination of deep snow and moose weakened by massive tick infestations allowed the wolves to kill three times as many moose daily as occurred in a normal year* (*In an April 20, 2008 AP article entitled, “Predator, prey in danger on Isle Royale.” Yellowstone Wolf Research Director Doug Smith credits Rolf Peterson with “debunking numerous myths about wolves, including their image as indiscriminate thrill killers. They’re actually quite choosy, culling weaker members of herd species.”)

This statement ignores the reality that Peterson repeatedly documented indiscriminate surplus killing of

moose by wolves whenever moose, regardless of age or physical condition, became more vulnerable. He explained that although a healthy mature bull moose is a formidable animal for wolves to attack under normal conditions, deep snow makes it as vulnerable and easy to kill as a much weaker calf.

Wolves Change Healthy Moose into Weaklings

But deep snow is not the only way wolves are able to kill strong, healthy animals. In the FY 2008 annual report Peterson wrote, “(The) Chippewa Harbor Pack wounded at least five moose in five days in late January, and we were able to confirm that two of these moose died near the site of attack within a few days.”



One of at least five moose attacked and wounded by the five-member Chippewa Wolf Pack in a five-day period (2008 Annual Report photo).

Because the wolf pack failed to kill any of the five moose, it is reasonable to assume that all or most of the moose were healthy when they were first attacked. But even if the wolves were not able to pull any of those moose down and eat a meal from the live animal as they normally do, ripping the tongue out, tearing the flanks to expose intestines, inflicting deep bleeding wounds in the hindquarters, damaging tendons in the hind legs, or injuring the nose and mouth which prevents eating will all quickly change them into weak “unfit” animals.

In the same April 20, 2008 AP article in which Smith claimed that wolves choose the weakest moose and cull them from the herd, Peterson and his Research Assistant, Vucetich, were described “watching a wolf pack “hound a wounded moose for five days” from the air. These types of Wolf behavior have a way of shooting “natural selection” theories full of holes.

Mech Denounces “Balance-of-Nature”

In “How delicate is the balance of nature?” (*National Wildlife* 23(1):54-59) David Mech admitted that his brief research at Isle Royale as a graduate student “helped fix the balance-of-nature idea in the public mind.” But he also wrote, “During two decades of wolf research in northern Minnesota and on Isle Royale in Michigan, I have learned that far from always being ‘balanced,’ ratios of wolves and prey animals can fluctuate wildly – and sometimes catastrophically.”

Mech cited a well-controlled experiment in central Alaska where removing up to 60% of the wolves resulted in a two to four-fold increase in moose and caribou populations. He explained that these populations remained much higher than in adjacent areas with no control and said the non-hunting public should be made aware of the need to control wolves when prey populations decline.

Mech also described how protected wolves had destroyed the once famous white-tailed deer herd in northeast Minnesota during severe winters in the 1960s while he studied them. When the wolves ran out of deer in that area and turned to killing moose, Minnesota authorities closed the entire state to deer hunting in 1971. (*Recently, despite Mech’s report that wolves caused the losses, DNR blamed the losses on “the winters, killing too many does, and failure to remove aspen trees.”)

Allen Ignored Research – Promoted Myth

Yet despite these and other long-term predator-prey studies during the late 1960s and 70s that disproved Durward Allen’s “balance-of-nature” theory, he continued to promote the myth. His 1979 book about the wolves of Isle Royale, “Wolves of Minong: Their Vital Role in a Wild Community,” disguised the stark reality of the Isle Royale ecosystem with flowery phrases, including the following:

“The great carnivore removes the elders, the ailing, the afflicted – and also, no doubt the foolish and incompetent. For the moose it is a health, welfare, and eugenic* program of inscrutable realism. The wolf manages his livestock as any husbandman must manage to survive. He is inspector of the herd, liberator of the weak, and guardian of the range.” (*control of breeding to produce desirable offspring)

Even John Vucetich, who insists that Isle Royale’s ecosystem is “in balance” and “will still be ‘in balance’ even if the wolves disappear,” states “It’s just as wrong to make them (wolves) a symbol of all that’s good – some mysterious icon of the wilderness” (as it was to make them a symbol of evil) (4-20-08 AP article).

Yet Allen spent the latter part of his career promoting creation and protection of man-made wilderness ecosystems where nature could take its course – while severely limiting both human populations and the impact of humans. He joined and worked with organizations that shared his philosophy (e.g. The Wilderness Society, National Wildlife Federation, National Audubon Society, and The Nature Conservancy [TNC]).

Before his death, Allen lived to see his philosophy promoted by TNC and federal and state game agencies for nearly two decades, embodied in the Wildlands Initiative, and adopted in the 1992 U.N Biodiversity Treaty.

Isle Royale – Now Unhealthy for Mammals

Archeologists and historians tell us that Isle Royale was inhabited by humans for all or part of the year during the past 4,000 years. Yet since the introduction of the two

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so-called “keystone” species” and conversion to a quasi-wilderness, the forage has declined, coyotes have been driven to extinction and river otters are reportedly the only mid-sized mammals that have not either disappeared entirely or been reduced to unhealthy numbers.

Since wolves first appeared on Isle Royale, the two keystone species have existed between extremes of starvation, which invite parasites, diseases and viruses to weaken and destroy them. Unless the wolves are nearly exterminated as happened during the 1980s, Moose recruitment* remains too low to restore populations that crash due to extreme winters and surplus killing by wolves.

Vucetich: “Wolves Not Responsible for Elk Decline”

Although concern was voiced in Isle Royale Annual Reports about very low moose recruitment* not providing enough calves for wolves to eat, a major reason for this was not even mentioned. In 2002 Yellowstone National Park biologists announced the lowest elk calf recruitment* in the Northern Herd since surveys began in the mid-1960s. (*the percentage of the moose or elk population that is calves surviving their first year of life to replace animals that die from all causes)

Local hunters, outfitters, ranchers, businessmen and legislators blamed the low elk recruitment on Canadian wolves which they said were responsible for the severe decline in elk numbers since they were introduced. But in 2004-05, YNP Wolf Researcher Smith and Isle Royale Assistant Wolf Researcher Vucetich designed a computer model purporting to show wolf predation from 1995–2004 was almost entirely “compensatory.”* (*Vucetich claimed those elk would have died anyway by falsely claiming that hunting harvest, below average rainfall, above average snowfall, and elk *exceeding* carrying capacity accounted for 98% of the elk decline during that period.)

Science or Propaganda?

But YNP researchers White and Garrott (2005a) countered that Vucetich’s claims did not agree with known facts. They pointed out that the >17% of prime breeding-age female elk in the Northern Herd that were killed by wolves during 1995–2004 had very high survival rates otherwise and were part of an elk population that was well *below* carrying capacity.

Meanwhile wolf guru David Mech and his team of graduate students spent three years radio-collaring 151 newborn elk calves in four northern Yellowstone locations to prove that bears – not wolves – are the primary killer of neonatal elk calves. This was simply a duplication of numerous studies conducted over the past 36 years – all of which reached the same conclusion – including a study led by Mech in Alaska’s Denali National Park.

But at a time when the USFWS was taking a lot of heat from local Montana residents about wolves destroying the Northern Elk Herd, the study could be used to pretend that bears – not wolves – were really the culprits in the elk

decline. In fact Mech allowed his researchers to publish an early preview of the study results in *Yellowstone Science Vol. 13. No. 3, Summer 2005*, which included the statement, “*It is surprising, however, that wolves are apparently having less impact on elk neonate survival than bears.*” (emphasis added)

Virtually overnight, millions of people around the world read or watched “news” stories implying that the “beneficial” wolves had been falsely accused. FWS Rocky Mountain Wolf Leader Ed Bangs stirred the pot by comparing concerned Montana citizens and their legislators to ignorant people from another century “who believed the Little Red Riding Hood fairy tale.”

Ten years earlier, in a 1995 publication titled “The Challenge and Opportunity of Recovering Wolf Populations,” Mech wrote, “a new mythology about the wolf has evolved; the *vile* wolf has been replaced by the *unjustly persecuted* wolf.” Yet, along with Durward Allen, Mech was guilty of reviving that myth in 1963 and of perpetuating it in 2005 by remaining silent while his research team and the media resurrected it.

Research: Elk + Wolf Presence = Barren Cows

Meanwhile, In 2002 Montana State University researchers, led by Ecology Professor Scott Creel, began a five-year study to determine the number of cow elk that were pregnant in herds with heavy wolf predation versus herds with little or no wolf predation. The study determined that the two elk herds with the lowest pregnancy rate were also the two herds with the highest wolf predation and the lowest calf recruitment.

Annual aerial elk counts and examination of elk killed by wolves in one of five study locations referred to as the “Gallatin Canyon Site” revealed that although cows comprised **73.2%** of the total elk, they made up only **17.7%** of the total elk killed by wolves (see below):

Wolf-killed elk confirmed in Gallatin Canyon Site

	<u>Bulls</u>	<u>Cows</u>	<u>Calves</u>
% of total elk population	16.2	73.2	10.6
% of total wolf kill	54.0	17.7	28.3

This study correctly stated that elk (like most vertebrates) alter their behavior in response to predation risks, and pointed out that the assumed effect of changes in elk behavior on plant communities has been discussed extensively. Yet it also pointed out that analyses of wolf-elk dynamics have always focused on direct predation, ignoring the potential effects of elk anti-predator behavior on elk populations.

Wolf Presence Reduced Grass Consumption

In a separate study from December through May in 2004, 2005 and 2006, Creel and other researchers recorded the daily presence of wolves on 3 sites occupied by the Upper Gallatin elk population. They also estimated the proportion of grasses, conifers, evergreen shrubs, and woody stems in 980 elk fecal samples collected from the

three sites, and then tested to see whether or not wolf presence affected the cow elk diets.

Earlier studies had already documented that elk preferred to graze nutritious bluebunch wheatgrass and Idaho fescue found in open meadows or on open hillsides when it was available in late fall or winter. But when wolves were introduced, elk were most vulnerable to wolf attack in the open meadows and the cows quickly sought protection in the conifers.

Experienced mountain elk hunters learn this from years of observing elk head for the timber in the morning during hunting season and graze the open south slopes or meadows in the evening or at night, if at all. Although Western state game biologists who sell extended hunting seasons appear reluctant to discuss it, Creel cited the well-known 1985 Alberta study by Morgantini and Hudson which documented elk responding to human hunters by shifting from open grazing to browsing in forests.

The Canadian researchers recorded the decline in the elk's daily consumption of nutritious rough fescue from **87% to 34%** and a proportional increase in browsing. They suggested that this diet shift was due to increased use of protective cover and reported, "Following the hunting season, elk reverted to grazing in fescue-dominated meadows."

Anti-Predator Behavior = Malnourishment

A late fall/winter study by Creel, Winnie et al of the Upper Gallatin elk reported that, unlike the cows and calves which moved to timbered areas in all four drainages when wolves were present, the bulls generally continued to graze in the meadow areas. They attributed this to the bulls' poor condition following the rut which resulted in an individual bull being five times as likely to be killed by wolves as an individual cow (see PLATE 1. below).



PLATE 1. Bull elk in the Gallatin Canyon sparring during the fall rut. In winter, elk prefer grassy meadows such as this for feeding but are likely to retreat to the protective cover of coniferous woodland (seen at back) when wolves are present. Bulls are less likely to retreat than cow elk, probably because the anti-predator responses of males are constrained by poor physical condition after the rut. Photo credit: J. Winnie.

In yet another Creel study entitled, "A Review of Environmental Factors Affecting Elk Winter Diets" (Journal of Wildlife Management 71(1):164-176; 2007), Christianson and Creel cited 75 studies conducted over a 65-year period indicating that elk always prefer grazing to browsing. Studies indicate forbs commonly make up less than 5% of elk diet except when they are forced by deep snow or predation (human or animal) to exist on browse species that generally offer less digestible nutrients.

Because female body condition – normally defined in terms of body fat, bone marrow content or percent of weight loss – is the major factor in determining pregnancy rates*, Creel repeatedly points out that there are serious trade-offs when cow elk are forced to lessen their odds of surviving winter and/or producing offspring by "anti-predator" behavior. (*even animals that do become pregnant risk abortion or absorption of fetuses when they reach a certain level of malnutrition)

Biologists May Misinterpret Cause

Several of these studies by wildlife ecologists emphasize that wildlife biologists may be misinterpreting the malnourishment resulting from anti-predator behavior in elk or other wild ruminants as being caused by forage that is deteriorating. The food chain theory of natural regulation assumes that starvation is caused by lack of forage which is known as "bottom-up" regulation.

The plan to introduce "top" predators (wolves, bears, lions, eagles, etc.) into "wildland" ecosystems in order to keep the herbivores from multiplying and eating too many native plants is called "top-down" regulation. In theory predators are "self-regulating" and will either move to a healthier ecosystem, starve to death, or kill and eat each other once they have killed most of their prey.

In reality most will turn to any other wild or domestic prey that is available – or anything else from fish to apples that will help them to survive. The following photo from the 2007-2008 Isle Royale Annual Report shows one of several wolves that reportedly ate apples from trees remaining from the 19th century in close proximity to humans for several weeks:



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According to the Report, in early September 2007 the wolves began eating the apples next to the largest back country campground in the park and, “to protect both wolves and visitors the National Park Service closed the campground for the rest of the season.” Next to this photo was another photo of a wolf lying in the snow calmly watching two researchers trying to chase it away from their bunkhouse area so a plane could land with supplies.

Five years earlier when there were 58 moose per wolf rather than only 18, researcher Peterson said that of the 17,000 visitors that arrive by boat each year it was common for them to see moose along the trails, yet only about a dozen hikers ever saw a wolf. He said, “They (wolves) have very little contact with people, and they’re *terrified* of us.”

But from 2003 to 2005, when the number of moose per wolf declined from 58 to 18, the wolves suddenly showed no fear of humans – exhibiting behavior described by Wildlife Behavior Expert Dr. Valerius Geist as representing a potential threat to humans.

Surprising Admissions by Wolf Experts

In a 2003 paper entitled, “Yellowstone After Wolves,” Douglas Smith, Rolph Peterson and Douglas Houston admitted their predictions were often wrong:

“Although our expectations for wolf effects in Yellowstone are based on inferences from other studies, and may seem self-evident, we realize that specific predictions may be wrong. Even in a system as simple as Isle Royale, predictability has been poor following four decades of scientific scrutiny; **none** of the expectations for the moose herd, voiced in turn by Mech (1966), and Peterson (1977) actually happened.

“Rather, external forces such as severe winters, summer heat and outbreaks of winter ticks (driven by warm, dry spring weather) have caused the moose population to decline (DelGiudice et al. 1997). Surprises, as in the arrival of exotic disease which caused a wolf crash at Isle Royale in the early 1980s, are virtually guaranteed in the long term, and they will assuredly influence, and possibly determine the outcome of the great natural experiment in wolf-elk dynamics now launched at Yellowstone.

“Large perturbations, as with unique weather-driven events, will loom large in the future of Yellowstone. The 1988 fires burned about 36% of the land area of the park, affecting forage supplies for native ungulates (positively and negatively), but there is plenty of room for future fires in a climate that seems more conducive to large conflagrations. Given time, the severe winter of 1996-1997 will be matched and exceeded.”

“Some curtailment of midwinter shooting of cow elk outside the park might be necessary because wolves and humans, with very different hunting strategies, nevertheless compete over common prey. Successful

coexistence of wolves and human hunters is a management conundrum that will test wildlife managers and challenge long-held beliefs.”

The biologists’ suggestion that “*some* curtailment of cow elk hunting outside the park *might* be necessary” ignored the reality that wolves will continue to multiply as long as any food source is available. Despite a temporary reduction in YNP wolf numbers resulting from parvovirus and sarcoptic mange, and a reduction in antlerless elk hunting permits from 2,880 to only **100**, the Northern Herd elk count continues to decline.

News Releases Mislead Public

A February 27, 2008 news article announcing that decline, from 19,000 elk in 1994/95 when wolves were first released, to 6,279 this year, quoted Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks Biologist Tom Lemke: “It’s unlikely that we will see any significant increase in elk numbers until there is a long-term improvement in recruitment rates.”

The article continued, “A study that began in 2003 looked at why so many calves weren’t making it to adulthood. In the summer study, bears were responsible for more than half the calves killed by predators. Wolves killed about 12 percent and coyotes got about 11 percent.”

Although it mentions the word “summer,” it leaves many readers with the mistaken impression that wolves have a very limited impact on elk recruitment. It doesn’t mention the fact that the bear-killed calves are from several days to several weeks old when they are most vulnerable to death from many natural causes, or that calves that survive until winter make up only about 10% of the total herd yet account for 30% or more of the total elk killed by wolves.

But even more important, it doesn’t mention the excessive quantity of conifer needles and woody stems that pregnant cow elk that avoid wolves are forced to eat – or the vital fat reserves that are depleted in other pregnant cows that must run swiftly to escape wolf pursuit. Several chases like that in the third trimester of pregnancy can mean the difference between a fetus and its mother surviving until spring green-up – or one or both dying.

Fetuses that do survive these circumstances and are born as stunted, malnourished calves in late May or June, are likely more susceptible to predation. But although 20 years of predator-prey research, both before and after wolves were introduced, has documented the unhealthy impact of wolves on both the Northern and Central YNP elk herds, the results of those studies are rarely mentioned in media releases.

The *Yellowstone Science* website states, “By reporting on what has been learned from research and monitoring in these parks, we hope to increase public awareness of new findings.” Yet in its current 7,700-word “Yellowstone Elk Overview” it devotes only the following inconspicuous sentence to multiple studies confirming the unhealthy side effects of anti-predator behavior:

“The increased energy expenditure and reduced foraging efficiency that would be the likely costs of anti-predatory responses could lead to lower elk fecundity and survival rates.”

The researchers conducting these studies pointed out that Montana elk herds with either no wolves or low density wolf populations had 30 or more surviving calves per 100 cows and most herds were increasing. By way of comparison the Northern Herd reported as low as eight calves per 100 cows and the herd has declined by two-thirds since wolves were introduced.

Decline of the Central YNP Elk Herd

Local citizens who have suffered substantial economic loss as a result of the declining Northern elk herd continue to carefully monitor and publicize the decline. But few people are aware of the severe decline in the Central YNP herd – the only elk that are never hunted and spend their entire lives inside the Park.

From 1958-1994 that herd varied from about 400 to 800 elk with an early winter count in 1994 totaling about 750 animals. In *Outdoorsman* issues from 1969 through the early 1970s I described how the winter feeding habits of these elk resembled those of moose, surviving severe winter weather and deep snow along streams or pools heated by geothermal springs.

Beginning in 1959, I photographed grizzlies and an occasional black bear chasing down and killing pregnant cow elk in this herd when the bears first emerged from hibernation. Infrequent extreme winters and the annual bear predation resulted in the pronounced highs and lows in population size and poor calf survival that some biologists refer to as a “dynamically stable” elk herd – until wolves were introduced.

In the 2003 “Yellowstone After Wolves” article, the wolf biologists reported that the Central herd (referred to as the “Madison-Firehole Elk”) was “relatively stable” after wolf reintroduction, with a population of 500 elk.* (*It had actually declined by one-fourth in the two years since 2001 when local wolf numbers doubled.)

From 1996-2008 the Central elk herd declined by 73% to a historical record low of only 200. Because that herd exists entirely on public land with no hunting and has remained at a low density with small group sizes and intermittent wolf activity, none of the biologists’ stock excuses can be used to explain away the 73% reduction in the elk population since wolves were introduced.

The Results of Natural Regulation in YNP

From 1967 until wolves were released in the Park in 1996, YNP officials relied on “natural regulation” to reduce elk populations and reverse decades of habitat damage. Instead, elk populations in both the Northern Herd and the Central Herd steadily increased for the next three decades despite increased damage to YNP forage.

In the absence of top carnivores *or other controls such as regulated hunting*, large herbivores, including elk

and moose, will continue to multiply until they outgrow the ability of vegetation to provide adequate nutrition (exceed carrying capacity). When this continues, despite natural controls that “kick in” with both herbivores and their forage, the animals are described as “density dependent.”

When top carnivores such as wolves are added to halt the inevitable long-term damage to the ecosystem, the ultimate result (unless predator density is carefully controlled) is depleted prey populations that remain well below the carrying capacity of their range. Once the predators also deplete their alternate food sources, they succumb to starvation, disease and killing each other.

Natural Regulation in Denali Wilderness

That is the circumstance in the 2.2 million-acre Denali Wilderness portion of Alaska’s Denali National Park and Preserve where wolf populations are described as “healthy.” No hunting is allowed in that portion yet most wolves reportedly die before they are five years old and 60% of those that die are killed by other wolves.

Denali Wilderness caribou populations are a small fraction of their former numbers and Park officials allow a “tame” wolf pack to wander along the road so visitors in tour buses can see and photograph them. So-called “natural regulation” has replaced scientific wildlife management in America’s national parks.

State Wildlife Management Usurped by TNC

During the past two decades the powerful Nature Conservancy and its subsidiaries have quietly replaced scientific wildlife management at the federal and state level with this same hands-off “natural regulation” philosophy. Hunters who take the time to read articles like this one are hopefully beginning to realize that this is the “do nothing – have nothing” philosophy described by famed Canadian naturalist Jack Miner back when the United States Congress first appropriated money to restore our wild game populations.

Miner, who banded tens of thousands of ducks and geese at his wild bird sanctuary which provided the model for the National Wildlife Refuge System, asked, “Why (do we) have game wardens and biologists if nature will balance itself?” Yet the biologists, entomologists, etc. who are now in charge of managing “wildlife,” including snakes and snails, tell us they need game wardens to arrest people who kill protected species and biologists (and others) to study ecosystems to learn how they function.

When concerned Montana citizens point out the excessive populations of protected predators that are decimating the Northern Yellowstone Elk Herd, biologists respond that it may take a few more decades to reach “equilibrium.” They don’t explain that the equilibrium they imply is a “utopia” is what many white explorers found once they reached the Rocky Mountains – pockets of game mixed with vast areas where starving Indians were eating insects, rats and roots to survive.

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Origin of the YNP Natural Regulation Theory

Four years after YNP adopted a policy of letting nature “manage” the elk and buffalo in 1967, biologist Douglas Houston presented a new hypothesis (untested theory) that Northern YNP elk would limit their own numbers (without human intervention) by competing with each other for grazing combined with unfavorable winter weather (“bottom-up” regulation). Houston also said this would occur without a significant impact to the vegetation or to other animals that also utilized that vegetation.

Despite Houston’s predictions, the Northern elk herd, which totaled only 3,167 animals in 1968, increased steadily along with the severe decline in riparian area forage and quaking aspen stands inside the Park. Yet questionable “studies” blamed these declines on long-term changes in climate and weather patterns.

Houston Receives TNC “Outstanding Book” Award

A 1982 book by Houston claiming that “Natural Regulation” had produced a healthy natural ecosystem received “Outstanding Book of the Year” honors from The Wildlife Society (TWS). Like Mech’s and Allen’s earlier “Balance-of-Nature” claim in *National Geographic*, this and other publications by Houston prompted widespread acceptance of the flawed theory of “Natural Regulation” by wildlife managers worldwide.

It assured acceptance of the UN/TNC “Wildlands” agenda by wildlife managers, and paved the way for the ecological slums they are promoting today by managing only people rather than wildlife. However a number of wildlife ecologists disagreed with the theory and conducted definitive research to verify what actually happened during the 126-year recorded history of Yellowstone.

Kay: “Natural Regulation is a Failed Hypothesis”

Foremost among these were Utah State University Researchers Dr. Charles Kay and his former professor, Dr. Frederick Wagner. As chairman of a committee that spent five years reviewing wildlife management in our National Parks, Wagner was the lead author of *Wildlife Policies in the U S National Parks (1995)*.

The book discussed the decline in species biodiversity and addressed various misconceptions and ambiguities of such concepts as “Natural Regulation,” “Carrying Capacity,” and the term “Natural.” Meanwhile Dr. Kay published, *Yellowstone: Ecological Malpractice*, in which he concluded:

“Natural regulation is a failed ecological hypothesis that must be rejected as a valid scientific interpretation of the real world. The simple truth is that ungulate populations will not internally self-regulate before having had a serious impact on vegetation.”

The “before and after” photographs in his book spanning a century of YNP forage decline were presented to a public lands oversight hearing in Congress in February of 1997. Dr. Kay provided examples of Park officials

altering information to cover up the failure of its natural regulation policy and testified that Interior employees had tried to get him fired from the university and from research he was doing for Parks Canada after he published an independent analysis of their wolf recovery proposal.

Humans Shaped Intermountain Ecosystems

He also testified that there was no evidence of elk or bison overgrazing Yellowstone prior to it becoming a national park because hunting by Native Americans kept ungulate numbers low, which promoted biodiversity. In his research, Kay has repeatedly emphasized that Native Americans were the real keystone species and top-of-the-food chain predators in YNP and elsewhere in the West.

Their burning practices and harvest of large ungulates for thousands of years shaped the ecosystems in Yellowstone and the Intermountain West. Kay concluded his testimony with the following comment:

“Based on what I know about ‘natural regulation’ management, if I wanted to protect an area, the last thing I would do would be to make it a national park and the next to the last thing I would do would be to turn it into a wilderness area.”

Wagner Receives “Outstanding Book” Award

In 1999, 32 years after the natural regulation policy was adopted, YNP biologists claimed they needed more years of research in order to test the natural regulation hypothesis. But Dr. Wagner told the National Research Council they had a 126-year data-set of interaction between YNP ungulates and their ecosystem and half a century of research which should be adequate to determine if the elk herd had reached equilibrium.

In August 2008, TWS announced that Dr. Wagner would receive its “2008 Wildlife Publication Award – Outstanding Book” for his 2006 book *Yellowstone’s Destabilized Ecosystem: Elk Effects, Science and Policy Conflict*. His book documents extreme fluctuations in the Northern Elk Herd and is highly critical of Park Service management.

“In 1967 the NPS introduced a ‘Nature Knows Best’ approach and stopped controlling the size of the (elk) herd,” he wrote. “A new contingent of NPS research biologists disputed earlier scientific evidence and claims about best management practices of elk and other wildlife in the park. In the process, they totally negated everything that had been observed, recorded and published for nearly a century.”

Dr. Kay pointed out that TWS gave Douglas Houston the same prestigious award for promoting his flawed natural regulation theory in the early 1980s as it gave Dr. Wagner in 2008 for disproving Houston’s hypothesis. He asks, “Are we supposed to believe that Yellowstone is an ecological slum – or that it’s the epitome of land management as claimed by Park officials and the “greens” who want to depopulate half of the U.S. so that nature can take its course?”

“Balanced” Ecosystems, Burping Cows and the “Green” Financial Bailout

by George Dovel

If you enter the domain of bloggers on the internet and quote something about wolf behavior from one of North America’s leading wildlife scientists, there’s a good chance you will be called an “ignorant redneck” or a “murderer” or worse and then given a lecture about “restoring natural balance in the ecosystem.” A search using that phrase will lead you to the following comments from one of numerous groups with “green” in their name:

“Most of the ecosystems on our planet have been abused and are in a state of acute imbalance. Humans use all of these bio networks, such as the forests, oceans, rivers, soil, etc. for their subsistence and owe their life to the contributions they obtain from each of these ecosystems. However, due to the population explosion, pollution and constant abuse, the overall balance of these systems have been unsettled, which calls for urgent restoration measures.

“Unless serious steps are taken urgently towards restoring the ecosystems in general and the forest and water sources in particular, the prognosis seems bleak. The ‘inter’ and ‘intra’ dependence of these systems are such that when one gets off balance, it triggers a destructive chain reaction that affects every aspect of life on earth. Therefore, the need of today is concrete action that would allow Mother Nature to repair itself.”

The Nature Conservancy has repeatedly told us that, in order to restore healthy native ecosystems, we must turn control of rural private property selected by TNC over to it or some other land trust to be converted to “wildland” areas. The property may be replanted to native vegetation at taxpayer expense and protected large carnivores will be reintroduced “which will,” TNC claims, “restore healthy native ecosystems that provide services to humans.”

Ecosystem Services Also Kill Humans

But neither the green groups nor TNC have told us the harmful side of those services which are properly described in Allen Fitzsimmons’ book *Defending Illusions: Federal Protection of Ecosystems*. “Ecosystems ‘serve’ us with diseases that kill or disable us, competitors that destroy the results of hard work by farmers and foresters, and calamities that devastate our homes and fields.”

“It is true that biodiversity is the greatest treasure we possess; equally true, it is our greatest misfortune. Millions of people dying from dysentery, tuberculosis, pneumonia, and other infectious diseases pray to be saved from these ecosystem ‘services’.”

In 2007, more than a year after Dr. Fred Wagner’s book exposed the failure of natural regulation to restore a healthy balance in the Yellowstone Ecosystem, Isle Royale

Moose populations declined to the lowest level ever recorded. Hungry wolves began to kill each other and wolf numbers nose-dived.

Moose Decline Blamed on Humans

But instead of admitting the failure of the Isle Royale ecosystem to achieve the “natural balance” it has been famous for during half a century, headlines in the Aug. 22, 2007 *Science Daily* declared:

“Global warming is impacting more than the water levels in the Great Lakes. It could be the beginning of the end for the moose and wolves of Isle Royale. And if it is, a Michigan Technological University scientist places the blame squarely on the human race.”

“Humans have made summers increasingly hot, which likely exacerbates moose ticks,” says John Vucetich, a population biologist in Michigan Tech’s School of Forest Resources and Environmental Science. “Both the heat and the ticks are detrimental to moose. If wolves go extinct for a lack of moose, humans will be to blame.”

“Ecosystems change; that’s normal,” said Vucetich. “When they change quickly in dramatic ways, that creates a new balance,” he explained. “Nature is still in balance. It may just be a balance that doesn’t favor humans and disenfranchises certain kinds of wildlife.”

As also happened with his Yellowstone elk model, Vucetich joined assorted green groups and biologists in blaming humans for the failure of wolves and moose to achieve the balance-of-nature myth. The “balance” they refer to (now called “dynamic equilibrium” by many ecologists) includes the extreme highs and lows and occasional extinctions that occur when humans do not manage the ecosystems in which they live.

Indians Were Vital Part of Thriving Ecosystem

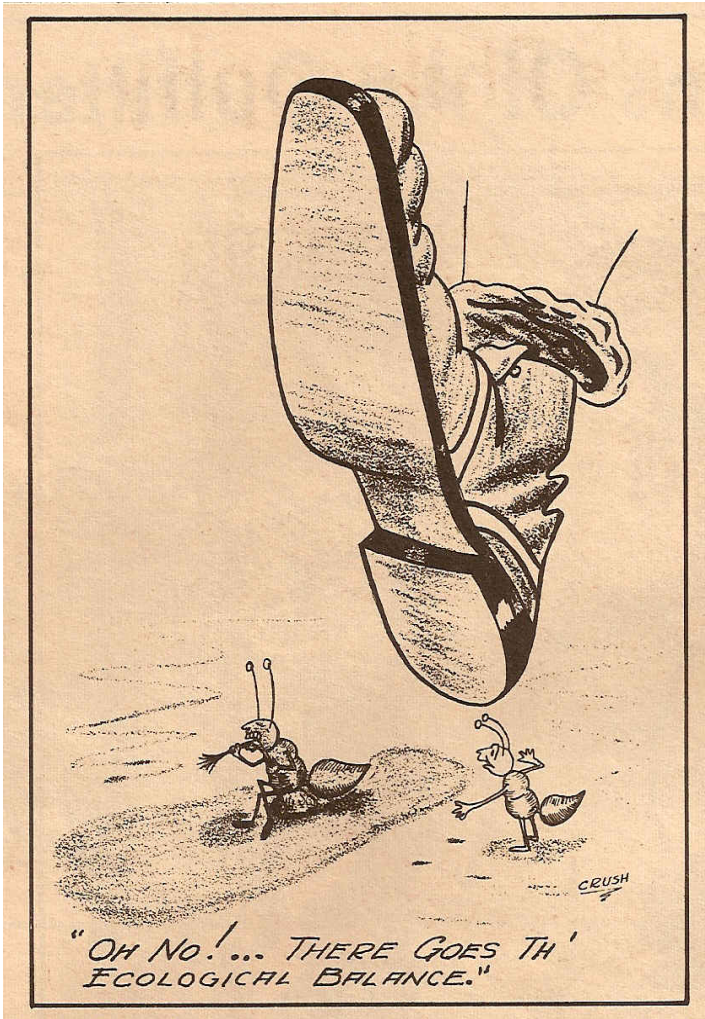
Although Isle Royale Park literature claims wolves and moose are “native” species, they offer no evidence that either species ever existed there prior to the 20th Century. The only native ungulate species that lived there until recently was woodland caribou - with humans, lynx and coyotes their primary natural predators.

For several thousand years Indians hunted and trapped those species and mined copper and fished on the island, and white men lived there and did all of those things for nearly 100 years in the 19th and 20th Centuries. In fact Isle Royale was a county in Michigan with no federal land ownership before it became a National Park and was subsequently given “wilderness” designation by Congress.

If wolves and moose were invasive species, why weren’t they destroyed and the humans, caribou, lynx and

continued on page 10

Balanced Ecosystems - *continued from page 9*
 coyotes restored to the ecosystem? Could it be a refusal to admit that humans were as much a “native” inhabitant of many ecosystems as any other life form during the past 10,000 years?



Cartoon from the July 1971 issue of *The Outdoorsman*.

The above cartoon by *Outdoorsman* cartoonist Carl Rush published 37 years ago, illustrated that the heavy hand (or foot) of man was blamed for every disruption in the “balance-of-nature” that was claimed to exist in all ecosystems until man “interfered.” Yet nearly two decades of research by Wolf Biologist David Mech, resulted in him denouncing the theory he had made so popular.

The “Burp” Concern

The claim that human-caused carbon emissions or other greenhouse gases are the major cause of global warming has now been disputed by thousands of scientists, including several highly respected former supporters of the theory. (“*Why I Recanted: There is no evidence to support the idea that carbon emissions cause significant global warming,*” David Evans *Financial Post* August 30, 2008). When the above cartoon was published, there was still concern for global *cooling* that had existed since 1945.

But in 1971, scientists also claimed that the methane gas resulting from domestic cattle “burping” far exceeded the impact of carbon emissions from vehicles. In 2006 the UN issued a lengthy report titled, “Livestock’s Long Shadow,” stating that the livestock sector was one of the top two or three contributors to land degradation, climate change, air pollution, water shortage, water pollution and loss of biodiversity.

Political Leaders are Gullible

The UN and its green advocacy groups like The Nature Conservancy have managed to convince many political leaders that global warming results from almost every use of the world’s renewable natural resources that benefits the human race. The “carbon credit” trading, promoted by former TNC Board Chairman Henry Paulson, amounts to a redistribution of wealth from industrialized nations to third world rulers.

Both the Democrat and Republican Presidential Candidates and Democratic Vice-Presidential Candidate Joseph Biden insist that ice-core sampling proves that excessive human-caused carbon dioxide in the atmosphere causes global warming. Yet scientists admit the ice core samples show that each indication of high carbon levels occurred 800 years **after** each episode of global warming.

The national news media frequently reminds us of the UN claim that one-third of all animal species are in danger of extinction during this century. Yet scientists tell us that during the periods of global warming that occurred over the past 2.5 million years, almost none of the millions of species that existed became extinct.

The few that did were the so-called “mega-fauna,” including hairy mammoths and saber-tooth tigers, which disappeared at the end of the last ice age. Other species adapted to the warmer temperatures which brought about an increase in biodiversity as it always does.

Skeptics Offer Half a Million Dollar Reward

The ~600 UN scientists who predict worldwide disaster from global warming offer only theories and pitifully inaccurate climate models in support of their claims. But “The Ultimate Global Warming Challenge” has posted a \$500,000 reward “to the first person to prove, in a scientific manner, that humans are causing harmful global warming.” (see <http://www.ultimateglobalwarmingchallenge.com/>)

People who portray carbon dioxide as an atmospheric pollutant ignore the reality that it is a major component of the earth’s atmosphere – without which there would be no life on earth. Rather than being a pollutant it is a plant food that, even doubled in quantity, dramatically increases crop productivity which feeds millions more people with less ground devoted to growing crops.

That makes more land available to increase species biodiversity which is proclaimed to be the goal of the green advocates. Depriving millions of poor people of the ability to provide food, clean water, shelter and a healthy source

of heat in the guise of protecting the environment from carbon dioxide emissions amounts to signing a death warrant for several million humans every year.

Thousands of Scientists Disagree

The small group of international power brokers who continue to promote their destructive agenda to control the world's energy production, claim that only a handful of dissidents disagree with their claims of impending doom from man-caused global warming. Yet that, too, is false

According to a recent posting, a total of **31,072** American scientists, including 9,021 with PhDs, have now signed the following petition to the President and Congress: (see <http://www.petitionproject.org/>)

"We urge the United States government to reject the global warming agreement that was written in Kyoto, Japan in December 1997, and any other similar proposals. The proposed limits on greenhouse gases would harm the environment, hinder the advance of science and technology and damage the health and welfare of mankind.

"There is no convincing scientific evidence that human release of carbon dioxide, methane, or other greenhouse gases is causing, or will, in the foreseeable future, cause catastrophic heating of the Earth's atmosphere and disruption of the Earth's climate. Moreover, there is substantial scientific evidence that increases in atmospheric carbon dioxide produce many beneficial effects upon the natural plant and animal environments of the Earth."

Ignoring Warnings, Bush Appointed Green Extremist

Neither the United States nor Australia have signed the Kyoto Protocol yet both countries' governing bodies have adopted many of its provisions to limit carbon emissions during the past two years. Although President Bush was warned not to appoint environmental activist Henry Paulson as Treasury Secretary by government watchdog groups he ignored the advice and the appointment was quickly confirmed by Congress.

In his dual role as Chairman and CEO of Goldman Sachs and Chairman of The Nature Conservancy Board of Directors, Paulson was responsible for Goldman Sachs adopting TNC's radical environmental policy. This included restricting logging and the rights of indigenous people and strongly promoting "cap-and-trade" restrictions on carbon emissions.

Endorsed by both Obama and McCain, "cap-and-trade" has the potential to generate huge profits for Al Gore, Goldman Sachs and other wealthy investors in carbon credits. But like the "cap-and-tax" scheme for taxing carbon emissions that is reportedly ruining the European economy, the costs will be paid by doubling the American family's energy costs (CBO Report).

The addition of Paulson and several other former Goldman Sachs executives to the Bush Cabinet during the past two years may help explain the change in the Bush

policy from refusing to support mandatory controls on carbon emissions to promising to implement them.

Media Hides Facts about "Bailout Bill"

But it does not explain why the national news media failed to report Paulson's role in Goldman Sachs leaving the Fannie Mae mess it helped create before the house of cards began to tumble. After Paulson's **3-page** bailout bill failed in the House by 228 to 205, the media appeared more concerned with telling Americans they must convince Congress to vote for **H.R. 1424** (the **450-page** "substitute bailout bill") than telling them about the carbon tax provisions, green energy subsidies and assorted "pork" that were all part of the new three-part "bailout bill."

Part 1 – Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 (112 pages) This gave Paulson – who oversaw TNC turning millions of acres of productive private land into non-productive federally-owned land – authority to take 700 billion nonexistent tax dollars from American citizens' future earnings and spend it as he saw fit "to increase investor confidence." As soon as the new bill passed and his plan to spend \$250 billion to buy up worthless paper was announced, investors raced to sell their stock at a loss in "the biggest sell-off since 1933."

Paulson's assurance that the federal government had no intention of actually using the bill's takeover powers was abruptly forgotten. Following Europe's lead, he announced he will use the first \$250 billion or so to "obtain preferred stock in" (federalize) nine of the largest mortgage banks which he said "are healthy institutions."

Part 2 - Energy Improvement and Extension Act of 2008 (148 pages). Described as "an environmental pork" give-away, this amended the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to extend or even double massive taxpayer-funded subsidies for virtually every "carbon-reducing" activity from a \$20-per-month fringe benefit for each person riding a bicycle to work to multi-billion-dollar incentives for recovering carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

The subsidy for producing "cellulosic biofuel" (ethanol and other "biofuels") ignores the reality that the manufacturing process emits more carbon dioxide than it saves in the fuel. Subsidizing the use of feed grains and other crops for fuel use drives up the cost of producing meat, vegetables, and grain for human consumption.

This Act gave Secretary Paulson full authority to make all determinations and appropriated \$1.5 million for the National Science Foundation to do a two year "carbon audit" of the 1986 Tax Code. That paves the way for imposing a carbon tax on every activity that generates "greenhouse gases," including farming, ranching, manufacturing, energy production and outdoor recreation.

Part 3 - Tax Extenders and Alternative Minimum Tax Relief Act of 2008 (190 pages) Assorted added "pork" designed to bribe opponents of the Bailout Bill and the Carbon Credits Bill to change their vote to yes. It worked and the combined bill passed the House 263-171.

The Turning Point

Editorial Opinion by George Dovel

Ever since I resurrected *The Outdoorsman* in 2004, my goal has been to provide legislators, resource managers and outdoorsmen with documented facts they can use to help restore sound management of the billion-dollar renewable wildlife resource that existed in Idaho and other western states. Current trends and my conversations with long-time readers have dictated the subject matter of articles that have often been lengthy and difficult to read.

Responsible wildlife managers have been replaced by ecosystem worshippers at every level of government. These misguided extremists ignore the real world and live in a fantasy land, pretending it is their moral duty to restrict and control others in order to save mankind from itself.

If this sounds pretty "far out" consider that our Congress has relinquished control of our immediate destiny and given it to a self-proclaimed ecosystem advocate whose activities have displaced untold numbers of indigenous people in third world countries.

A growing number of state legislators and governors now support The Nature Conservancy and other land trusts acquiring ownership or control of productive private land and selling millions of acres of that land to the federal government at huge profits provided by our tax dollars. Sadly several sportsman and agricultural groups who figure to benefit financially, have endorsed this practice under the pretence it is being done to protect a rural way of life.

But knowing that millions of acres of man-made wildlands overgrown with noxious weeds and forest debris exists will not compensate us for the loss of our freedoms or our productivity. Nor will it restore the abundant diversity of wildlife that we once enjoyed thanks to sound management.

My wife and I and most of our children harvest wild game by hunting and fishing because it has been a part of our existence for generations. The professionals we have entrusted with managing and perpetuating the wild game and fish we share ownership of with other residents are destroying it in the guise of ecosystem management.

It no longer involves a process of politely debating season lengths or management techniques. These obsessed ecosystem worshippers have violated the trust they were given and the time has come to take the gloves off and "tell it like it is" to anyone who will listen.

The dumbing down of America by self-proclaimed experts in the media has reached the stage where we watch a political debate on TV and then tune in all three of the major networks to have them tell us who won the debate. They have elevated yellow journalism to a new level of perfection, spoon feeding us only the facts mixed with opinions that support what they want us to believe.

When the first bailout bill failed to pass in the House and the market took a dive, the media claimed the Congressmen who listened to their constituents and voted against the bailout were too dumb to understand why it must be passed. Then when the second bailout bill passed and the market recorded the worst selloff since the Great Depression, they blamed it on everyone but themselves.

The federal takeover of the nation's largest banks, however temporary it is claimed to be, marks the transition from a free market society to a Socialist State. Yet many people now seem to believe it was necessary based on what they were told by the media.

Lately when I see one of my neighbor's animals chewing its cud it reminds me that Treasury Secretary Paulson intends to impose a tax on so-called greenhouse gas emissions. That may make him millions of additional dollars from carbon trading but imagine what it will do to the consumers and wage earners who will pay higher costs of living and have fewer jobs available to support the family.

The TV media apparently takes great delight in showing the video of a young polar bear hitching a ride on a small chunk of ice or the video of researchers illustrating ice core sampling in Greenland. But they never produce facts to substantiate their claim that global warming is caused by human-caused "greenhouse" gas emissions.

In Idaho, half of the Congressional delegation voted for the bailout and carbon restrictions and the other half opposed them. These are not restrictions against poisoning the air we breathe or the water we drink but are based entirely on the unproven theory that gases like carbon dioxide and methane will cause abnormal global warming with severe consequences.

I am privileged to have the opportunity to discuss these issues on a fairly regular basis with a few distinguished wildlife ecologists and several Idaho Legislators who express genuine concern that we are reaching a point of no return. I am convinced that we have reached a turning point in the discussion where we have the opportunity to take aggressive action and turn things around.

Those of you who are Idaho big game hunters may get inspired to join the battle after you've covered enough ground observing how mule deer and elk numbers have declined in your favorite hunting areas. That is especially true in the deep snow areas that experienced heavy losses from starvation or predators this past winter.

Whatever motivates you, I urge you to contact your elected State officials and solicit their help with problems you are familiar with. You may be surprised at how many other people feel the same way you do.

Bad Faith in F&G Disclosure of Money Spent

By Ed Lindahl

(Ed Lindahl, PhD, retired as a Lt. Colonel in the Army Infantry Airborne Rangers with Special Forces qualification, after 23 years of service. An avid big game hunter, fisherman and skier, he served for years as Chairman of the Clearwater Elk Recovery Team and as President and Director of the Moscow based Concerned Sportsmen of Idaho.

Eleven years ago he and other sportsmen from different Regions convinced former IDFG Director Steve Mealey to adopt the Mandatory Big Game Hunter Harvest Report in order to obtain accurate harvest totals, and to publish an annual "Stockholders Report" to show sportsmen, whose license dollars support the agency, exactly where the income from license buyers and other sources is spent.

In recent years IDFG provided the Stockholders Report only on its website and then discontinued it. Two months ago the IDFG website included an 8-page historical summary of its budget for the past three years and that is the document Dr. Lindahl refers to in the following article. – ED)

On September 11, 2008 I sent the following letter to the Idaho Fish and Game Commissioners referencing a budget summary that appeared on the Department's website:

Dear Commissioners:

After several years of interest and activity in Department budgeting and priorities, I must sadly admit that the Department has, indeed, lost its way.

The attempt to inform license buying hunters, anglers and trappers as to where their money is spent, that is found in the reference, is shameful, disrespectful and likely intentionally deceiving. The reference conveys so little information regarding where license and matching PR/DJ dollars are spent that it makes the Huffaker budget pie charts rank as being near full disclosure.

With \$16.3 million going to the Administration and Communication Bureaus, all that sportsmen get is a "policy wonk" document intended for use in the Governor's office that conforms to prescribed bureaucratic format, but conveys nothing to them in any manner of detail. Why bother to inform sportsmen of where their money goes when the so-called, "conservative" Governor has already checked off on the 20% fee increase that his Commission has gleefully approved?

Just when some folks had hope that the recent addition of some new members to the Commission might change the Conley/Andrus and Huffaker/Kemphorne ways of the past, we are sinking even lower into the abyss of bad faith dealings in Commission and Department spending and disclosure.

Perhaps under the Commission's supervision the Director could produce an honest and detailed "Sportsmen's Supplement" to the highly disappointing reference that could explain where and how much elk hunters' license and tag fee generated revenue (yes, a line item amount for elk revenue) goes toward elk management in the state. Elk hunters should also be informed of where any excess elk related revenues are spent i.e., non-game, ESA, administration and communication bureau's share of expenses for functions other than elk management purposes.

The same should be done for the other species that we hunt, fish and trap. Don't include those federal dollars for salmon and steelhead. I strongly believe if elk hunters got honest and detailed information regarding the Department's budget, they would be far more active in getting the Commission's rubber stamp policies and the Department's secret spending policies turned around.

It might even help the Governor get the lowdown on what's really going on. Last I heard his staff was busy trying to get an informed, concerned and passionate mule deer hunter to apologize to the Governor for having spoken truth to authority. And I thought cowboys liked straight talk, even if it's a little rough around the edges. I have many other concerns about Department spending and operations and would be glad to pass them on to anyone interested in discussing them.

Based on the handling of the wolf issue, the deceiving Department budget and other related issues, I have lost almost all confidence in the Director's leadership of the Department and I have little hope in this Commission getting the Department on track. By the way, the Department's wiring diagram on page 4-12 of the reference contains no mention of game management under the Wildlife Bureau, but does list Habitat Manager, Vet Services, NON-GAME/ESA and Wildlife Research.

Is this a change in mission for the Bureau? Many hunters I know maintain that the change of mission took place long ago during the Conley era and it has remained the same ever since. Too bad for hunters, anglers and trappers and too bad for Idaho!

Sincerely,
Ed Lindahl
Sagle

(Dr. Lindahl also sent the Commission a list of procedures that could be implemented by the Department to provide accurate line item reporting of money spent from each source of income. But IDFG's reluctance to show this

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F&G Disclosure - *continued from page 13*

information to State legislators, auditors or the general public appears to be the major stumbling block in getting an accounting of where the income is actually spent.

The following example illustrates why dedicated sportsmen conservationists like Ed Lindahl get so frustrated after years of broken promises and failure of F&G Commissioners and Idaho's elected officials to correct the lack of F&G transparency:

By late January of 2008, thousands of mule deer and a smaller number of elk at specific locations could not access winter forage covered by several feet of snow and were starving. After local residents reported what was happening, F&G officials and their feeding committees repeatedly refused to use the dedicated winter feeding set-aside account to feed.

Animals that were fed timely and properly by landowners and sportsmen in those critical locations survived in good shape but many of the rest died. In mid-April, Pocatello sportsman conservationist John Kontes sent photographs of the mass starvation in a letter to Gov. Otter who responded, as Idaho governors always do, by forwarding the letter to Idaho's F&G Director to answer.

In March when F&G finally was forced to provide feed, there was still more than \$800,000 in the dedicated winter feeding set-aside account. But in Director Groen's May 28, 2008 letter to Mr. Kontes, he claimed that IDFG is limited to **\$303,802** in legislative spending authority for the winter feeding account per fiscal year! He also said that limit includes money in excess of the \$400,000 minimum account balance that may be spent for range rehabilitation!

Yet in a September 10, 2008 email to Pocatello Sportsman Gary Peck and Pocatello Senator Diane Bilyeu, Legislative Budget Analyst Ray Houston explained that the amount spent for winter feeding is limited by IDFG's requested appropriation for winter feeding and habitat improvement. That request was for **\$1,394,300** in FY 2009 and he listed other sources IDFG could use if additional feeding funds were needed.

Analyst Houston also sent Senator Bilyeu and Mr. Peck the IDFG Winter Feeding Analysis for FY2008 which includes a 14-year record of winter feeding income and expenditures provided by IDFG. This document is also misleading because IDFG lumps winter feeding and range rehabilitation expenditures together and the implication is that this is solely money spent for winter feeding (see portion below):

Expenses	Winter Feeding Expenses		
	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008
State Auditor	2,721	4,647	2,395
Temp. wages	31,747	3,867	0
Travel costs	363	30,601	54
Contract Svcs.	1,898	113	630
Utility/Comm.	4,236	16,964	257,176
Material/Supply	43,141	45,571	34,626
Equip. Rental	13,007	40,857	56,386
Repairs	10,788	6,753	13,456
Misc.	<u>18,251</u>	<u>1,636</u>	<u>22,524</u>
Total Expenses	126,152	151,009	387,247
Acct. Balance	691,242	722,928	605,906

Although the chart appears to show that IDFG spent \$387,247 for winter feeding in FY2008, further inquiry of Big Game Manager Brad Compton by Mr. Houston revealed that IDFG spent only \$90,537 for winter feeding and spent \$294,315 to combat weeds, plant seedlings, etc. That total is within \$2,400 of the total shown on the chart but since feed pellets and seedlings are both normally listed under "Supplies/Material" according to Houston, there is no way to tell how much of the \$34,626 in material or of the \$90,537 total provided by Compton was actually spent for feed.

If this sounds like nit-picking to some readers they should be aware that during the past eight years I reported the misappropriation of several hundred thousand dollars from a dedicated set-aside fund by IDFG officials which was confirmed by an OPE investigation. Before that I reported hundreds of thousands of dollars from the reported sale of licenses that never showed up as income and most of which was never recovered.

Each of the dedicated set-aside funds was proposed to sportsmen and their legislators by IDFG for specific purposes such as emergency feeding, fish hatchery and dam repairs, etc. Sportsmen are entitled to an accurate accounting of the \$32 million they pay IDFG directly in user fees (a tax) plus additional millions they are charged in P-R and D-J excise taxes.

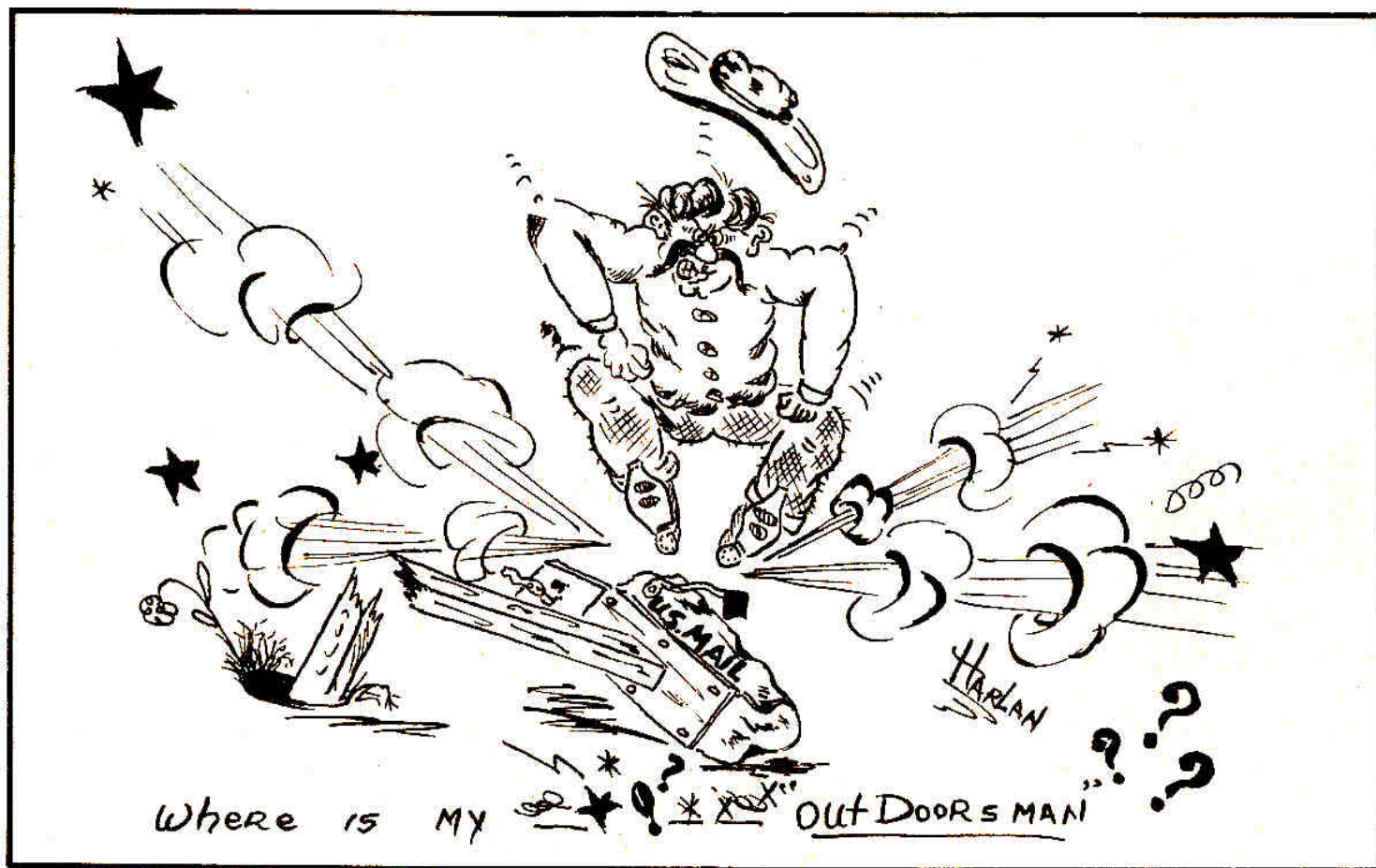
A quick look at the FY2008 expenditures reveals that IDFG spent \$83,000 more than the "cap" claimed by Groen. It also shows that on June 30, 2008 there was still \$606,000 remaining in the feeding account that could have been used to feed and save eight times as many deer and elk as were fed across the state.

Director Groen's claim in his letter to John Kontes that the emergency feeding money is more effective when spent for habitat than for emergency feeding defies logic. His claim that the so-called "Mule Deer Initiative" depends on spending the emergency feeding money on habitat (rather than feed starving deer) is an admission that he is violating IDAPA 13.01.18 which requires him to feed.

Groen's letter to Kontes states that the legislative intent was to use the account to also fund rehabilitation of winter forage once the balance exceeds \$400,000. Although that statement is accurate, it was never the legislative intent for IDFG to deliberately let deer and elk starve to death in order to keep the fund balance above \$400,000 to allow the "surplus" to be spent for habitat improvement, but that is what the Director is doing.

On April 4, 2005 Houston told F&G Commissioners the best place to start building transparency and credibility was by showing clearly what the Department spent in the previous year. He said the goal is to make the budget tell a story understandable to the average person.

Yet neither Budget expert Houston nor Big Game Manager Compton could explain the \$257,176 winter feeding expenditure charged to "Utilities/Communication" in FY2008. Two weeks after Houston's request for an explanation and two hours before this will be printed I received an amended spreadsheet with all expensive items reduced radically and \$374,250 charged to "General Services, R&M Supplies or Special Use Supplies!" – ED.)



Where Is My Outdoorsman?

Several weeks ago we began to receive phone calls from readers telling us they had not received the current issue of *The Outdoorsman*. Whoever answered the phone (usually me) explained that this Bulletin was a two-month issue and gave them the approximate date in early October when the August-September issue would be printed and mailed.

Unlike many national magazines, *Outdoorsman* Bulletins are not dated a month or more ahead of time but are printed and mailed on a regular schedule depending on whether the issue covers one, two or three months (12, 16, or 20 pages). This two-month issue is being printed two months and 10 days after the last issue and hopefully will be mailed the same day it is printed.

We apologize for the 10-day delay but it seemed more logical than finishing the lead story when it was two-month-old news. Beginning next month articles will be shorter and longer articles will be split into two or more issues.

While we're on the subject of mailing, since 2004 our costs for every part of putting each issue out have increased by about 30% for supplies and printing to over 100% for transportation, special equipment maintenance

and mailing (up to 300% for mailing single copies separately). When individuals or organizations sent us larger donations the money was used to increase bulk circulation but then we continued to mail them one or several copies for months or years.

We also bear all or part of the cost of printing and mailing several hundred copies to certain state legislatures, F&G Commissions and other elected state officials. It is vital that these people get exposed to facts and we can certainly use donations in any amount to help defray those costs.

We would like to post entire issues or at least specific articles on the internet as we formerly did but many sportsmen still do not have internet access. We urge all of you to send us a change of address card when your address changes – the Post Office refuses to forward.

Several weeks ago Jim Hagedorn from the Clearwater Region asked folks on an email list to send donations to *The Outdoorsman* to help defray costs. To those who did, please accept our sincere thanks. To those who sent emails saying they would donate but failed to follow through, I urge you to help my wife and I pay the thousands of dollars this is costing us. Many thanks!



Trista Pottenger fighting a large sturgeon on a stretch of the Salmon River downstream from Riggins in June 2008.



The proud young lady and family members help remove the hook in the water and release the fish unharmed.

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The Outdoorsman accepts no advertising and represents no special interest group, government or private entity or political party or philosophy. Its publication of facts and mailed subscriptions are supported entirely by donations. Through donations to cover the annual cost of approximately \$25.00 each, it is printed and mailed free of charge to the several hundred Legislators, Fish and Game Commissioners and other State and Federal elected officials in Idaho and Nevada, and to selected officials in other states.

A donation in any amount will help support the circulation of facts in this unique publication and a donation of \$25 or more will pay the cost of receiving The Outdoorsman by U.S. mail for one year. Please print your name and correct mailing address on the coupon below and add additional names on a separate sheet of paper.



Pottenger family in jet boat heading downriver to fish for sturgeon on the Main Salmon.

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