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THE HISTORY OF THE ERADICATION OF THE WOLF IN MONTANA

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INTRODUCTION

Literature, myth and superstition portray the wolf as intelligent, cunning, cowardly and usually villainous. If man can apply his own characteristics to animals, the wolf indeed has all of these traits. Modern man also possesses a characteristic attitude toward the wolf -- prejudice.

The American's prejudice has evolved over three and one-half centuries of contact with the wolf. This long process has left an indelible mark which manifested itself in a hatred of the wolf. Thus, it is appropriate that the first known record of a wolf should be displayed in a prison. During the Pleistocene period, an ancestor of the modern wolf left his tracks in the soft sand. Thousands of years later man found these tracks in the sandstone and placed the stone in the courtyard of the Nevada State Penitentiary. The bars of prejudice still surround the wolf, and only in the last twenty years has the wolf begun to gain any stature in the world of the human being. As man begins to understand some of the more sophisticated facts of ecology,[1] he is beginning to vindicate the wolf.

[1]Ecology -- The branch of biology which deals with the mutual relations among organisms and between them and their environment.

Most Indian tribes found the wolf useful; there are few records of Indians taking vengeance on this animal. Yet the wolf seemed intolerable to the white settler in North America. Whether he was a Massachusetts settler, a Tennessee frontiersman or a Great Plains pioneer, his prejudice emanated from the same sources: (1) a European tradition of dislike for the wolf, (2) a psychological aversion toward the wolf because he displays those characteristics which were despised by the frontiersman -- particularly cowardice, and (3) most importantly, the wolf did economic damage to all frontier groups -- from the settler of the Eastern seaboard to the "sod buster" of the Northern plains.

Whenever the frontiersmen moved west they encountered the wolf.[2] The wolf, being carnivorous and extremely adaptable, found the frontiersmen's livestock easier prey than wild game. The result always followed the same pattern. The frontiersmen called a meeting, set a bounty and then called for the extermination of all wolves.

The Great Plains cattlemen incurred the greatest losses due to wolf predation in all our frontier history,

[2]Prior to colonization wolves inhabited all of North America.

and it was the Montana stockmen who suffered most severely. The Montanans used every conceivable method to eradicate the wolf; they used traps, disease, snares, bounties, wolf-proof fences, poison, dogs, holes, burning chemicals, ropes, dead-falls and even fire to burn wolves' hiding places. The stockmen almost succeeded; today less than one hundred wolves exist in the state of Montana, and the wolf has been placed on the United States Department of the Interior's List of Rare and Disappearing Species.

The American frontiersman proved to be extremely successful in protecting his economic interests and fulfilling his dreams of a prosperous country. However, he was often extractive and wasteful and moved with little understanding of the consequences involved. The American of today suffers for the mistakes that the frontiersmen made.

The wolf is an example of this. Modern ecologists have proven that the wolf and other predators are important in maintaining a proper ecological balance. Ecologists and zoologists, concerned about our game herds, have found that, in many cases, game animals are increasing to dangerous levels, and even worse, these animals are becoming weaker with the passage of years.[3]

[3]There are presently more deer in the United States than there were at the time of the discovery of America.

Man has become the predator who controls game herds; every fall thousands of animals are killed by hunters. However, man is not a beneficial predator, as hunters usually try to take the strongest and best animals. Thus, the weaker animals are left to propagate, and through the evolutionary process weaker traits are transmitted from generation to generation while the stronger traits are lost.

Wolves, unlike men, are beneficial predators. Modern studies have shown that wolves kill the weaker animals -- leaving the stronger animals to pass on their attributes to future generations.

The solution seems simple -- reintroduce wolves to help strengthen and balance the big game herds. However, the problem is vastly complicated. There are two major obstacles to such a plan. The first problem is ecological. Man has changed the entire wildlife ecology, and thus, it is impossible to return to any state of nature which existed prior to exploration and settlement. The second problem is one of opposition from the livestock growers. Although North America wolf attacks on man are inconsequential, the wolf does eat man's livestock.

Stockmen in Montana still fear the wolf. Many stockmen still remember the "renegade" White Wolf of the Judith Basin (in Central Montana) which was credited with killing over

$15,000 worth of livestock in Montana between 1925 and 1932. There were wolf depredations on Montana livestock until 1940.

These attitudes and the long history of man's contact with the wolf cannot be easily erased. The wolf created a challenge with which the Montana stockmen had to cope. They conquered the wolf, but the process was frustrating, costly and long.

Today man faces the opposite problem with the wolf; he must turn his efforts from eradication to saving the species. To accomplish this goal we must place the wolf in a historical perspective in order to ascertain and analyze the problems which have developed and which must be solved before we can take any effective action concerning the wolf.

CHAPTER I

CANIS LUPUS

Prior to the colonization of North America, the Canis lupus (timber wolf) enjoyed a wider distribution than any other land animal. It inhabited the entire United States, Canada and Northern and Central Mexico.[1] Within this seven million square mile range were found twenty-three subspecies of Canis lupus or gray timber wolf and three subspecies of Canis niger or red wolf. Probably no other land mammal possessed a greater ability to survive in the many diversified environments of the continent.

Two gray timber wolf subspecies inhabited Montana -- Canis lupus irremotus or Northern Rocky Mountain wolf and Canis lupus nubilus or Great Plains wolf, also called buffalo wolf loafer. These two subspecies do not vary greatly in size or habits. The differences are in their skull size and traditional range.[2] Most of Montana's wolves were the

[1] Richard Aulerich, "The Wolf," National Parks Magazine. Vol. 40, no. 230 (Nov., 1966), 10.

[2] Stanley P. Young and Edward A. Goldman, The Wolves of North America (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1964), II, 411-449 passim. Hereafter quoted as Young and Goldman, Wolves.

Canis lupus nubilus species; they were found in all of Eastern Montana.

The survival of the species is attributed to its ability to adapt feeding habits to the food available. Intelligence, speed, endurance and social organization gave these predators tremendous adaptability. Man represented the only factor which the wolf could not contend.

Today, wolves remain in the sparsely populated areas of five states -- Alaska, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana and Wisconsin. There are also a few in Wyoming -- in or near Yellowstone National Park. In Montana there were several hundred thousand wolves in the 1860's; now there are probably less than one hundred.[3] The present wolf population of Montana is confined to a few animals near Glacier Park and some recently sighted ones in the Yellowstone Park area. These recent sightings represent a resurgence, as wolves were actively killed in the Park area until 1933 when they were considered "eradicated." After that only a few sightings of single wolves had been reported until December, 1968 when Park officials confirmed reports of a pack living in that area. A few wolves must have been inhabiting the area

[3]This is an estimate by the author after discussions with zoologists, wildlife biologists, National Park personnel and Fish and Game officials, as well as from personal research.

around the Park and isolated areas within the Park between 1933 and 1968, but only recently did the excess of wolf population force some of the animals into the less remote areas where they could be seen by man. Ranchers west and north of Yellowstone Park have reported seeing wolves for several years. One outfitter said that wolves have been increasing in the Cabin Creek area just west of the Park.[4]

Two factors brought about the near extinction of the wolf in Montana. First, and most important, was the deliberate attempt by man to eradicate the wolf, and second was the constant population pressure by man which interfered with the wolves' traditional denning areas. The wolf's nature made him very difficult to eradicate, but man, with his scientific methods and persistence, almost succeeded. Even after man focused his attention on the elimination of this mammal, it took nearly sixty years (1870 to 1930) to alleviate the wolf problem.

The Montana wolf weighs from sixty to one hundred and twenty-five pounds and has an over-all length of five to six feet.[5] The wolf's speed and endurance enables him to travel

[4]Personal interviews with Henry Gates and Peter Durham of Cameron, Montana. This is not a confirmed sighting, but the outfitter, Henry Gates, has had experience with wolves and should be considered fairly reliable.

[5]Young and Goldman, Wolves, II, 411-449 passim.

great distances in search of food. The speed of running wolves has been measured at twenty-eight to forty miles per hour.[6] His normal gait is a jog of twenty miles per hour, which he can maintain for many hours.[7] There are numerous reports of wolves traveling over one hundred and twenty miles in a single day.[8]

Like most mammals, the wolf covers a defined area and usually proceeds along the same trails. The territory covered primarily depends on the food available and the season of the year. During the fall and winter, the wolf covers a broad area and often will follow migrating game herds to winter feeding grounds. During the spring and summer, the region covered is limited, as the females are confined to the dens in order to rear the young. Men soon learned to take advantage of the wolf's natural tendency to confine his hunting to one area. They placed traps or poison on traditionally used trails or in areas of frequent wolf kills. In the spring and early summer, wolf hunters

[6]Young and Goldman, Wolves, I, 72. Also see Russell J. Rutter and Douglas H. Pimlott, The World of the Wolf (Philadelphia & New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1968), 89. Hereafter cited as Rutter and Pimlott, Wolf.

[7]Young and Goldman, Wolves, I, 73.

[8]Young and Goldman, Wolves, I, 74. Also see Helen Aga, "Three Toes," Rapid City Journal, Feb. 28, 1965.

searched for denning areas where all the pups, and often the female, could be killed.

Once a hunting region is defined by a group of wolves or a pack, it is defended from encroachment by other wolves.[9] Other wolves are "invited" into the area by howling, but if a wolf wanders into another's territory without this invitation, he is chased away, usually after a bad mauling.[10]

Food availability is the major factor which determines the territory covered by the wolf. It is a carnivorous predator which must kill to live and will eat any warm-blooded animal. Stomach and feces analyses show the large variety of animals which can be included in the wolf's diet. The remains of rabbits, moose, elk, caribou, antelope, deer, buffalo, mountain sheep, goats, beaver, fishes, ducks, geese, grouse, pheasants, black bears, grizzly bears, cattle, sheep and horses have all been found.

The wolf's social structure is responsible for his effectiveness as a predator. The family and social structure of the wolf is efficient and effective, particularly for

[9] Farley Mowat, Never Cry Wolf (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1966), 60. Hereafter cited as Mowat, Never Cry Wolf. Young and Goodman, Wolves, I, 304. Young and Mowat believe that the wolf defines his territory by urinating on objects at the perimeter of the area.

[10] Mowat, Never Cry Wolf, 60. Also see Russell J. Rutter and Douglas H. Pimlott, The World of the Wolf (New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1968), 80-82.

rearing the young and for hunting. Wolves usually mate for life[11] and responsibility for rearing the young is assumed by both parents. Often the previous year's pups will remain with their parents for another year thus forming the pack which is the basic social unit. Packs vary in size from four to twenty animals. The size of the pack is in direct relation to the size of the animal to be hunted. When the basic food supply is moose, the pack is larger because it requires more wolves to kill a moose than it does to kill a smaller animal. In Isle Royale National Park (an island in Lake Superior) where almost the entire winter food supply is moose, the pack which was studied numbered sixteen.[12] In the Algonquin Park area of Canada where the food supply is mostly white-tailed deer, the packs number from three to six.[13] The size of the pack remains the same when caribou are the main food source.[14] When wolves fed on buffalo there are indications that the wolf packs were large. Some

[11]Young and earlier wolf experts stated that wolves mate for life. However, Pimlott says that there is no proof of this and that wolves will remate after the death of their mate.

[12]David Mech, The Wolves of Isle Royale, U.S. Dept. of Interior, Fauna of the National Parks, Fauna Series 7 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), 37. Hereafter cited as Mech, Isle Royale.

[13]Rutter and Pimlott, Wolf, 110.

[14]Mowat, Never Cry Wolf, 48.

"wolfers"[15] in Montana reported killing as many as one hundred wolves per bait. Most packs reported by early explorers and trappers in Montana ran from fifteen to thirty animals. However, these men also sighted some smaller packs.

The wolf population varies in direct proportion to food availability.[16] Modern mammalogists have been unable fully to explain this exact balance between population and food source. The wolf can be a prolific breeder with litters usually numbering four to six pups, but eight or ten are not uncommon.[17] It is reasonable to assume that cyclical overpopulation would occur as it does with rabbits and deer; however, this has never been reported by any biologist, mammalogist or ecologist. One researcher raised the question of whether or not wolves voluntarily reduce their numbers by not breeding whenever the food supply decreases.[18] Mech, in his Isle Royale study, reports that as the food supply remained constant, so did the wolf population, and only one case of breeding took place over a three year period.[19] Thus

[15]Wolfers were men who hunted wolves for their pelts. This term usually refers to those men who hunted before 1883.

[16]Young and Goldman, Wolves, I, 134.

[17]Young and Goldman, Wolves, I, 84. Also see Rutter and Pimlott, Wolf, 50.

[18]John B. Theberge, "The Arctic Haunt of the Whitest Wolf," Audubon, Vol. 70, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb., 1968), 58.

[19]Mech, Isle Royale, 70.

the number of animals in the pack remained about the same. Authorities cannot agree on the causes of this phenomenon, but they all believe that breeding patterns are an important factor in this balance.[20]

The pack is usually composed of a family unit in which the young are reared and taught to hunt. Responsibility for rearing the young is assumed by the entire pack or family unit. Even when the pack is large and there are two mated females, the entire pack assumes the burden of feeding and taking care of the young.

Wolves mate in February and the pups or whelps are born in late April or early May. Before the litter arrives, the female chooses a den. Often it has been used previously, and if so she cleans and enlarges it before the whelps are born. The choice of a den is important; it must be adjacent to water, have a good food supply and be hidden from the wolves' enemies. High rocky ridges overlooking a stream or lake are favorite denning places. Wolves prefer an area where there are grassy meadows nearby, so they can hunt the many rodents that inhabit this type of land in the spring.[21]

[20]For the best studies see: Mech, Isle Royale, and Theberge, "Whitest Wolf."

[21]Mowat, Never Cry Wolf, 80.

Eastern Montana provided the wolf with many ideal areas for spring denning. The wooded creeks and rivers with steep rocky banks offered the requisites of water and protection. The buffalo, deer, elk, and later cattle, provided the necessary food. When man started populating the river and creek bottoms, the number of denning areas was greatly reduced. The cattleman and then the honyoker also desired these bottom lands for hay meadows and protected homesites. This encroachment by man reduced the wolf population, not only because of the competition for the land, but also because of the wolves' vulnerability during the denning period.

During this time, the wolves' mobility is greatly reduced.[22] The female must stay with the whelps almost constantly for the first six weeks, and she leaves only for water. The responsibility for feeding the female is assumed by the other members of the pack. After six or eight weeks, the pups are weaned and then they, too, must be fed by the other members. Each night the pack hunts. In the morning, it returns to the den, and the hunters regurgitate food for the female and the young pups. Sometimes large pieces of

[22]Wolves can travel thirty miles and return during a single hunting trip, thus the area could be sixty miles in diameter.

meat and even bones are brought to the den for consumption. The whelps and the female nip at the head and neck of the hunting wolves causing them to regurgitate food. Even wolves that have been raised by human families as domestic animals retain this trait and will regurgitate partially digested food for pups from any litter.[23]

The spring confinement and limitation of the hunting area did not present too much of a problem for the wolf, as fawns, calves and other young animals were easy prey. The frontier cattlemen reported many calf losses during the spring months due to this predator.

Cattlemen misinterpreted this spring calf kill and labeled the wolf as a wanton killer. Actually, the hunting wolves, confined to a smaller territory during the spring, followed the same trails and often killed in the same area each time. Because they needed to feed each night to maintain the female and the pups, the hunters usually made one kill per night. The wolf would make a fresh kill if possible, as he preferred the entrails and hind quarters of a warm animal to that of an old kill. Only when food was scarce would he return to a former kill. Over a period of several weeks or a month, these wolves would kill many animals and

[23]Rutter and Pimlott, Wolf, 58-59.

eat parts of each, but not devour the whole carcass. When the stockman finally arrived on his range, he would find several mutilated animals, many of which looked as though they had been killed at one time. In his indignation, the stockman accused the wolf of killing unnecessarily. The stockman expected losses due to winter kill, disease and predators, but these seemingly unnecessary kills infuriated him and added one more element to his pathological hatred of the wolf.

Another factor that contributed to this hatred was the belief that wolves killed many animals simply to teach their young to kill. The stockmen were correct in assuming that the pups must be taught to hunt with the pack; however, wolves do not kill simply as a demonstration. During June and July, the pups are taken on short hunts near the den. The concentration of kills, again misled the cattlemen into believing that the wolf killed simply for amusement rather than to survive.

Survival of the wolf depends upon the ability to kill his prey. The wolf is unlike the mountain lion or other members of the cat family who wait above their prey and then jump on it, thus breaking its neck or dragging it down by the neck. The wolf must chase the animal and bring it to bay before attacking. It takes the cooperation of a whole pack to kill a large game animal or domestic livestock.

The young wolves thus must be taught to hunt with the pack, as there is little natural instinct to hunt in cooperation with other wolves.[24] In taking game animals, the wolf is at a considerable disadvantage, as all of these animals can run faster than he can. Larger species (moose, caribou, elk and buffalo), when standing at bay and not exhausted, can easily fight off a pack of wolves. In spite of these disadvantages, the wolf is an efficient and savage killer. In the case of cattle and sheep, the wolf's task is much easier, because these domestic animals are slower and tend to panic when chased.

The wolf is forced to depend upon close cooperation and a natural instinct, developed over the centuries, to determine when an animal is weak and may be taken easily. The methods of killing depend upon the animal hunted, but they are similar for all large four-footed animals. A pack of wolves lopes along smelling the ground in an attempt to get a fresh scent. Once an animal is located, it is "tested" by running it for a short distance. If the animal is strong and runs rapidly, the wolves turn away and search for another victim. If the animal tested shows signs of

[24]Rutter and Pimlott, Wolf, 72. Also see Young and Goldman, Wolves, I, 104.

weakening or limping, the wolves chase the animal until it is caught, brought to bay, or until it manages to out-run the pack. Scientists are amazed at the wolf's ability to detect the slightest faltering of a weakened animal.[25] Larger animals will sometimes stand at bay and fight. If the fighting animal appears strong, it is left along, but if it appears weak, then it is attacked by the pack. In an Isle Royale study, Mech found that wolves killed only 7.8 percent of the moose tested.[26] His study also indicated that all moose killed by the wolves under observation were either under one year old or over five years of age and that most of the older moose were diseased.[27] Other studies have indicated similar facts.[28] By culling weak animals through selective killing, the wolf has proved beneficial, rather than detrimental, to wild game herds. They are kept from over-grazing their traditional range. Since weak animals are culled from the herds, the stronger animals remain. Strong traits are rebred and through the evolutionary process,

[25]Olaus J. Mure, "Wolf," Audubon, Vol. 59, no. 5, (Sept.-Oct., 1957), 219.

[26]Mech, Isle Royale, 144.

[27]Mech, Isle Royale, 144-147, passim.

[28]Mowat, Never Cry Wolf, 146. Also see Rutter and Pimlott, Wolf, 62 and 108.

the herds are strengthened.

The nineteenth century stockman could hardly appreciate the ecological role of this predator. Since the wolf could easily kill cattle, horses and sheep, the stockman only viewed the wolf as an undesirable predator.

Part of the stockman's negative attitude resulted from his repugnance for the wolf's method of killing. This is naturally distasteful to man, as the wolf seldom makes a clean kill, but rather lets the animal slowly bleed to death. Usually these predators will start feeding on their victim's entrails before it has died. Most wolves follow the same pattern of attack; the Montana wolves of the Canis lupus nubilus species had one peculiar method of attack which was developed because their traditional food source was the buffalo. One wolf, usually the female, would draw the victim's attention by moving back and forth in front of the animal to be taken, while the other members of the pack stalked it from the rear. The name "Loafer" given to the wolves of this species came from this method of approach as the female appeared to be slow on the attack.

Once the female drew the attention of the victim, and the other members of the pack closed in, the attack began. The male and other members would strike at the flank of the animal, biting large chunks of hair and meat. The female

remained at the head as a distraction. As the animal weakened, the female would bite at the ears and eyes, while the others would bite at the stomach pouch in an effort to get to the entrails. When the animal became too weak to resist, the wolves would start feeding even though the animal was still alive. One can easily imagine the anger of the stockman when he found the mutilated carcass with the entrails spilled on the ground and the hind quarters ripped and torn with many vertical slashes. The ears, tongue and tail of the dying animal had usually been devoured.

This mutilated condition of domestic stock after a wolf kill caused the stockmen to believe that wolves hamstrung[29] their victims before they made the final kill. Now, experts agree that this was not true.[30] Whether true or not, it infuriated the cattlemen who felt that this represented a cowardly act by the wolf.

The wolf's nature and population in Montana brought him into contact with man. From the first exploration of the area until the wolf's near extinction, this predator has been an influential factor in the history of Montana.

[29]The "hamstring" is the large tendon in rear of the animal's leg. Once it is severed, the leg is useless.

[30]Mech, Isle Royale, 136.

Chapter II

EXPLORERS, TRAPPERS AND WOLFERS

Man's contact with the wolf for over 3,000 years has resulted in a deep prejudice against this animal. The wolf existed in all of Europe until the eighteenth century, and wolves reportedly killed livestock and humans. The "Beast of Gévaudan," an eighteenth century wolf in France, was credited with killing 123 people, and Louis XV allegedly called an army of 43,000 men with 2,800 dogs to hunt and kill this single wolf.[1]

The first permanent settlers who came to the English and French American colonies carried a prejudice and fear of the wolf with them in their migrations. They found the American wolves more shy than the European species. There have been very few authenticated cases of North American wolves killing men, and in most of these cases, the killing was done by rabid wolves. The colonists did not fear the wolf because of possible attack on humans, but rather for

[1]C. H. D. Clarke, "The Beast of Gévaudan." M.S. on deposit in the Fish and Wildlife Library, Department of Lands and Forest (Maple, Ontario, Canada). As quoted in Rutter and Pimlott, Wolf, 26.

killing their livestock. In 1609 a Virginia colonist wrote of wolf attacks:

> . . . greatly to the annoyance of the settlers; and many a time did they start in the middle of the night to defend their pig-pens and sheepfold, the brave housewife joining in the combat; but the circumstances sometimes would compel her to defend the flock single-handed, usually with good success.[2]

The people of Plymouth Colony first endeavored to control the wolf. In 1630 they enacted the first bounty law in North America. Other colonies soon followed, and eventually every colony had a bounty on this predator.[3]

Like the Indian, buffalo and elk, the wolf was forced farther west by the pressure of expanding white population. As settlers moved into an area, they usually set a bounty on wolves, and increasing population put pressure on the wolves' denning areas. The pattern was the same whether it was in New England, Tennessee, Kansas or Montana. In Montana it took nearly 120 years (1803-1923) for man to control the wolf. During this period it became a depredator

[2]Albert C. Miuri, "An Animal," Proceedings of the Worcester Society of Antiquity, 1897-1899, XVI, 405. As quoted in Stanley Young, The Wolf in North American History. (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers Ltd., 1946), 62. Hereafter cited as Young, Wolves -- History.

[3]Young, Wolves -- History, 340.

of livestock and economically valuable for its pelt.

When the first white men penetrated Montana, they found the wolf in abundance. Montana's rolling hills, steep-sided coulees and wild game provided a natural haven for this predator. Captains Lewis and Clark wrote their impressions of the large gray wolf which inhabited the area. They were impressed by the number of wolves and the number of game animals which were killed by them. When camped near the present day site of Billings, Clark reported:

> For me to mention or give an estimate of the different species of wild animals on this river [Yellowstone] particularly Buffalo, Elk, Antelopes and Wolves would be incredible. I shall therefore be silent on the subject further.[4]

The Lewis and Clark Journals give the first account of wolf predation in Montana when they reported wolves killing buffalo.[5] Lewis called wolves the "shepherds of the buffalo," as he usually sighted these two animals in close proximity to one another.[6] As the expedition moved across Montana,

[4]Reuben G. Thwaites, Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804-1806 (8 vols.; New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1904), V. 206. Hereafter cited as Thwaites, Lewis and Clark.

[5]Thwaites, Lewis and Clark, I, 307; II, 94 and 113; V 202-203 and 206.

[6]Thwaites, Lewis and Clark, I, 307 and V, 206.

the members killed many game animals, but when the explorers left the kill overnight, the wolves would devour it unless special precautions were taken to protect it. Captain Clark noted: "All meat which is left out all night falls to the wolves which are in great numbers . . ."[7]

Although this first contact with wolves in Montana had few dramatic effects, it was the first time that the white man came in conflict with the Montana wolf. This predator, which had been merely a nuisance to the Lewis and Clark Expedition, remained a problem until its near extinction in the 1930's.

As Lewis and Clark were returning to St. Louis, they met Manuel Lisa ascending the Missouri River. The Lisa expedition was the first of many that opened the fur trade in the vast area of Montana. Like the Lewis and Clark expedition, the fur trappers found the wolves troublesome because they ate the food that men had stored in caches. In contrast to the explorers and fur trappers, the Flathead Indians' tribal economy was greatly affected by the wolf. Ross Cox, an early trapper, reported:

> As their lands are much infested by wolves, which destroy the foals, they cannot rear

[7]Thwaites, Lewis and Clark, I, 235 and V, 280.

> horses in such large numbers as the Nez Perce, from whom they are obliged to purchase them annually.[8]

The early fur traders (1806 to 1830) did not take wolf pelts so there are few records concerning wolves until 1830.[9] These early trappers were primarily interested in beaver, and no economic value was placed on wolf pelts.

During the 1830's and 1840's, the wolves were killed more for sport than for economic reasons. James Audubon, explorer and naturalist who visited Montana, wrote: "The most interesting event of the day was the shooting of a wolf by Bell, after dark from the battlements of the Fort."[10]

The American Fur Company shipped only a few wolf skins from Montana during the 1830's and 1840's. The trapper sold large prime wolf pelts for $1 and small wolf pelts for $.50.[11] The percentage of these furs in the total fur trade

[8]Ross Cox, Adventures on the Columbia River (New York: J. & J. Horner, 1832), 183.

[9]The American Fur Company (Western), Vol. S, Packing Book, 1. Manuscript collection on deposit at the Missouri State Historical Society Library (Saint Louis). These records do not show a single wolf pelt until 1830.

[10]John F. McDermott, Up the Missouri with Audubon (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), 102. This statement is partially edited, but also appears in Maria R. Audubon, Audubon and His Journals (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), II, 38.

[11]The American Fur Company (Western), Vol. T, Packing Book, 16.

was very small, thus Hiram Chittenden was correct when he stated: "The sale of wolf pelts contributed little to the fur trade."[12]

Two factors accounted for the fact that wolf pelts had little economic value -- the early fur trade was dependent upon beaver; and there was no foreign market for the wolf pelt. There were still some wolves in the East and therefore, the domestic market for western wolf pelts was extremely limited. By 1850 the industry shifted from an emphasis on beaver to a dependence upon buffalo, wolf and deer hides.

During the 1850's and 1860's the sale of wolf pelts grew steadily until they were second only to buffalo hides. Shipments from the Upper Missouri Outfit of the American Fur Trading Company jumped from twenty wolf pelts in 1850[13] to over 3,000 in 1853. The total value of four shipments of hides in 1853 was $1,210,534 and wolf pelts represented only $15,410.[14] At this time, wolf pelts were not economically significant in sparsely populated Montana.

[12]Hiram Chittenden, The American Fur Trade of the Far West (New York: Press of the Pioneers, Inc., 1935) II, 830.

[13]Pierre Chouteau Jr. and Company, Ledger, Vol. NN, 317. MSS on deposit at the Missouri State Historical Society (St. Louis). Hereafter cited as, Chouteau Co.

[14]Chouteau Co., Ledger, 1853, passim.

By 1865 the percentage of wolf to buffalo kills was still small, but it had increased. One shipment from Fort Benton contained $63,184 worth of buffalo robes and $3,272 worth of wolf pelts.[15] This revenue from wolf pelts was insignificant at this time, but a new factor appeared which made the wolf more important in the territory's economy.

With the discovery of gold came a permanent population which needed supplies and food. These supplies came from St. Louis by steamboat to Fort Benton and were then hauled overland to Virginia City, Helena, Bannack, Missoula and northward to Canada. Wagon masters, longshoremen and many other men were employed in this transportation business. During the winter, deep snows stopped this system, and for winter employment, many of these men went to the plains country to kill wolf and buffalo.

Wolf hunters were known as "wolfers" and the term became a part of the Montanan's vocabulary. Although the tenure of the independent professional wolfer was short (1860 to 1885), he did make a contribution to Montana's developing economy.[16]

[15]Chouteau Co., Packing book, 1865, fold-out following page 55.

[16]For the best accounts about wolfers see: Paul F. Sharp, Whoop-Up Country: Canadian-American West 1865-1885 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), and Granville Stuart, Forty Years on the Frontier (2 vols; Glendale, California: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1957). Hereafter cited as Stuart, Forty Years.

The wolfer, a fascinating character, was found mainly in Montana; only a few were hunting in the neighboring territories. The abundance of wolves was the primary element involved in the industry; however, large buffalo herds, access to inexpensive shipping and a favorable price for pelts were also requisite for successful wolfing.

During the fall, the wolfer purchased his supplies for the season[17] -- usually on credit from the traders in Fort Benton. He bought the usual staples, beans, bacon, flour, salt and coffee, but his major investment was in ammunition and strychnine.

Wolfer's methods were simple and effective. He killed a buffalo every three or four miles and inserted strychnine into the entrails, tongue and flanks of the animal. The unsuspecting wolf ate the buffalo carcass and died near it. Up to one hundred wolves were found dead at one bait.[18] Although the wolf was the hunter's primary objective, he often got other animals. Kit foxes, red foxes, coyotes, bobcats, badgers and even bears were victims of indiscriminate poisoning. These other pelts were taken, and some

[17]The season ran from November to March because the pelts are only prime during this period.

[18]Montana Federation of Women's Clubs, Local Community History of Valley County (Glasgow, Montana: Glasgow Carrier, 1925), 13. Also see Stuart, Forty Years, II, 174.

energetic wolfers took the buffalo robe before inserting the poison.[19]

After setting the baits, the wolfer rode his "circle" every day or two to skin the dead animals. Bad weather often interfered with the smooth functioning of the wolfer's routine. A sudden blizzard could prevent him from making his circle, and often when he was able to get to them, the carcasses would be frozen solidly. In this condition they could not be skinned. Even frozen wolf pelts could not be properly flattened and salted, so they were simply stacked in piles. A chinook or sudden thaw could quickly spoil the skins, and continued warm weather could ruin all the skins from a whole season's work.

Indians sometimes despoiled skins if they found a cache. They hated the wolfer because his poisoned baits also killed many of the Indians' dogs. The greatest danger to the wolfer's life was certainly the Indians, as they would sometimes wait at the bait and kill an unsuspecting wolfer. When Indians prevented the wolfer from making his circle at the proper time, the poisoned animals would often decay and the pelts were ruined by the time he got to them.

[19]This did bring extra money to the wolfer as prices were as follows: $4 to $5 bear, $1 kit fox, $.75 red fox, $.50 coyote. Bears were only taken late in the season as they hibernate most of the winter.

The wolfer's life was hard and dangerous, but the rewards of a successful season offset the hardships. The total cost of his supplies was between $120 and $200.[20] By 1865, a prime large wolf pelt sold for $2[21] and by 1873, the price had risen to $2.50.[22] In a good winter, a wolfer could make between $2,000 to $3,000,[23] and in an average season, he made from $1,000 to $1,500.[24]

Wolfing increased during the 1860's and by 1876, a U.S. Government report stated:

> Wolfing, as it is called, is an established industry in Montana, and being pursued only in winter, it gives employment and support to a large number of teamsters, steamboat hands and others who are necessarily idle at this season.[25]

[20]Peter Koch, "Life at Muscleshell in 1869 and 1870," Contributions of the Historical Society of Montana, II, (1896), 282-293.

[21]The Daily Herald (Helena, Montana), June 11, 1973.

[22]Stuart, Forty Years, II, 174.

[23]William Ludlow, Report of a Reconnaissance from Carroll, Montana Territory, on the Upper Missouri, to the Yellowstone National Park and Return, Made in the Summer of 1875. Annual report of the Chief of Engineer for 1876, Appendix NN (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), 1876, 67. Hereafter cited as Ludlow, Report.

[24]Stuart, Forty Years, II, 174.

[25]Ludlow, Report, 67.

The number of wolves actually killed during the 1860's and 1870's is unknown.[26] A conservative estimate would be over 100,000 per year between 1870 and 1877. In 1873 The Daily Herald of Helena reported on one group of wolfers:

> There were five or six teams, some of them four-horse teams, and they had about 10,000 wolf skins among them. They had put in a very profitable winter, as wolf skins in Benton were worth $2.50 each.[27]

During the early 1870's, conditions on the plains were ideal for the wolf. Neither cattlemen nor farmers had yet come to Eastern Montana, so there was little population pressure. Buffalo were numerous and many were being killed. The skinned and discarded carcasses provided an easy and abundant food source and made it possible for weaker wolves to survive. Buffalo hunters reported that wolves often waited for them to finish skinning, so they could feast on the carcasses.

Buffalo hunting in the North increased greatly in the late 1870's and early 1880's, but the success of the hunters began to diminish in 1877. In that year there were 30,000 robes shipped from Fort McLeod; in 1878 the

[26] Some shipping records are not available.

[27] The Daily Herald (Helena), June 11, 1873.

number dropped to 12,797, and by 1879 it was reduced to only 5,764. Fort Walsh reported a reduction from 18,145 in 1878 to 8,567 in 1879.[28]

In the early 1880's, the greatest buffalo and wolf populations were found in the Yellowstone River area. Buffalo hunters took 100,000 hides in this region during the winter of 1881-1882. The next winter they took only 45,000;[29] this was the last buffalo hunting season, as in 1884 the buffalo virtually disappeared from the plains.

The tremendous buffalo slaughter took place in spite of the fact that for over half of each year it was illegal to kill buffalo just for their robes. The Montana Legislature had passed a law in 1876 which stated:

> That any person or persons who shall willfully shoot or otherwise kill . . . any buffalo, moose, elk, black-tailed deer, white-tailed deer, mountain sheep, Rocky Mountain goat, or antelope, between the first day of February and the tenth of August, of each year, shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor . . .[30]

[28] The Yellowstone Weekly Journal (Miles City, Montana), Oct. 30, 1879.

[29] Gary E. Eichhorn, Peter Jackson (Miles City, Montana: n.p., 1959), 12.

[30] Montana, Laws, Resolution and Memorials 1876, 9th Sess., Sec. 1, 102-103. Hereafter cited as Laws of Montana.

The wolf had increased during the period from 1875 to 1883, but then suddenly his food source disappeared. During this same period, the cattlemen had discovered that the rich grasses that had supported the buffalo were ideal for cattle. Thousands of cattle were moved onto the plains of Eastern Montana during the late 1870's and early 1880's.

The wolf began to change his diet from buffalo to beef and this change brought him directly into conflict with man. The wolf was no longer sought simply for his pelt or shot. because the frontiersman hated him; suddenly he represented an economic threat to the cattle herds.

In 1883 the Montana Legislature declared war on the wolf with the first bounty law. For forty years the stockmen attempted to eradicate this predator. They nearly succeeded in eliminating the wolf from Montana, but it was expensive and frustrating. In the process the stockmen developed a hatred of the wolf which still exists.

CHAPTER III

THE MONTANA CATTLE INDUSTRY EVOLVES

During the first four decades (1846-1886) of the Montana cattle industry, cattlemen paid little attention to the wolf. They were simply too preoccupied with the problems of a growing industry to worry about losses due to wolves. The nature of stock growing in this early period made it difficult to accurately determine the exact damage being done by wolves.

Jesuit missionaries had introduced the first cattle into Montana, so that they could supplement the diets of people in the missions. In 1846 there were forty-six head of cattle at Saint Mary's Mission.[1]

The first commercial operation in Montana was one of trading draft animals on the Oregon Trail. John Owen, who purchased the Saint Mary's Mission in 1850, was one of the first men who took part in this trading business. Richard Grant and his son John (in the Deer Lodge Valley) became the most prosperous of these early traders.

[1]Merrill G. Burlingame and K. Ross Toole, A History of Montana (2 vols.; New York: Lewis Historical Pub. Co., Inc., 1957), I, 311. Hereafter cited as Burlingame and Toole, Montana.

Each spring the Montana herds were driven south to a point west of Fort Laramie, and then the stockmen traded one fresh animal to the emmigrants for two worn-out draft animals (usually oxen). Small items were also traded for additional stock or were sold to the emmigrants for cash. Trading continued into the summer, and in the late summer or early fall, the accumulated animals were driven back to the Deer Lodge and Bitterroot Valleys or to the Big Hole to winter and recuperate. The next spring they were driven south for trading.

This trading brought moderate profits and allowed these pioneers to accumulate herds of livestock at little cost. By 1858 the Grants had 600 head wintering in the Deer Lodge Valley.[2] Other men like Reece Anderson and Granville Stuart joined the trade in the late 1850's.

None of these traders reported having major difficulties with wolves. There were two reasons: first, game was sufficiently abundant to feed the wolves that inhabited these large valleys; these traders kept their herds confined where the cattle could be protected from Indians. The wolf, being wary of humans, seldom ventured near the ranches. Wolves must have killed some livestock, as in 1861 stockmen were poisoning these gray predators. Granville Stuart who

[2]Burlingame and Toole, Montana, 311.

ranched near Gold Creek, first reported the poisoning of wolves in Montana when he wrote: "Killed three large wolves last night with strychnine and probably more if they could be found."[3]

In 1862 this trail trade ended abruptly. With the discovery of gold in Bannack that year came a population boom which gave these early traders a local market for their cattle. Gold discoveries at Virginia City, Alder Gulch, Last Chance and Confederate Gulch further expanded the cattle market. To meet the demand, other men such as Conrad Kohrs, Phillip Poindexter and William Orr joined the rapidly growing industry.

The placer miner's demand for meat also precipitated a growth in the sheep industry. Conrad Kohrs drove 400 head from Utah to Montana during the winter of 1863-1864. This industry slowly expanded to supplement the cattle supply. The number of sheep increased rapidly and by 1870 there were 2,600 head in Montana.[4] Since sheepherders constantly accompanied their flocks, there was little wolf predation until the 1890's when large operators found it increasingly difficult to protect their sheep against the wolves.

[3]Stuart, Forty Years, I, 165.

[4]Burlingame and Toole, Montana, I, 317.

During the 1860's the rapidly expanding cattle industry centered in the valleys of Southwestern Montana. The mountains protected the stock from the weather and the wolf. There were few kills reported because most of the wolves in these valleys had been killed by the early stockmen and miners.

Previous to 1879 the livestock industry remained small and depended on the local markets. Montana's eastern plains were still the land of the buffalo hunter and wolfer. In 1866 Nelson Story made a significant advance toward moving the cattle industry onto the plains when he drove 600 head of Texas longhorns from Texas to Bozeman in the Gallatin Valley.[5] Although Indian threats delayed other drives, he proved that long drives were feasible.

Several other factors contributed to the sudden movement of cattle into Eastern Montana. Western cattlemen had discovered that their stock could survive the rigorous winters of Colorado and Wyoming, and then they found that Eastern Montana provided an even better range. There were coulees for shelter and protection from the cold northern winds; the elevation was lower; the ranges were relatively snow-free and produced a better quality grass.

[5]Robert H. Fletcher, Free Grass to Fences (New York: University Publishers Inc., 1960), 26. Hereafter cited as Fletcher, Free Grass.

These natural advantages attracted the cattlemen, but it was the push of overstocking that ultimately provided the most significant motivation for moves into Eastern Montana. Overstocking occurred in Oregon as they had no transportation outlet to move large numbers of cattle to the markets in the East. Overstocking was also a problem in Kansas, Nebraska and Eastern Colorado because large numbers of Texas cattle had been driven to shipping points in these states in anticipation of shipment to Eastern markets. Often these cattle could not be shipped at a profit, so many of them were trailed northward into Eastern Montana. The valleys of Western Montana were also overstocked, and many cattlemen began moving their surplus herds over the mountains onto the plains. Conrad Kohrs, John Bielenberg, Robert Ford and Granville Stuart were a few of those who moved their livestock into Eastern Montana during the 1870's.

During the early 1870's, cattle outfits were still widely dispersed in the vast area of Eastern Montana. However, after 1876, the increased cattle population caused ranchers to occupy most of the grazing land.

By 1876 the nation was recovering from the Panic of 1873, and a new optimism seized the Eastern investor. There was a great deal of speculation in the cattle industry in the West. This speculation apexed in 1886, but in the ten year period

between 1876 and 1886, it had a dramatic effect upon the entire industry.

The pull of geography and the push of overstocking combined with tremendous speculation and the arrival of the railroads to create a cattle boom in Montana which was unprecedented in American history. However, this dramatic movement placed hundreds of thousands of cattle in Eastern Montana squarely in the middle of the largest wolf population remaining in the United States.

In May, 1881 Granville Stuart reported:

> Our losses all told, this first year were thirteen percent, five percent from Indians, five percent from predatory animals [wolves], and three percent from storms.[6]

A five percent loss was not considered alarming during this period, and it was considerably lower than the losses reported in the 1890's. Even the thirteen percent figure did not seem too disturbing to Stuart.

There were few other reports of wolf depredation before 1883 because the buffalo slaughter kept the wolves well fed, and there was little need for them to kill domestic stock. During this period (1876-1883), the wolf population was actually increasing. The nature of the cattle industry at

[6]Stuart, Forty Years, II, 150.

this time made it impossible to determine the exact number of cattle killed by wolves, but obviously some killing did take place or there would not have been a bounty established in 1883.

Eastern Montana's cattle industry was based on the vast grazing land available. Cattlemen claimed great areas of the public domain to which they had no legal title. They usually did file on a small area under the Homestead Act and often bought a few hundred additional acres for an operational center.

The operation of these ranches was very simple; the cattle were turned loose to graze on the free grass. Round-ups were held twice a year -- once in the spring so that the calves could be branded and once in the fall to determine which cattle would be shipped to market. These ranches were so large that the owner and his cowboys did not see the stock very often -- especially during the winter. During the summer they were only able to cover the whole range once or twice. The stockman actually saw his herd only three or four times during the entire year.

It was impossible for the rancher to assess exact losses or their causes. The "book count" of calves branded in the spring and the number of animals shipped in the fall were the only account records kept concerning the herd. The number

of calves killed by wolves before the spring roundup could not be determined. During the roundups, carcasses could be counted, but the cause of death was not always easy to ascertain.

Many carcasses found on the range were wrongly attributed to wolf kill. The carcass of an animal which had been killed by wolves looked the same as one which had died a natural death and had then been eaten by coyotes or other scavengers. The losses from natural causes and from wolves did not seem greatly to bother these early entrepreneurs.

Until 1878, cattlemen had little concern for losses except those caused by Indians. The Indians stole horses, and this affected the cattlemen more directly. Like most frontiersmen, the cattlemen hated the Indian, and it was only natural that this prejudice would become particularly vehement when the stockmen suffered an economic loss because of the Indian. The latter became the scape-goat for the stock industry, but later the wolf took the Indians' place and was then blamed for the problems of the cattlemen.

During the early and mid 1870's, this uncomplicated industry existed in relative isolation, and there was little contact between cattlemen. By the late 1870's and early 1880's, many operators moved into this vast area and thus created problems of specific range and water rights. This closer contact forced cattlemen to form organizations for

their mutual benefit.[7] In 1878, the first major cattleman's association was formed, and by 1884, a permanent territory-wide organization, the Montana Stock Growers' Association, was in operation.[8] Local roundup associations and pools were organized to make efficient use of manpower for the semi-annual roundups. These local associations later became the main vehicle through which the cattlemen fought the wolf.

By 1883, Montana's cattle industry had been transformed into the major economic and political force in the Territory,[9] and the legislative session of 1883 became known as the "cowboy legislature." Two major pieces of cattle legislation were passed during this session; both were designed to cope with problems within the industry. The first bill provided for a commission, the Montana Board of Stock Commissioners, which would direct investigations of cattle rustling; this portion of the law was vetoed by the newly arrived governor, John S. Crosby. The second act provided for a bounty on predatory animals; this became a law.

The legislator's prime desire was to stop rustling.

[7]Ernest Osgood, The Day of the Cattleman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1929), 103.

[8]Fletcher, Free Grass, 87.

[9]This distinction lasted for a very short time as mining again became the major political force after 1885.

Ineffective legislation and lack of enforcement made the conviction of rustlers and horse thieves almost impossible. The cattlemen had become outraged at the activity of the rustlers. Most of the rustlers concentrated their operations in the Lewistown area of Central Montana. These men had often worked as wood cutters or as loaders for the steamship companies before the big boats stopped coming up the Missouri River. There were also some ex-wolfers and buffalo hunters who had turned to rustling because they no longer found their former professions profitable.

Because the 1883 rustling law was vetoed, the stockmen of the Lewistown area formed a vigilance committee under Granville Stuart and hanged seventeen of the rustlers.[10] According to Stuart, this stopped the rustling for many years and also motivated the Legislature to pass the 1885 law.[11] This law established the Montana Board of Stock Commissioners which controlled rustling.

Although troubles with the Indian and the rustler were then considered more important than the wolf problem, the 1883 Legislature did pass the first workable bounty law.

[10]Oscar O. Mueller, "The Central Montana Vigilante Raids of 1884," Montana Magazine of Western History, I, No. 1 (Jan., 1951), 23.

[11]Stuart, Forty Years, II, 209.

This law awarded a $1 bounty payment for each wolf pelt that hunters turned in to the Territorial officials, but excluded predators which were killed on Indian reservations.[12] The hunter was required to present the pelt, including the tail, to a probate judge or justice of the peace. To prevent fraud, the law also stated:

> Should said officer, after careful examination find that the scalp and ears belonging to each skin have not been severed, patched, or punched, he shall, then and there, mark each ear by punching a hole, one inch in diameter, in the same, in presence of the two witnesses, and shall then deliver said skin to the owner, and shall make out and deliver to said owner a certificate showing the number of skins so punched, . . .[13]

This bounty law allowed the hunter to claim the bounty payment and then sell the pelt at market value. Pelts sold from $.50 to $2.50, depending on the condition of the pelt; this was largely determined by the season of kill.[14]

The cattlemen believed that this bounty would eliminate the wolf problem. They reasoned that the $1 inducement added to the price of the sale would again make wolfing attractive to the many men who had quit the occupation when the buffalo disappeared. The sheepmen were also pleased with this law

[12]Laws of Montana 1883, 13th Sess., Ch. XXVI, Sec. 657.

[13]Laws of Montana 1883, 13th Sess., Ch. XXVI, Sec. 657.

[14]Young and Goldman, Wolves, 170.

which included bear and mountain lion. These two predators were taking a larger percentage of sheep than the wolf.

The stockmen's beliefs concerning the bounty were correct, and hunters, encouraged by the bounty, did kill many wolves. In 1884, the first full year after the act became law, 5,450 wolf pelts, 565 bear skins, 146 mountain lion skins and 1,774 coyote pelts were presented for bounty payment. The total cost to the Territory was $12,049 which the stockmen considered a small expense in comparison to the value received.[15]

During 1885, the number of wolves reported for bounty payment dropped to 2,224.[16] This figure indicates that there was either fewer wolves or fewer wolvers, but it was impossible to determine which was the fact. Stockmen did not report large wolf depredation at this time, and given the nature of the industry then, it is unlikely that they would have had cause for serious complaint. From 1882 to 1885, the cattlemen enjoyed the best economic situation they had ever experienced. Speculation by Eastern investors made money readily available for borrowing. Cattle prices were higher than ever

[15]Montana, Bounty Certificate Book 1894, passim. On file in the Montana State Historical Society Library (Helena) and in the Office of the Montana Board of Livestock Commissioners. Hereafter cited as Bounty Certificate Book.

[16]Bounty Certificate Book 1885, passim.

before; in 1884, steers were selling on the Chicago market for $4.40 per hundred weight, and there was little reason to believe that the situation would change.[17] The general prosperity and optimism drew the cattlemen's attention away from wolf depredation.

In 1886 hunters reported 2,587 wolves for bounty payment -- little change from the previous year.[18] The stockmen felt that the bounty had been successful, and during the Legislative Session of 1887 the bounty law was amended to include ground squirrels and prairie dogs.[19]

The stockmen paid little attention to the revised bounty law for they were facing the greatest disaster that had hit the industry in its entire history -- the Hard Winter of

[17]Robert S. Fletcher, "That Hard Winter in Montana, 1886-1887," Agricultural History, IV (Oct., 1930), 123. Hereafter cited as Fletcher, "Hard Winter."

[18]Bounty Certificate Book 1896, passim.

[19]Montana, Compiled Statutes 1887, 15th Sess., Ch. LXVIII, Sec. 1159.

[20]There is some question concerning the actual losses during the Hard Winter. Wyoming sources indicate that the losses may not have been as severe as ranchers reported. See Helen Huntington Smith, The War on Powder River (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1966), 35-49; and Alfred Larson, "The Winter of 1886-87 in Wyoming," Annals of Wyoming, XIV, No. 1 (Jan., 1942), 5-6. Larson does admit that the Hard Winter was more severe in Montana. Until a new study is completed concerning the Hard Winter of 1886-1887, the best source for Montana is Robert S. Fletcher, "That Hard Winter in Montana, 1886-1887," Agricultural History, IV (Oct., 1930), 123-130.

1886-1887. The optimism of 1883, 1884 and 1885 turned to pessimism as the extraordinarily severe winter ravaged the industry. Two factors combined to create the conditions which led to such large stock losses: overstocking of the range and an unusually severe winter.

The summer of 1886 was hot and dry with no substantial rainfall until October. Cattle were in such a weakened condition that they could not withstand the rigors of winter.[21] Cattle in this condition would normally have been shipped, but poor market prices caused many operators to hold their stock. Cattle prices had dropped to $3.30 per hundred weight on the Chicago markets.[22] Droughts in Wyoming, Colorado and Kansas had caused many cattle to be moved into Montana, and Texas herds were still being trailed into Montana as the speculative rush continued. The holding of cattle by local ranchers and the increased movement of "pilgrim cattle"[23] into Montana resulted in a dangerous overstocking of the range.

The winter of 1886-1887 started early with deep snows in November. In January there was a chinook which encouraged

[21]Fletcher, Free Grass, 124.

[22]Fletcher, "Hard Winter," 123.

[23]"Pilgrim cattle" were those brought into the Territory from other areas.

the worried stockmen, but the optimism soon waned.[24] The chinook only worsened conditions on the range as a sudden freeze followed which left Montana ranges covered with a sheet of ice. Cattle could not paw through the ice to the short grass that was left after the summer drought.

Losses reported varied from four percent in the Big Hole to 90 and 95 percent in the Yellowstone area.[25] In the fall of 1887, Montana cattlemen shipped 82,134 head. The previous year -- a bad year because of low prices -- they had shipped 119,620 head.[26] The price on the Chicago market dropped from the 1886 low of $3.30 to $3.15 in 1887 (price per hundred weight).[27]

The industry recovered quickly from the Hard Winter. The heavy snows left the ground with ample water, and during the spring and summer of 1887, the grass which had been in such short supply the previous year, returned in great abundance.[28] The overstocking problem solved itself with the death of thousands of cattle during the Hard Winter. Cattle-

[24]Fletcher, "Hard Winter," 126.

[25]Fletcher, "Hard Winter," 126.

[26]Montana, Board of Stock Commissioners, Annual Report 1901, 18. Hereafter cited as Annual Report MBSC.

[27]Fletcher, "Hard Winter," 123.

[28]Fletcher, Free Grass, 89.

men shipped 167,662 head during 1888; this was over twice as many head as were shipped in 1887. The shipments kept increasing, and in 1895 Montana cattlemen shipped 306,460 head.[29]

A changed industry emerged after the Hard Winter. The cattlemen had learned a bitter lesson, and they realized that the simple open range operation could not succeed. Ranchers began to grow hay for winter feeding; this meant that stock had to be kept closer to the base of operations during the winter. Other factors contributed to the change within the industry. Because the public domain was no longer free for the taking, ownership of large tracts of land was required for a successful operation, and barbed wire fences appeared on the once open ranges of Montana. Eastern investors had also learned their lesson, and the speculative boom ended as abruptly as it had started.

The massive reorganization of the industry gave the stockman better control of his herds. He maintained more accurate records and accounted for nearly every animal. This better accounting brought a sudden awareness of the actual losses -- particularly those due to wolf depredation. Losses due to the Indian, the rustler and the Hard Winter

[29] Annual Report 1901 MBSC, 8.

had dimished, and stockmen turned their attention to the problem of the wolf.

Stockmen suddenly realized that while they had been preoccupied with the problems of the Hard Winter, the Legislature had repealed the bounty law. This traditional weapon which had proved successful from 1883 to 1887 was no longer available to help the stockmen control wolf depredation.

Ground squirrels and prairie dogs had caused the repeal of the bounty act. An amendment in 1887 had added these two rodents to the bounty list as it seemed a logical way to control these destructive little animals. This simple amendment was to prove damaging to both the Territory and the stockmen. The purpose of the 1887 amendment was to kill the rodents, and in this it succeeded. During the tenure of the act (March, 1887 to December, 1887), 712,199 ground squirrels and 189,678 prairie dogs were killed. The cost to the Territory of Montana was an incredible $61,721.25.[30] The price for killing these varmints was too high, for as one newspaper editor stated: "A few months' experience under the operation of the amended law demonstrated the fact that its continuance upon our statutes would swamp the Territorial treasury and bankrupt the Territory itself."[31]

[30]Bounty Certificate Book 1887, passim.

[31]The River Press (Fort Benton), Dec. 5, 1888.

The alarmed Governor called a special session of the Legislature in September of 1887 to repeal the bounty law. The Legislature not only repealed the section dealing with ground squirrels and prairie dogs, but also repealed the entire bounty law, including the bounty for bear, mountain lions, wolves and coyotes.[32]

A few stockmen did organize to fight repeal of the whole bounty law. Russell B. Harrison[33] headed a committee to save the bounty, but the effort was unsuccessful. At the annual meeting of the Montana Stock Growers' Association, Harrison reported:

> We thought for a long time we would succeed, but the ground squirrel question brought so much pressure to bear for the repeal of the whole law and the members being anxious to adjourn, they decided to wipe the entire law of bounties off the Statute books.[34]

[32] Laws of Montana 1887, 15th Sess. (Extra Sess.), 58.

[33] Russell B. Harrison was the Secretary of the Montana Stock Growers' Association and Secretary of the Montana Board of Stock Commissioners. He was instrumental in the formation of both organizations and from 1883 to 1893 worked to secure favorable legislation for the Montana cattle industry.

[34] Proceedings of the Montana Stock Growers' Association 1888, Drawer 2 -- File 12, 180. MSS on deposit in the Montana State Historical Society Library (Helena). Hereafter cited as Proceedings of the MSGA.

Harrison's report bitterly criticized the legislarors' action:

> It has not cost a very large sum of money, but it has been the means of saving a great deal of property. There is no inducement now to go out onto the range to poison or kill wolves or coyotes. It appears as if we wanted wolves to breed and multiply.[35]

Wolf killing did not cease with the repeal of the bounty, but its emphasis changed. Many of the professional wolfers abandoned the profession, leaving the stockmen to kill the wolves themselves. The lack of a bounty and the disappearance of the wolfer, combined with the new awareness of losses, aroused the Montana stockmen. They demanded that the wolf be eliminated from Montana ranges.

[35]Proceedings of the MSGA 1888, Drawer 2 -- File 12, 180.

CHAPTER IV

WAR ON WOLVES: STOCKMEN AND BOUNTIES

From 1880, Montana's stockmen were increasingly aware of the wolf problem, and as they turned their attention to the wolf, they developed a bitter hatred of this predator. The wolf's method of killing infuriated the cattlemen, but it was the apparent economic loss that motivated the stockmen to organize against the killer.

Once the stockmen were committed to eradication, they used the bounty as their main weapon. To obtain favorable bounty legislation, the stockmen deliberately exaggerated their losses due to wolves. This adverse publicity against the wolf further intensified the stockmen's hatred.

At the 1888 meeting of the Montana Stock Growers' Association, Russell B. Harrison[1] urged the cattlemen to fight for a new bounty:

> If we intend to do anything, it seems to me that now would be the time. A year hence, the Legislature will have been in session and will

[1]Russell B. Harrison was influential in the formation of stock legislation.

> have adjourned. These animals [wolves] should be exterminated. Now is the time to pass such a resolution instructing a committee to introduce such a bill before the session of the Legislature. Everyone is suffering severely this spring from loss of calves by wolves.[2]

Thomas C. Power, a cattleman and owner of the T. C. Power Company which was one of Montana's leading shippers of wolf pelts, supported Harrison's suggestion:

> We lose more calves by wolves than we do hard winters and I would like to hear expressions about it. I am satisfied that they can be abolished to a certain extent. We have shipped out 10,000 and 15,000 wolf skins a season. Now the wolf bounty has been abolished and there is no inducement except for the skin.[3]

The Association formed a committee that recommended a $1 bounty for each wolf. They also recommended that roundup associations poison worthless cattle and horses as bait to kill wolves.[4]

The agitation for a new bounty bill started during the summer of 1888, but so did the opposition against it. By December, the argument had become bitter. The opposition

[2]Proceedings of the MSGA 1888, Drawer 2 -- file 12, 181.

[3]Proceedings of the MSGA 1888, Drawer 2 -- file 12, 178-179. The Montana State Historical Society (Helena) has recently acquired the T. C. Power papers, but they have not yet been catalogued and presently are unavailable.

[4]Proceedings of the MSGA 1888, Drawer 2 -- file 12, 181.

argued that the previous bounty (the ground squirrel law) had proved that the system was too costly. The Helena Independent led the opposition: "The experience with the last bounty law was a costly one to the Territory at large, and it did not appear to be very effective in abating the pests."[5] The River Press of Fort Benton quickly answered by pointing out that in just over five years, the Territory paid $51,577.75 for ground squirrels and prairie dogs, but only $46,175.50 for all other predators combined.[6] The River Press asserted:

> We will say that the 23,923 bears, lions, wolves, and coyotes would have killed but one head of stock each -- cattle and colts, not counting sheep -- of an average value of say $40, and we find that $956,920 worth of stock was saved in five years under the old bounty law. A little more figuring will show that the taxes collected upon that sum fully repaid the bounty and left a principle in the hands of the stockgrowers.[7]

The Montana cattlemen relied on the Board of Cattle Commissioners to write and lobby for legislation beneficial to the industry. On January 2, 1889, the Board met and suggested that "Each Stock Commissioner should get up a

[5]The Helena Independent, Dec. 1, 1888.

[6]The River Press (Fort Benton, Montana) Dec. 5, 1888.

[7]The River Press (Fort Benton) Dec. 5, 1888.

petition as soon as possible, get as many signatures as early as possible to have the Legislature pass a bill concerning bounties."[8]

The 1889 Legislature failed to enact a new bounty law. This session was dominated by men from the mining industry who feared that the cost of another bounty fiasco would have to be borne by increasing the mine taxes. The cattlemen were worried, but did not express great indignation against the Legislature.[9] They were still somewhat occupied with the problems of reorganizing the industry after the hard winter. By 1891, the industry had regained its economic stability and again demanded that a bounty law be passed. The Legislature then passed a law which provided for a $2 bounty for each wolf skin presented for payment.[10]

The 1891 bounty should have satisfied the cattlemen, but it did not. In fact, the demand for a larger bounty payment increased steadily. During 1891 and 1892, three factors combined to intensify the wolf problem: the disappearance of the wolfer; the steadily increasing number of

[8]Minutes of the Meeting, January 2, 1888, of the Montana Board of Stock Commissioners, 134. (MSS are in the files of the Montana Board of Livestock Commissioners, Helena, Montana). Hereafter cited as Minutes of MBSC.

[9]Proceedings of the MSGA 1889, 210.

[10]Laws of Montana, 1891, 2nd Sess., Sec. 1, 271.

cattle; and the disappearance of wild game which forced an increased wolf population to rely more heavily upon domestic stock for its nourishment. The Board of Stock Commissioners commented:

> Owing to the lack of game, which has almost disappeared, the wolf is forced to prey upon the livestock, and the amount of property destroyed by them is enormous.[11]

As the cattlemen became more irritated, they turned to the 1893 Legislature and demanded an increased bounty payment. Again the Board of Stock Commissioners led the fight for a change in the bounty law:

> . . . we would recommend that the Legislature increase the bounty to such a sum as will make it a paying investment to the men who will go into the business of destroying these animals [wolves].[12]

The mining-dominated Legislature of 1893 failed to help the cattlemen when they rejected an increase in the bounty. Not only did the legislators reject a new bounty bill, but they even failed to appropriate funds for the existing

[11]Minutes MBSC, Sept. 23, 1892, 9.

[12]Annual Report MBSC 1892, 2.

bounty.[13] The cattlemen reacted bitterly against this Legislature which had failed to enact legislation in their behalf. The Board of Stock Commissioners stated:

> The wolf question seems to be the absorbing topic among stockmen at present for the reason that the rate of increase among these animals is startling,[14] because of the failure of our last Legislative Assembly to make any bounty appropriation.[15]

For the first time, the cattlemen united in a common denunciation of the wolf. In 1893 a tremendous amount of publicity was generated concerning the wolf which further incensed the cattlemen, and they turned their hatred toward the wolf rather than toward the Legislature.

The cattlemen used the newspapers, the Annual Reports of the Montana Board of Stock Commissioners and meetings of state and local cattle associations to express their unified concern over the wolf problem. They found that some of their most effective vehicles for expression were the Annual

[13]Bounty payments continued, but were greatly reduced in number, and by mid 1894 the payment had ceased entirely. This indicates that there was some type of fund set aside for bounties that could be carried over to the next session or some levy tax which helped pay for the bounty.

[14]The statement that wolves increased is found in most of the reports concerning this predator, but it is unlikely that it is true. The increased concern and changes within the industry made it appear that this had occurred.

[15]Annual Reports MBSC 1893, 10-11.

Reports of the Bureau of Agriculture, Labor and Industry. The purpose of these publications was to advertise the advantages of Montana industry, and unfavorable reports proved particularly effective in motivating an unwilling Legislature to take action.

Although the stockmen exaggerated the gravity of the situation to gain sympathy and, hopefully, to get an increased bounty bill, still the industry did suffer from wolf depredations. In 1894, the Bureau of Agriculture, Labor and Industry sent a questionnaire to stockmen requesting information concerning predators. The stockmen's reaction reflected the attitude of the industry. One Lewis and Clark County rancher reported that "Wolves in this county kill more stock than is lost from all other causes."[16] Cattlemen in Yellowstone County reported that they had lost 51.66 percent of their calf crop. Every county reported at least a 2 percent calf loss even though wolves were nearly extinct in some counties (Beaverhead, Madison and Missoula). The 1894 report of the Montana Bureau of Agriculture, Labor and Industry gave the reported losses:

[16]Montana Bureau of Agriculture, Labor and Industry, Annual Report 1894 (Helena, 1894), 126. Hereafter cited as MBAL&I, Annual Reports.

Animal Loss	Minimum	Maximum	Average
Calves	2%	51.66%	22.54%
Colts	1%	60%	15%
Cattle	0%	20%	4.5%
Lambs	2.5%	10%	6.88%
Sheep	0%	10%	4.09%
Horses	0%	10%	2.18%

Average of total stock loss 9.19%[17]

The industry could not have sustained such losses for more than one or two years, and while it is doubtful that it actually did have these high losses, it is important that it believed such losses had occurred. An attitude developed among the stockmen that the entire industry was in danger.

Cattlemen became alarmed because Montana's stock industry was based on the breeding of cattle, and they believed that the high calf losses would soon force them out of business. The Montana Bureau of Agriculture, Labor and Industry stated:

> In reporting for 1894, many stock farmers were despondent on account of the great destruction of calves and colts by wild animals, especially wolves, and a number of large owners stated unless these losses could be diminished, they would have to discontinue breeding cattle.[18]

[17]MBAL&I, Annual Report 1894, 158.

[18]MBAL&I, Annual Report 1895, 158.

Pierre Wibaux, the largest rancher in the Miles City area, was particularly distressed by wolf depredation. An article in the Stock Growers' Journal summed up his situation:

> Pierre Wibaux was in the city [Miles City] this week, and he says that though he has an opportunity to purchase some cheap cattle, he will not buy any, for as things now stand, it is simply buying cattle to feed the wolves.[19]

The industry believed that it was seriously threatened by wolves, but due to much exaggerated reports, it is impossible to determine exact losses. There was, however, a substantial enough threat to motivate cattlemen to attempt to deal with the problem themselves and not to rely totally on the state bounty system.

Cattlemen had always shot wolves whenever they had the opportunity to do so, but after 1890, they intensified their wolf-killing efforts. Roundup associations took R. B. Harrison's advice given in 1888 and started poisoning wolves. Because the animals followed the roundups, cattlemen killed and poisoned weak and diseased animals and left them behind to be devoured by unsuspecting predators. In the fall of

[19] Stock Growers' Journal (Miles City, Montana, June 3, 1894.

1891, James Fergus spent $195 on poison to kill wolves.[20]

The cattleman's main weapon, poison, did kill many animals, but during the 1890's it lost part of its effectiveness against wolves. The predator preferred freshly killed animals and would take them if they were available. Much to the consternation of the ranchers, the wolves learned to avoid poison baits. The stockmen believed that the wolves could smell the poison and thus avoided eating the bait. Actually, the wolves did not avoid the bait because of the poison, but because they had become increasingly wary of man. When hunters set the bait, they left their scent, and the wolf, having a highly developed olfactory sense, smelled the lingering scent and avoided the bait.

By 1894 wolves had become so difficult to poison that the stockmen had to find a new method of killing them. The River Press (Fort Benton) stated:

> It is the general opinion among wolfers that the use of poison should be entirely abandoned for at least three years, as the wolves are now suspicious of everything dead upon the range and confine themselves to killing what they want.[21]

[20]James Fergus was one of Montana's leading ranchers. He was active in political affairs and became a Representative and Senator in the Territorial and State Legislatures. Fergus Papers, cataloguing incomplete, see receipts 1891. (MMS on deposit in the University of Montana Archives, Missoula). Hereafter cited as Fergus Papers.

[21]The River Press (Fort Benton), May 23, 1894.

The same problem existed in trapping wolves; they simply smelled man's odor and stayed away from the traps. Many of the cattlemen then started using dogs against wolves. The dogs ran and tired the wolves which were then shot by the hunter or killed by the hounds. Some cattlemen reported success with dog packs; one Fergus County rancher said: "I have been compelled to invest $125 in a pack of hounds, which are rendering me great service."[22] The actual success of dogs was small compared to the investment involved. The dogs had difficulty catching the wolves, and the hunter had more difficulty keeping up with his pack.

Some of the larger cattlemen hired men for the specific purpose of killing wolves, and other simply assigned the job to their cowboys during slack seasons. The cowboys would sometimes rope them and drag them to death but usually used more conventional methods. Pierre Wibaux paid some men a monthly salary specifically to kill wolves, and after the spring roundup used some of his cowboys as wolfers. In the spring, Wibaux's men hunted for dens and used burning balls of bi-sulphide of carbon to destroy the pups.[23]

Some cattlemen and roundup associations hired men to

[23] Stock Growers' Journal (Miles City), June 3, 1894.

[22] MBAL&I, Annual Report 1894, 126.

kill wolves and paid them on per head basis. The Shonkin Association near Fort Benton which reported twenty-five percent losses, employed "skilled wolfers" at the rate of five dollars for every wolf killed on its ranges.[24] Other cattlemen and roundup associations paid bounties on wolves killed within the boundaries of their specified ranges. James Fergus paid $4 for each wolf and $1 for each coyote.[25] The highest private bounty paid before 1895 was $18 per wolf.[26]

In 1894 the stockmen continued to ask for state aid with the wolf problem, but they also requested that the Federal Government take action. They appealed to the Department of Agriculture and the Biological Survey to find some system of wolf control.[27] Their appeals had little success until 1914 when the Federal Government allocated funds for work on this problem.

The State of Montana did respond to the demands of the cattlemen. After the 1893 Legislature failed to

[24]The River Press (Fort Benton), Dec. 6, 1893.

[25]Fergus Papers, April 1891, Receipts.

[26]MBAL&I, Annual Report 1896, 80.

[27]Stanley P. Young, The Wolf in North American History (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers Ltd., 1946), 135. Hereafter cited as Young, Wolves -- History.

appropriate funds, the cattlemen waged a successful war for the establishment of a new bounty with a large appropriation. The Yellowstone Journal (Miles City), The Stock Growers' Journal (Miles City) and The River Press (Fort Benton) became the most vociferous advocates of this bounty. They constantly printed editorials calling for a new bounty law. The Montana Stock Growers' Association and the Board of Cattle Commissioners also worked hard and lobbied for the new bill. The constant complaints and the over-reporting of losses also contributed to success in the passage of the new bounty law in 1895 which awarded $3 for each wolf reported for payment.[28]

Cattlemen obtained the desired bounty increase, and immediately the high loss reports abated.[29] Optimistically the Weekly Yellowstone Journal (Miles City) began giving totals of the number of wolves reported for bounty payment. By April of 1895, they estimated that 3,300 wolves had been killed.[30] The newspaper proved to be overly optimistic for

[28]Montana, Codes and Statutes of the State of Montana 1895, Ch. V, Art. VIII, Sec. 3070. Hereafter cited as Montana, Codes and Statutes.

[29]For the best contrast in reporting see: MBAL&I, Annual Report 1894 and MBAL&I, Annual Report 1896, 80.

[30]Weekly Yellowstone Journal (Miles City, Montana), April 27, 1895.

it later reported that only 1,675 pelts had been recorded by all county clerks by mid-July.[31]

The bounty was successful in inducing men to kill wolves; during the first six months under the new law, 2,978 were reported, and in 1896, hunters presented 5,866 wolves for bounty payment.[32] Even the usually pessimistic Board of Cattle Commissioners lauded the new act:

> The bounty law [of 1895] has probably been the most beneficial in its working of any law ever passed for the protection of the stock interests, and we are safe in saying that many thousands of dollars have been saved to the stockmen since the passage of that act creating a bounty on wolves. The wolves are fast disappearing and on some ranges have actually become scarce.[33]

The Montana Bureau of Agriculture, Labor and Industry, hoping to vindicate itself, reported:

> The Fourth Legislative Assembly placed a bounty of $3 each on wolves and coyotes and already the destruction of these animals has been so great that losses are materially decreased, and it is believed the evil will be practically abated.[34]

Favorable comments on the new bounty continued through

[31] Weekly Yellowstone Journal (Miles City), July 25, 1895.

[32] Bounty Certificate Books 1895, Vols. A-B, passim.

[33] MBSC, Annual Report 1895, 7.

[34] MBAL&I, Annual Report 1895, 158.

the fall of 1896, and because there was little pressure on the 1897 Legislature, it did not increase the bounty.

By December of 1896, the stockmen's optimism began to wane. There were still wolves and they still killed cattle. Even the sheep became victims of the gray predator.[35] Actually, the $3 bounty still did not bring the results the stockmen desired. They continued to insist that an even larger bounty would rid the ranges of the predator. During 1897, hunters reported 4,995 wolves for bounty payment, but the number seemed insufficient to the stockmen who would not be satisfied with anything less than total extermination.[36]

Once again stockmen began to realize that state efforts needed to be supplemented. In 1897, one rancher invested $3,000 in dogs and invited sportsmen to hunt on his range and use his dogs.[37] Most ranchers and associations either hired wolfers or paid large supplemental bounties. Stockmen in the Missouri Valley near Helena gave $15 per wolf.[38] The

[35]Previous to 1893, there had been little wolf depredation on sheep, because herders protected the bands. The great increase in the sheep population during the early 1890's gave wolves more of an opportunity to kill sheep and it was harder to protect these larger bands -- especially during the winter.

[36]Bounty Certificate Book 1897, passim.

[37]The River Press (Fort Benton), Sept. 14, 1897.

[38]Fergus County Argus (Lewistown, Montana), June 13, 1900.

West Rosebud Association in Carbon County paid a bounty of $25,[39] and cattlemen on the Teton paid $15 and later raised the bounty to $50 per pelt.[40]

In 1898 the stockmen were again complaining and demanding an increased bounty. The Montana Stockman and Farmer called wolves "the greatest drawback to the cattle industry."[41] In 1899 the sheepmen finally joined the outcry against the wolf when they reported 25,816 sheep and lambs lost due to wolf depredation. This was less than one percent of the total sheep population, but since the loss was quoted in actual numbers rather than as a percentage, the losses seemed very striking and motivated the sheepmen to demand an increased bounty.[42]

Stockmen again used high loss reports in 1898 to gain the passage of a new bounty law in 1899. This was passed by the Legislature in spite of the fact that large numbers of wolves were still being reported under the terms of the 1895 bounty law. In 1898 hunters reported 4,780

[39] The Daily River Press (Fort Benton, Montana), Jan. 10, 1900.

[40] The Daily River Press (Fort Benton), March 12, 1900.

[41] The Montana Stockman and Farmer, (Editorial), Vol. 7, No. 11, (Jan., 1898), 4.

[42] MBAL&I, Annual Reports 1899-1900, 242-243.

wolves for bounty payment.[43] The 1899 act placed a $5 bounty on each adult wolf and offered $2 for each pup.[44]

After the passage of the 1899 law, there was no praise or inordinate optimism. Stockmen had realized that the wolf problem could not be solved with easy panaceas and that the industry would simply have to wage a constant war against the predator if it were to succeed in eradication.

During the first full year under the new bounty, 3,832 wolf pelts were reported for payment -- a drop of nearly 1,800 pelts from the previous years.[45] The added inducement had failed to increase the kill. By 1900 the stockmen had become so conditioned to hating the wolf that they could not recognize the fact that the wolf depredation was beginning to subside. From 1900 on, the wolf population declined and the number of wolf pelts reported for payment slowly decreased until 1933 when the Legislature repealed the general bounty law.

During the 1890's cattlemen concentrated their destructive efforts on the wolf because they believed he was the major nemisis of the industry. Although the period was

[43]Bounty Certificate Books 1898-1899, passim.

[44]Laws of Montana 1899, 6th Sess., Ch. V, Pt. 3, Sec. 3071.

[45]Bounty Certificate Book 1900, passim.

actually one of prosperity for the cattlemen,[46] some problems existed and the stockmen blamed the wolf for all the ills of the industry. One stock grower stated: "The cattle business would be immensely profitable were it not for the wolves."[47]

In the process of fighting for ever-increasing bounties on wolves, the stockmen intensified their hatred of the wolf. This animosity became so strong that it was carried over into the twentieth century, and the bounty remained the primary weapon against the wolf.

[46]This general statement excludes the brief period in 1894 when a general depression did create some economic problems for the Montana stock industry. It should be noted that during this period there was an increase in the reporting of stock losses due to predators. As shown above (page 59), this increased reported corresponds with the attempts to get a new bounty law passed in the Legislature of 1895.

[47]The River Press (Fort Benton), Dec. 5, 1899.

CHAPTER V

NEAR ERADICATION

The decade of the 1890's had been crucial to the relationship between the stockmen and the wolf. Much of the stockmen's hatred of the wolf had been precipitated by the negative publicity used against the wolf in an effort to motivate the Legislature to pass acceptable bounty legislation. Although the number of wolves was reduced after 1900, the stockmen's negative attitude toward the animal did not change.

The stockmen stubbornly held to the state bounty system and supplemented it with large individual and association bounties. In 1901, the ranchers of the Sun River area even formed a special association, The Augusta Wolf Bounty Association, because they believed the existing bounty fees were insufficient to motivate wolfers to kill the predators. This association paid a bounty of $20 for each adult wolf and $5 for each pup.[1]

In that year (1901), the Legislature increased the state bounty payment on wolf pups from $3 to $5 making it

[1]The Daily Yellowstone Journal (Miles City), March 4, 1901.

the same as the payment for adult wolves.[2] This modification of the bounty law completely changed the emphasis of wolf killing. Before the enactment of the 1901 bounty, hunters primarily took adult animals by using poison, but after 1901 the emphasis shifted to taking pups.

Unfortunately, for the wolf population, the change in the bounty law motivated hunters to seek out the dens in the spring and kill the pups. During the spring denning, the wolves are most susceptible, because they are forced to stay near the den. The confinement of stock and game kills to a specific area indicated the general location of the den to the wolf hunter. Hunters used fires or crawled into the dens to kill the pups. One man had his small son retrieve the pups; the boy occasionally encountered a female wolf protecting her young, but the hunter always managed to pull the boy out of the den unhurt.[3]

The wolf population had declined rather slowly as long as the wolf pups were not killed, but the new bounty law ended the constant repopulation of the species. This new bounty law was even more effective than the stockmen had hoped it would be and became the most efficacious weapon

[2]Laws of Montana 1906, 7th Sess., Ch. 5, Pt. 3, Sec. 3070.

[3]Young, Wolf-History, 132.

which the ranchers ever used. After nine months of the new bounty, hunters reported 3,938 wolf pups and only 1,403 grown wolves for bounty payment.[4]

During 1902 the State paid $158,107 in bounty payments on all predators;[5] this was the largest total dollar payment in the entire history of the Montana bounty system. Even some of the stockmen began to question the practicality of the large bounty -- especially in view of the fact that the 1901 law had levied a bounty tax on all stock in the state to finance the bounty system.[6] Stockmen in areas where wolves did not represent a major threat complained about paying the tax. The ranchers in the Gallatin, Madison and Bitterroot valleys complained most vociferously about the levy.

Stockmen and the Legislature also became concerned about fraud which they believed was "considerable." The state and private bounty systems provided many opportunities for fraudulent claims. The easiest method of defrauding the State or individuals was to report wolves for payment that had been killed in other states or on ranges which did not offer a private bounty. Careless inspectors sometimes

[4]Bounty Certificate Book 1902, passim.

[5]Bounty Certificate Book 1902, passim.

[6]Laws of Montana 1901, 7th Sess., Ch. 5, Pt. 3, Sec. 3079.

authorized payment for domestic dog pelts or made a double bounty claim possible by not punching the hide properly.

In an attempt at appeasement, the 1903 Legislature reduced the bounty on wolf pups from $5 to $3 and changed the procedures for reports for payment to reduce fraudulent claims.[7] The stockmen in wolf areas cautiously accepted the change. One editorial stated:

> If the present bounty law [1903] with its lower schedule of rewards, shall prove efficacious in suppressing the wolf and coyote evil at a smaller cost than heretofore, that result will be cause for general satisfaction; but, if it develops that the wild animal pest increases under its provisions there will be an urgent call for legislation calculated to encourage more effective work.[8]

After the State published the first year's results of the changed bounty, the ranchers did call for new legislation. During the first year (1903), 1,339 adult wolves and 1,446 wolf pups were reported for bounty payment.[9] This represented a fifty percent reduction from the previous year.

The stockmen demanded that the Legislature take some decisive action; both groups wanted the bounty continued, but also sought a new weapon to use against the wolf. The

[7]Laws of Montana 1903, 8th Sess., Ch. XCIV, Sec. 3070.

[8]The River Press (Fort Benton), August 26, 1903.

[9]Bounty Certificate Book 1904, passim.

ranchers were not satisfied with the use of poison, traps, dogs, chemicals and guns as these weapons had not eradicated the wolf. The Montana Legislature of 1905 provided an additional method of wolf destruction. It enacted a law which authorized the State Veterinarian, Dr. M. E. Knowles, to innoculate wolves and coyotes with sarcoptic mange[10] and then release them on the ranges to infect others of their species. The law stated:

> The State Veterinarian is hereby instructed, and it shall be his duty to, at the earliest possible moment, secure a sufficient number of wolves, wolf pups, coyotes and coyote pups to demonstrate fully the feasibility of producing among them the contagious disease known as Mange and that not less than six wolves and six coyotes shall be so obtained in each of the following counties of the State: Dawson, Custer, Valley, Fergus, Chouteau, Teton, Meagher and Rosebud.[11]

The idea for the introduction of mange may have come from an 1893 article which appeared in the Daily Yellowstone Journal (Miles City).

> Mr. Campbell[12] endeavored to get rid of the pests [wolves] by poisoning them, but met with

[10]Sarcoptic Mange is a disease caused by a parasite. It causes itching, loss of hair and even death in canines.

[11]Laws of Montana 1905, 9th Sess., Ch. 107, Sec. 1.

[12]J. M. Campbell was one of the largest sheep ranchers in West Texas and ran nearly 12,000 head in Valverde County.

> little success. He has now hit upon a novel plan of extermination for every wolf in West Texas. It is by the innoculation of a disease among them. In order to do this, he trapped ten wolves almost ten months ago and caged them up with a dog which was badly affected with the Mange. The wolves soon contracted the disease and are now thoroughly infected with the parasites which produce it.[13]

Montana's law was very specific in order to insure the success of the experiment:

> A suitable person shall be selected in each county who shall be a person that is an owner of and interested in livestock growing. Such designated person shall have charge of and keep in captivity such wolves and coyotes, and shall, when the same are fully infected with said disease or diseases, convey the same in six different directions from the place said animals are kept, not less than eight miles away in each direction.[14]

For capturing, detaining and distributing, the stockmen were to receive no more than $15 per animal; this was paid from a legislative appropriation of $2,500.[15] The State Veterinarian had the responsibility of innoculating the wolves and coyotes and being sure that these animals were fully infected before being released. The Veterinarian's office

[13] Daily Yellowstone Journal (Miles City), April 25, 1893. There is no more evidence concerning the completion of this experiment.

[14] Laws of Montana 1905, 9th Sess., Ch. 107, Sec. 2.

[15] Laws of Montana 1905, 9th Sess., Ch. 107, Sec. 4.

was required by the law to "obtain reports . . . and make a detailed report to the next Legislature."[16]

The idea of introducing mange seemed logical to the State Veterinarian, Dr. Knowles, and to the desperate stockmen. Although the wolf threat was reduced after the turn of the century, stockmen's aversion toward the wolf increased, and they encouraged this drastic action.

This incredible experiment proceeded in spite of a dearth of scientific information concerning sarcoptic mange. Dr. Knowles insisted that "sarcoptic mange of dogs is only communicable to members of the dog family."[17] However, he could not have been certain of this fact, since scientists today do not have any conclusive proof that sarcoptic mange is specific to canines.[18]

The innoculation of sarcoptic mange seems even more inconceivable in the light of the fact that there had recently been an outbreak of another variety of mange

[16]There is no evidence to indicate that Dr. Knowles complied with this section of the law.

[17]Montana, Board of Sheep Commissioners Annual Report 1913-1914, 10. Hereafter cited as Sheep Comm. Annual Report.

[18]In an interview with Dr. J. A. Stafford, present Montana State Veterinarian, he agrees that Dr. Knowles could not have known that this mange was specific to the canine. He also said that there was some controversy over the innoculation, but did not remember exactly the nature of the argument.

(Soroptic mange of scabies) in Montana sheep. In a letter to the Board of Sheep Commissioners, Dr. Knowles commented on this outbreak:

> During the past eighteen months [in 1904 and 1905] we have had a relatively extensive outbreak of scab in Chouteau, Cascade, Teton, and in Beaverhead counties, that has unnecessarily and unwarrantedly forced upon the sheepmen of these counties an actual expense of over Ten Thousand Dollars for dipping expenditures alone, not to mention numerous other expenses, depreciation in value, etc., impossible to calculate.[19]

Dr. Knowles could not have known that either soroptic mange or sarcoptic mange were specific to any one particular species and that sarcoptic mange would not spread to cattle and sheep.[20]

The soroptic mange (scabies) appeared in cattle in Chouteau county (one of the counties named in the 1905

[19] Sheep Comm. Annual Report 1904-1905, 18.

[20] During interview with Dr. Stafford, Dr. P. L. Wright, Chairman of the Department of Zoology at the University of Montana and Dr. W. L. Pengelly, Department of Forestry (Wildlife Biology) at the University of Montana, there was agreement among these men that there is not enough scientific information to warrant a specific statement concerning the transferability of sarcoptic mange from the canine to other animals or its limitation to the canine species. All three men said that it is unlikely that a transfer did occur, and all mentioned an experiment conducted in the Jackson Hole (Wyoming) which attempted to transmit scabies of elk to sheep. The group doing the experiment have not published the results to date, and it seems unlikely that they will do so. All of the three men interviewed agreed that the willful innoculation of mange was a dangerous experiment.

innoculation law), and by 1908 the Federal Government had ordered a quarantine on cattle shipped. The government required that all cattle be dipped before shipping. The River Press reported:

> The federal authorities have concluded that scab exists among cattle in the western part of Chouteau County and announced that beef shipments for the territory alleged to be infected must be accompanied by a dipping certificate.[21]

Before 1908 the scabies had been found only in Choteau county, but it soon spread into other parts of Montana. The disease could have come from many sources -- sheep, outside cattle, or wolves. In spite of the new outbreak of soroptic mange, the State Veterinarian continued the innoculation of sarcoptic mange into the wolf and coyote population.[22] Dr. Knowles even refused to help the cattlemen of Chouteau County. In a letter to The River Press, Dr. J. A. Stauffer, the Chouteau County representative of the United States Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Animal Industry, complained about the State when he wrote: "As the State [Montana] refused to do anything toward eradication of

[21] The River Press (Fort Benton), April 29, 1908.

[22] Sheep Comm. Annual Report 1913-1914, 15.

scabies, the U.S. Government will have inspectors at each dipping place to supervise the dipping and give all possible assistance."[23]

Dr. Knowles' failure to help the cattlemen and his delay in giving any public report concerning the experiment with sarcoptic mange causes considerable suspicion.[24] There was an eight year delay before Dr. Knowles finally made a public statement concerning the experiment. In a letter to the Montana Board of Sheep Commissioners in 1913, he wrote:

> The Board [Montana Livestock Sanitary Board] has come to the conclusion that this experiment with the innoculation of coyotes and wolves with the sarcoptic mange of the dog is meeting with considerable success, and the Board has decided to continue these experiments for the next two years, as we are convinced that it will result eventually in ridding the State, in a large measure, of these pests.
>
> In this connection [we] would add that it was voted that the sum of $10,000 be set aside for the purpose of carrying on these experiments during the coming two years. . .[25]

[23] The River Press (Fort Benton), April 29, 1908.

[24] This is even more inexplicable considering that there is no reference to the experiments in the State Veterinarian Reports, Minutes of the Montana Livestock Sanitary Board or in the Ledgers of Expenditures now held in the State Veterinary office. Dr. Stafford, the present State Veterinarian, stated that records concerning the experiment were probably destroyed because of the controversy over the innoculation.

[25] Sheep Comm. Annual Report 1913-1914, 15.

The program did not meet with everyone's approval. The Federal Bureau of Animal Industry opposed the Montana innoculation experiment on the basis that the sarcoptic mange might be transferable to food-producing animals. In a 1914 letter to the Board of Sheep Commissioners, Dr. Knowles wrote defensively:

> It is perhaps well for you to know that the Federal Bureau of Animal Industry have for reasons best known to themselves, consistently thrown a damper on this work for extermination of predatory pests. In a number of communications from the Bureau that have been referred to me by the gentlemen receiving them, the substance of the replies were invariably deprecatory and intended to lead the inquirer to believe that this experiment is extremely dangerous, probably inimical to food producing animals; usually ending the communication by stating that, however, authorities seemed to be agreed that the sarcoptic mange of dogs is only communicable to members of the dog family.[26]

The innoculation experiment continued until 1916[27] despite warnings from the Federal Government. By 1916 some cattlemen began to question the merits of mange innoculation.

[26] Sheep Comm. Annual Report 1913-1914, 10.

[27] There are no records which give the exact date of termination of the experiment, but it did continue through 1916. The records do not give the reason for stopping the experiment. However, the last statement by Knowles in 1916 mentions only coyotes being innoculated. It is reasonable to assume that he had discovered that the experiment did not work with wolves.

They did not question the potential danger of the experiment, but rather its effectiveness as a killer of wolves. Wallis Huidekoper, an influential Montana cattleman and Second Vice-President of the American National Livestock Association, whose cattle had been hit particularly hard by wolves, stated in an annual address to the 1916 meeting of the Montana Stock Growers' Association:

> Mange has been innoculated into coyotes and wolves and results have been claimed; but I can find no very authoritative assurances of the success of this method. In my opinion, the only reliable plan is to wage a continuous war with traps, guns and poison and to supplement these by destruction of dens in the spring of the year.[28]

Huidekoper's pessimistic assessment was more correct than Knowles' optimistic pronouncements concerning the innoculation experiment. The actual nature of the wolf's existence limited the success of the experiment. The wolf's instinct to defend his territory, combined with the social structure of the family packs, limited the possibilities of communication of the disease. A diseased animal would breed with only one other wolf, but both would die before

[28]Wallis Huidekoper, "The Wolf Question and what the Government is doing to help." Address delivered at the annual convention of the Montana Stock Growers' Convention April 18, 1916. (A copy on file at the Montana State Historical Society Library, Helena).

before other animals could contract the disease.[29] The limited number of animals released necessarily meant that only a limited number of wolves would be infected with the disease.[30]

In 1905 the Legislature had not only enacted the Mange Law, but had also increased the bounty on adult wolves to $10.[31] Like the mange, this high bounty failed to increase wolf deaths. There was a reduction in the number of pelts reported for bounty; 3,701 were reported in 1904 and only 1,743 were reported in 1906.[32] For the first time since 1883 there was no increase in the number of pelts reported for payment after the Legislature raised the bounty. The wolf problem was dimished, but the stockmen continued their vengeance against the predator.

The stockmen continued to ask the Legislature for an increase in the bounty, and in 1911, it responded by raising

[29]This was not true for coyotes as they do not mate for a long period or for life as wolves do.

[30]Records are not available to determine the exact number of wolves released under the innoculation program, but with the limited budget (varying from $2,500 to $10,000), the number could not have been very great.

[31]Laws of Montana 1905, 9th Sess., Ch. 49, Sec. 1.

[32]Bounty Certificate Book 1904, passim. and Bounty Certificate Book 1906, passim.

the bounty to $15 for each wolf pelt presented.[33] Even the $15 bounty did not greatly increase the number of wolves killed for in 1912 hunters only turned in 1,233 wolves for bounty payment.[34] The bounty for wolf pups remained at $3 until 1917 when it was reduced to $2.50.[35] The $15 bounty remained until 1933 when the Montana Board of Livestock Commissioners assumed the responsibility for killing wolves and other predators.

By 1914 the stockmen had turned their attention from the wolf to the problems of the shrinking public domain and high railroad rates. The enlarged homestead act of 1909, railroad promotion and the advent of dry-land farming had provided the impetus for many farmers to move into Eastern Montana. These farmers cultivated thousands of acres of Montana's grazing lands, but more importantly in relation to the wolf, humans occupied many of the areas which the wolf used for denning. The human population pressure on denning laws, combined with the steady pressure of the bounty system, greatly reduced the wolf population.

Finally, after the wolf problem had almost abated, the Federal Government acted to kill wolves. In 1915 the

[34]Bounty Certificate Book 1912, passim.

[35]Laws of Montana 1917, 15th Sess., Ch. 59, Sec. 1.

Department of Agriculture's branch, the Biological Survey, assumed responsibility of controlling predators on all Federal lands. The Biological Survey obtained an appropriation of $125,000 to initiate its predator control program. This organization emphasized three areas of predator control: actual trapping and killing of predators, research and publication of information concerning predators.

During the first year tha the Biological Survey had the responsibility for killing predators, its hunters killed 1,095 wolves. This figure, however, includes the entire nation, so the number killed in Montana was small.[36] Most of the wolves killed by the Biological Survey hunters were taken from dens during the spring, and this became the method which it recommended for eradication of the wolf. The Survey also gave instructions on woods burning (to destroy denning places) and the construction of wolf-proof fences; neither method was suitable for Montana.[37]

[36]The 1,095 figure is taken from Huidekoper's address. The exact figures are located in the Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. and individual sections of these records cannot be microfilmed. The major efforts of the Biological Survey were concentrated in Louisiana, Meaker County (Colorado) and the Wind River area of Wyoming.

[37]The Biological Survey distributed a pamphlet giving instructions on building wolf-proof fences; it was published in 1907. See U.S. Biological Survey Circular, No. 55, 1907 (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1907), 5. Stanley Young wrote that woods burning was used in 1924. See Young, Wolf-History, 111-112.

By 1916 the wolf problem had been reduced to minimal proportions. However, the stockmen's hatred of the wolf did not subside. During the late 1910's and the 1920's there were several "renegade wolves" which aroused the stockmen. There were renegades in Montana, North and South Dakota, Wyoming and Colorado. These individual wolves became legends and evoked a particularly bitter hatred from the stockmen. The White Wolf of the Judith Basin in Central Montana (known as Snowdrift), was credited with killing $15,000 worth of stock,[38] and Three Toes in South Eastern Montana was reputed to have killed $50,000 worth of stock.[39] These renegade wolves were particularly cunning and were able to evade and frustrate hunters for many years. Each futile attempt to capture these wolves increased the legends.

The stories and legends concerning the wolf have survived to the present time, thus perpetrating the hatred which began to develop soon after the first movement of the white man into Montana. However, the image of the wolf is beginning to change as scientists have proved that the

[38] J. Frank Dobbie, "Snowdrift, Loneliest of all Lone Wolves," Montana Magazine of Western History, IV (Summer, 1954), 10-17.

[39] Rapid City Journal (South Dakota), Feb. 15, 1968.

wolf and other predators are necessary to maintain a suitable balance in our natural wildlife. The task of changing the historical attitude toward the wolf is a difficult one, for many ranchers are still convinced that even a single wolf represents a serious threat.

CONCLUSION

In their efforts to obtain county legislation, Montana's stockmen generated a hatred toward the wolf which still remains. The publicity was delibertely exaggerated to obtain favorable bounty legislation to eradicate the wolf. This publicity aggravated the stockmen to such an extent that their animosity toward the wolf became nearly pathological.

The wolf was partly responsible for the hatred because he did represent an economic threat to the livestock industry. Wolves did kill stock; this partially justified the stockmen's attitude. However, the stockmen blindly demanded total eradication and were not satisfied with anything less.

The stockmen believed that the best means to accomplish eradication was the enactment of high bounty payment for wolf pelts. The Montana bounties did motivate hunters to deliver wolf pelts for payment. From 1883 to 1918, 80,730 wolves were reported for bounty payment.[1] This number of wolves was impressive. However, this figure is not totally due to the effectiveness of the bounty. Many of the wolves

[1]Bounty Certificate Books 1883-1918, passim.

reported for payment would have been killed even if the Legislature had not enacted a single bounty. Over 80 percent of the recorded entries in the Bounty Certificate Books show less than five pelts delivered for payment, and not even 2 percent of the entries are for more than one hundred pelts.[2] The ever-increasing bounties were unable to keep the professional wolfer killing wolves, but obviously provided some incentive for cowboys or others to shoot and poison wolves or occasionally to hunt for their dens in the spring.

Critics of bounties condemn the system because of the high cost of its operation. Between 1883 and 1918, bounty payments on 80,730 wolves cost the Territory and State of Montana $342,764.[3] Stockmen probably paid an equivalent amount in private bounties. Part of these payments were for fraudulent claims, but it is impossible to determine the exact amount.

The stockmen believed that the amount paid for the bounty was minimal compared to their losses, especially when they considered the taxable value of their livestock.

The bounty system was only partially successful, and the section dealing with wolves proved more effective than

[2]Bounty Certificate Books 1883-1917, passim.

[3]Bounty Certificate Books 1883-1917, passim.

did the sections dealing with bears, mountain lions, ground squirrels, prairie dogs and coyotes. The bounties on these other animals did not eradicate them and proved much more expensive. Between 1883 and 1918, Montana paid $2,091,911 in bounty claims on all these other predators and rodents.[4] Wolves represented only about 15 percent of the total bounty payment, yet the stockmen did nearly all their complaining about the grey predator. This fact emphasizes the stockmen's psychological aversion to the wolf.

Contemporary biologists, zoologists and ecologists are attempting to save the wolf from extinction, but their task is vastly complicated because of the stockmen's lingering hatred. This sentiment has influenced the stockmen's aversion to all predators including bears, mountain lions and coyotes. During 1966 the State of Montana and the United States Government spent a total of $329,800 on predator control in Montana.[5] This figure is far above the actual losses that are attributed to predators. The State of Montana and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service explain these large expenditures by saying that if they do not kill these predators, they will become a menace. This weak argument does not justify the

[4]Bounty Certificate Books 1883-1917, passim.

[5]Montana, Board of Livestock Commissioners: Annual Report 1966, 36-38, passim.

tremendous damage done to wildlife in an effort to kill a few predators. Poison still remains the major means of killing predators, and indiscriminate poisoning, both past and present, has left many species close to extinction in Montana -- wolf, kit fox, bald eagle and golden eagle.

Montana's historical experience with the wolf and other predators has left a prejudice which will remain for many generations, and it is unlikely that the trend to kill predators will change very rapidly. It is unfortunate, for few Montanans will ever hear the howl of a wolf again or see wolf pups frolicking on an open mountainside.

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