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'Not the Wolf Itself': Distinguishing Hunters' Criticisms of Wolves from Procedures for Making Wolf Management Decisions

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ABSTRACT

Swedish hunters sometimes appeal to an inviolate 'right to exist' for wolves, apparently rejecting NIMBY. Nevertheless, the conditions existence hunters impose on wolves in practice fundamentally contradict their use of right to exist language. Hunters appeal to this language hoping to gain uptake in a conservation and management discourse demanding appropriately objective ecological language. However, their contradictory use of 'right to exist' opens them up to the charge that they are being deceptive – indeed, right to exist is a 'disguised NIMBY!' We address this situation by distinguishing hunters' criticisms of wolves from the procedures for reaching objective policy decisions.



KEYWORDS

Wolves; conservation policy; deliberation; NIMBY; meta-consensus; hunters

Introduction

NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) is usually invoked to account for people's theoretical approval of an issue but rejection of its particular siting and manifestations. Indeed, it has become a pejorative denoting defensive localism and resistance to change on the part of residents (Bosley & Bosley, 1988; Devine-Wright, 2005; Meyer, 2010). This is because most assume that NIMBYs, supporting principles but not practices, are self-interested and hypocritical (Wolsink, 2000). For example, the public generally approves of wind energy as opposed to environmentally harmful fossil fuel energy, but few want the wind turbines installed in their backyard. Likewise, the public today generally approves of the idea of reintroducing previously extirpated species such as wolves to meet biodiversity goals (Franklin, 1999). Nevertheless, it appears, no one wants potentially dangerous carnivores in their backyard (Ericsson et al., 2006).

This is certainly the case in Scandinavia. Public acceptance for large carnivore reintroduction is generally high, even if approval rates are considerably higher in urban centers, whose inhabitants do not come into direct contact with the species

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(Eriksson, 2016a; Krange et al., 2017; Masius & Sprenger, 2015). Recent research however shows that even staunch skeptics of such policy, typically livestock farmers and hunters who stand to lose livelihoods and lifestyles in such reintroductions, offer fairly high 'in principle' support for large carnivores (Von Essen et al., 2017). Generalized support by hunters and livestock farmers is manifested in their endorsements of all species' 'right to exist,' their 'belonging in the natural fauna,' or even admiration of the characteristics of the animal itself, like observing the wolf 'is a good hunter' or a beautiful animal (Anderson, 2016; Ghosal et al., 2015; Krange & Skogen, 2011). Indeed, hunters maintain 'it's not the wolf itself' (Von Essen, 2016, p. 349) to which one objects. Rather, one objects to the management of wolves, in a similar way to how Hagggett (2010) describes NIMBY claims in the context of wind power to be about 'the nature of the planning and decision-making processes' (p. 315). At a fundamental level, this is a promising finding: we can change the human premises around a policy, but *cannot* easily change species-specific characteristics (Von Essen, 2016).

While ostensibly supporting the wolf's right to exist, in principle, hunters object to wolf reintroduction in practice. In this sense, their position is one of NIMBY. Interestingly, objections are not expressed as NIMBY (except when it comes to the 'yard-wolf,' which one opposes because it literally strays into people's gardens), but rather *disguised* in a series of objective-sounding ecological counter-arguments toward siting of wolves that predicate on these particular wolves behaving 'unnaturally.' Thus, wolves can forfeit the right to exist because they are seen to have genetic, morphological, dispositional and locational faults. This repertoire of opposition to wolves is increasingly ubiquitous (see, e.g., Peltola & Heikkilä, 2015), but has not been presented all together before, nor interrogated as to their meaning. In our paper, we argue the latter oppositions to wolves have traction in the debate inasmuch as they appear to transcend self-interested NIMBY and be veiled as ecological concerns at a time when policy and public opinion value buzzwords like naturalness in biodiversity conservation (Pol et al., 2006; Von Essen, 2015).

However pragmatic hunters' disguise of wolf opposition appears, it is also problematic. On the one hand, it may be understood as an act of deception. This would in turn say something about the discursive climate in which opinions are offered on wolf conservation, and hence which sorts of arguments hold validity (Von Essen, 2015). On the other hand, as we argue to be the case, the collapsing of hunters' opinions about wolves into ecological objections is also an unfortunate byproduct of present failures to offer deliberative arenas that can unpack the genuine ambivalences that hunters have about wolves and the processes around wolf conservation. Our study gives voice to these ambivalences, to clarify the nature of opposition. We also observe that ambivalences are never appropriately disentangled or separate distrust of *processes* from distrust of *wolves* and that this is needed. What takes place instead is that hunters resolve their appeal to 'right to exist, but' by coupling it to the wolf's perceived ecological and genetic aberrations from a species norm. This functions at once to neutralize any cognitive dissonance they may have in relation to supporting wolves as a species, and it locates the problem in ecological-objective sounding facts, instead of within and between their own ambivalences in attitudes. At present, then, we face a problem of positions on wolves becoming *simplified* and *polarized* as either self-interested NIMBYs (as per decision-makers) or as objective-sounding assessments.

We believe that the current debate on wolf conservation in Sweden, and by extension likely many other places, is in dire need of unpacking in deliberation, to clarify the nature of wolf opposition, but also to bring out hunters' tentative endorsement of the wolf's right to exist, which have never been brought to light before. Unpacking NIMBY as to core objections is hence pivotal in moving forward. At the same time, we draw on recent research in arguing that we also need to stay with NIMBY and take it seriously (Burningham, 2000; Meyer, 2010). We should take NIMBYisms seriously as indicators of potential environmental injustice rather than self-interest. In our paper, we adopt the position that NIMBY can be a justified marker of injustice (as argued by Crozier & Hajzler, 2010; Feldman & Turner, 2014; Whyte, 2010). On the other hand, we also add the novel contribution that NIMBY can become disguised because of the parameters of the conversation and that this disguise is ultimately in the disservice of hunters, policy-makers and wolf conservationists alike in going forward in wolf conservation, as it simplifies complex positions and does away with hunters' important, untapped ambivalences on animal rights.

We use a combined literature study and empirical interview data with Swedish hunters (2014–2016) faced with wolf reintroduction, to demonstrate there exists a surprising amount of 'in theory' support of the wolf as an animal, and even of the wolf's return to the country after centuries of extirpation. This takes place in the term 'right to exist.' Our aim with this investigation is twofold. First, it is to show that the hunters do indeed theoretically endorse the principles of species reintroduction to a larger extent than acknowledged in previous literature. Hence, deliberative processes need to proceed from this shared imperative between hunters and wolf conservationists, as opposed to a point of difference or competing ecological arguments as they do currently (Von Essen & Hansen, 2015). Indeed, these ecological arguments risk losing important nuances as well as grievances that hunters have about wolves.

Our second and broader aim is to show that the hunters' opposition to wolf siting decisions has utility as indicators of problems of environmental injustice. For this utility to be realized, right to exist should be used as a starting point for interrogation of what is truly behind hunters' objections to wolves in policy deliberation. In doing so, we can reveal core issues and objections – these are likely to be about perceived injustices over hunters' treatment, as well as complex and changing attitudes toward wolves as a species, rather than in the reported objections toward the wolf's genetic make-up, country of origin or similarly worded ecological oppositions.

In the text that follows, we first present a literature overview of the language 'right to exist' as it is applied both by conservationists in policy and appropriated by hunters. Second, we present empirically collected interview quotes by Swedish hunters that reveal, on the one hand, admiration of the wolf and support of conservation principles at a general level, and, on the other hand, specific junctures in their management at which hunters perceive wolves' 'right to exist' appears to forfeit. These are clarified in a subsequent section. In the final section, we argue for the usefulness of the term 'right to exist' in going beyond NIMBY in policy deliberations by appeal to how recent developments in communication theory can utilize NIMBYs as a deliberative tool or starting point for more productive discussions between actors.

Right to Exist Language in Conservation Debates

From where does the term 'right to exist' as applied to wolves originate? Is it a recent position? Are hunters alone in appealing to it? In this section, we answer these questions by identifying the use of the term 'right to exist' and its analogous concepts that apply to the wolf, like 'having a natural part' and 'belonging' from wildlife management and hunting sociology literature. We examine also how the literature considers how this right can forfeit.

To be sure, there is philosophical contention in attributing the right to exist as to a species, rather than an individual. While it has defenders within ecocentrism (Callicott, 1987; Leopold, 1946; Rolston, 1985), ethicists generally (Johnson, 1983) and is implicit in biodiversity conservation policy, the prevailing view of philosophers is arguably still that rights are properties of *individuals* rather than collectivities, such as species as biotic aggregates (Feinberg, 1974). We do not engage this philosophical debate on rights but declare that right to exist is in use in both policy and practice. Indeed, the right to exist language may be said to partly undergird the EU Habitats Directive and Bern Convention, as well as providing an implicit premise to several species protection plans in modernity (see, e.g., Haslam, 2012; Paavola, 2004; Wandesforde-Smith & Watts, 2014). This is particularly so in the context of reintroduction schemes where extirpated species like large carnivores are reinstated, in part, on the normative rationale that they have a right to exist in those areas their forebearers once claimed as natural habitats (Jamieson, 2008). Indeed, the explicated premise in the Habitats Directive is that the wolf has a right to exist in its former 'natural habitat' or 'natural range' (EU Guidance Document, 2007, p. 10).

We note this is founded on a valorization of naturalness and authenticity in modernity and our duties to restore such conditions as development has degraded them (Fitzpatrick et al., 2015). On the other side to this coin is an often strict implication that *unnatural* is a value-deleting property: be it in the form of invasive species that cross natural boundaries in landscape, hybrid animals that cross boundaries in genetics, and pest species that cross boundaries of expected behavior, such as by predating on or feeding on human resources, or by behaving unshyly or erratically. By latching on to an overriding critique of unnaturalness, the latter claims provide an important storehouse of arguments that provides legitimacy to hunters' discursive objections to wolves (Von Essen, 2015).

Despite resistance toward bringing back wolves, research has revealed that concessions are made as to the wolf's existence that separate the hypothetical wolf's *right to exist* from problems on the ground: poor management and siting decisions, the association of wolves with a patronizing academic middle class in cities, or locally ferocious livestock-predating wolves, for example. A generalized support for hypothetical wolves comes through prominently in discourse of 'right to live' in Norway, an attribute which hunters appear to assign to every species (Krange & Skogen, 2011). In a comparative study between Norway and India similarly, Ghosal et al. (2015) note that both Norwegian hunters and Indian pastoralists use terms like the landscape 'belonging to' wolves and leopards respectively as much as to humans.

In Sweden where our study is set, a majority of hunters and livestock farmers speak of the wolf as having '*hemortsrätt*' [right of domicile] (Anderson, 2016). In Finland, the wolf itself has a right to exist, though locally wolves may be seen as 'visitors,' frequenting places they are not supposed to be (Bisi & Kurki, 2008, p. 117). In Albania similarly, 'by

transgressing the boundaries of the village and the house, the wolf comes as a stranger that fails to fulfill the complex rules to merit treatment as a guest' (Masius & Sprenger, 2015, p. 5). Indeed, in seemingly classic NIMBY vein, wolves in theory are a lot easier to accept than wolves that get too close (Gangaas et al., 2014). Specifically, these wolves become 'out of place,' even 'extraneous' to nature, when encroaching on human landscapes (Sjölander-Lindqvist, 2015). This, at least, implies that on a species level, they have a place originally, if conditionally, in nature.

In this context, a NIMBY preference is clearly articulated in the now-famous term 'yard wolf.' This derogatorily refers to wolves that specialize in house yard attacks on pets or livestock in Finland (Peltola & Heikkilä, 2015). The 'suburban wolf' (Hiedanpää et al., 2016) similarly denotes a wolf that transgresses boundaries and upsets human-animal relations (Ojalampi & Blomley, 2015; Snijders, 2012) and through sheer proximity in geography forfeits its right to exist in principle. This argumentation means that whenever wolves are criticized or, further, as rationalizations when they are illegally or legally killed, they are invariably painted as 'wrongdoers' or species-atypical wolves (Hermans, 2015; Tønnessen, 2010). These are wolves who, according to local skeptics of conservation, may have had a right to exist same as any other species, but by derogating from certain conditions for co-existence, have forgone these rights.

A further approximation of NIMBY is realized in 'it's not the wolf as a species, it's the genetic or geographical origin of this particular wolf that we object to ...' Indeed, the literature shows that all across Europe, even wolves who are technically in the 'right areas' legally and geographically have their right to domicile forfeit because they are regarded as *illegal immigrants* in this particular place (Von Essen & Allen, 2016): secretly released or accidentally contaminating the national stock of wolves with its foreign DNA (Drenthen, 2015; Ghosal et al., 2015; Hagstedt & Korsell, 2012; Theodorakea & Von Essen, 2016; Tønnessen, 2010; Von Essen, 2015). In the Nordic countries, the 'true' and 'natural' Swedish or Finnish wolf is actually spoken of with reverence by hunters as belonging to the local landscape, but the current individuals are seen as immigrants from the east that cannot be tolerated (Bergström et al., 2015). In the US, reintroduced wolves are painted as non-native by essentially being Canadian wolves, more destructive and ferocious than their American cousins and the cause of the extinction of the true 'American' wolf (Bell, 2015). The phenomenon is visible also on the African continent, where local communities often purport that lions are sent by rival peoples to kill their stock (Dickman & Hazzah, 2016).

Relatedly, much literature shows that perceived disruptions in the natural behavior of wolves – such as predation and fear of humans – undergird charges that actual wolves in the landscape are compromised. These wolves are tame, domesticated, hybridized or conditioned to human handling by virtue of, e.g., being secretly released from zoos. This so-called 'zoo hypothesis' (Ghosal et al., 2015) and the charge of genetic hybridity (and impurity) against wolves (Von Essen, 2015) presently serve to potentially sever the wolf's right to exist as a species from any actual co-existence on the ground. The narrative is endemic to most of Europe (Hagstedt & Korsell, 2012; Skogen et al., 2008; Theodorakea & Von Essen, 2016). It tends to emphasize wolves' loss of "timidity toward humans" and general unpredictability by derogating from expectations of a species norm (Bisi & Kurki, 2008, p. 108). Interbreeding with domestic dogs, creating a class of hybrids, presents the perhaps most troubling development to rural residents, as it obscures the boundaries between wild and tame (Von Essen & Allen, 2016).

In sum, critics of conservation policy concede wolves have a right to exist in theory but suggest wolves in practice do not deserve these rights because these specimens are seen to lack necessary biological or behavioral properties relating to their movement in the landscape, human association and genetic purity (Hiedanpää & Pellikka, 2017). In this sense, the argument approximates a NIMBY-like template: wolves are OK in theory, but not in practice. As seen above, however, it is not generally presented in terms of NIMBY objection (except when it comes to the yard wolf). It is rather disguised through appealing to a series of objective-sounding ecological, morphological and genetic preconditions coupled to the wolf's right to exist, so that self-interest never needs to enter the conversation. Consulting our interviews with Swedish hunters next, we add an empirical dimension to our study to illuminate the right to exist language in the practice of hunters and their discourse, and how it is forfeited or compromised.

Swedish Hunters

There is not one profile of the Swedish hunter. They hunt for meat, sport, wildlife management and out of tradition. Unlike some class-segregated hunting cultures, Swedish hunting is marked by considerable equality and origin from an earnest 'folk hunting' tradition (Tillhagen, 1987). Although a diverse community of different vocational, socio-economic and geographic backgrounds (Hansen et al., 2012), most hunters believe their knowledge and interests are marginalized in the current large carnivore conservation (Sandström et al., 2015; Sjölander-Lindqvist, 2008; Von Essen, 2016). This is a shared experience, or shared semantic of injustice, regardless of their personal opinions about the wolf as an animal (Eriksson, 2016b; Sandström et al., 2014). Hunters today report that their arguments do not count in the debate, that media is colonized by animal rights activists, and that wolf reintroduction has essentially meant the devastation of the countryside (Bisi & Kurki, 2008). While an increasing number of hunters are urban-based, research demonstrates that simmering rural-urban tensions has been brought to boil over the wolf in Fennoscandia (Skogen et al., 2013). Rural-based hunters, in particular, lament the fact that wolf conservation and with it the well-being and leisure it brings for urbanites, has turned the countryside into a dumping ground for environmental schemes, citing fundamental injustices in the distribution of environmental burdens and benefits (Epp & Whitson, 2001; Von Essen, 2016).

Concretely, hunters in Fennoscandia have been vocal not just about the threat that wolves mean for livestock, but the damage they inflict on dogs. The dog coursing tradition in Fennoscandia means that free-roaming hunting dogs, in addition to yard dogs, are often attacked and killed by territorial wolves in high numbers (Peltola & Heikkilä, 2015). The loss of a family pet is often devastating. Moreover, the dog-hunting tradition is arguably the *raison d'être* to a majority of contemporary Swedish hunters, who now feel as though their hunting culture has been rendered impossible in having to cater to conservation goals.

The purported victimhood and injustice suffered by Swedish hunters under the hands of an oppressive wolf regime may well be overstated. It may also be palpably felt today because hunters as a group in Sweden have only recently begun to be questioned and opposed by public opinion, new conservation agendas and media, having enjoyed an unquestioned status, and hence few restrictions, in society before. Ultimately, injustice is relative and perceived, making empirical investigations into such predicaments difficult. Such investigations are also beyond the scope of the present article. What matters is

arguably their experience of injustice, which is amply illustrated not just in recurring surveys and interview studies, but also manifested in the amount of disobedience and protests Swedish hunters undertake to signal their discontentment to policy-makers, the EU and urban-based wolf supporters (Von Essen et al., 2015)

Interviews with Swedish Hunters

We conducted 39 semi-structured in-depth interviews with Swedish hunters across all ages and demographics between 2014–2016. Respondents were asked to reflect on their trust in the political regime, their opposition toward wolf policy and their views on various forms of wildlife species and their management – but particularly large carnivores. Respondents were approached from multiple source points, including connections to the researchers, online forum, local hunting associations and snowball sampling from respondents. A majority of respondents were critical toward wolf policy but, when asked questions about the animals themselves and their ethics toward these, an inductive finding was that they routinely accepted the right of the wolf to be in Sweden – albeit under different circumstances. This finding was gleaned from Atlas.ti where codes like ‘it’s not the wolf itself,’ and ‘animals as equal’ combined to constitute a right to exist narrative, which we present below. The most common Swedish term for this was ‘hör hemma’ (meaning ‘to belong’) and ‘samma rättigheter’ (meaning ‘equal/same rights’) which we collapsed into ‘right to exist’ for convenience’s sake and thematic unity.

Hunters’ Reflections on Wolves

The right to exist or having a right of domicile in Sweden in theory is attributed to the wolf in spite of its unpopularity in practice, as in the statement: ‘I do still think the wolf has a place in our fauna as it’s a natural part just like the rabbit and the deer’ (R2). The same respondent claims to be ‘happy they’re back to the extent they are. They should be here.’ Other hunters maintain the problem definitely lay not with ‘the animal itself. I mean, it’s an animal like any other.’ (R24). The wolf is even commended by several hunters as an impressive predator whose presence in the landscape is ‘pretty cool actually,’ and wolves ‘have a right to exist here in Sweden’ (R4). If one was a true nature lover and animal friend, and thus a ‘true’ hunter,’ this means accepting ‘all animals in the forest’ (R3) as having ‘a right to exist’ (R3), albeit: ‘in managed forms.’ When asked explicitly if the wolf had a right to exist in Sweden, the same respondent notes he does not mind this, but also states that the right to exist comes with ‘responsibility.’ Respondents elaborate this as involving making the wolf a huntable game species. In effect, they request it to be better managed to reflect the natural relationship that man and wild large carnivores have had historically, which includes timid wolves that stay clear of human settlements for fear of persecution. On asked if it had a right to exist, a hunter states that ‘privately I do think it does [...] but that it needed to be managed’ (R5).

Other respondents we encountered are more conflicted but likewise point to caveats in the right to exist: ‘my vision is zero free-living wolves. I mean, wolf is all well and good, I definitely don’t want to exterminate any animal on this earth, I like animals, all sorts really, but well ... those who want the wolf here will have to sort that out then’ (R35). Hunters also maintain that ‘while they should exist, there’s no doubt about that, you get them too close

and it's not so fun anymore' (R4). Some suggest that 'the wolf's need and right to be here' have 'eclipsed all other forms of biodiversity' (R8) to the point where trying to accommodate its right of domicile makes the ecosystem worse off for all other animals. One needs to 'handle the wolf like we handle all species' (R8) to combat the symbolic 'upper-hand,' 'disproportionate value' (R19) and 'moral exception' that characterizes the wolf's right to exist (R15). At the same time, respondents also somewhat critically concede that in hunting practice 'some animals seem to be worth more' and that they are 'not equal in practice' (R13).

The disdain for non-native or 'immigrant' species, for example, is palpable especially when it comes to the wolf. While conceding all animals have a right to exist, and in theory any animal having the right to be here as any other, hunter respondents are surprisingly upfront about 'not giving a damn about invasive species' (R17). The same respondent suggests that 'natural migrations are all well and good' but notes that for several species in Sweden, they had been 'brought,' 'escaped' or 'imported into the European continent' (even by Nazi officers), which makes it to legitimate to him to 'just shoot each and everyone you see.' This is reflected in strong endorsements of culling the illegitimate immigrants of the Swedish wolf population, as in: 'This reintroduced part of the population we really ought to just shoot. I mean, goddamnit. That it made its way here out of its own accord? Please. They need to admit it's implanted (R29).' R29 goes further in noting that because 'we don't have a Scandinavian wolf stock anyway' and that because 'they're all Russian wolves,' it essentially meant it was OK to 'get rid of each and every wolf' today.

Hunters' Inconsistent and Contradictory Use of 'Right to Exist'

In what follows, we argue that by geographically, morphologically and genetically circumscribing the right to exist to an unattainable range, hunters demonstrate that their 'right in principle, but ...' statement is a version of NIMBY cloaked. It is also a deeply problematic form of NIMBY, since the nature and scope of conditions for existence that hunters impose on wolves render it impossible that wolves could ever be in anyone's backyard. Although concerned in this section with exposing a contradiction in how hunters appeal to right to exist language, we subsequently argue their appeals to this language also reveals a deep ambivalence about wolf-conservation, along with their confusion over their criticisms of wolves and their dissatisfaction with the terms of discourse for wolf conservation and management.

First, hunters' use of the terms 'belonging,' 'having a natural place' or 'domicile' imparts a spatial caveat to the wolf's right to exist. What can be observed is that domicile of a species is ascribed to a particular nation or local area, which facilitates discrimination against outsider wolves as 'impure' immigrants. It is also clear that the wolf becomes designated *out of place* when it moves along another spatial dimension: from outside of designated areas and into human landscapes. Here, some scholars argue that the wolf loses its purity as a wild wolf (Arts et al., 2016) and is polluted, its right to exist *de facto* forgone, by way of its association with human settlements (Shelton, 2004; Sjölander-Lindqvist, 2015). To Brownlow (2000), loss of place correlates with loss of right, and this implies that the place was once obtained, but 'lost' by wolves at some point.

Consequently, the impression given by these analyses is that the wolves' right to exist is essentially contingent on location.

This is particularly problematic applied to wolves. Unlike a forest's 'right to exist' (found by Drenthen, 2010), wolves are never once at fixed points in the landscape. Their transient migratory nature, especially of young wolves, means that wolves have large space requirements and easily move in and outside of protected areas, inevitably encroaching on human landscapes (Linnell, 2005; Zedrosser et al., 2011). Deconstructing the basis of hunters' opposition to such wolves reveals a conceptual incoherence of the implication that wolves lose their protected status under the law and their 'right to exist' or to belong (Ojalammı & Blomley, 2015). Hence, this right is supposedly forfeited for wolves when they cross national borders and zones (Linnell, 2005). This confuses rights as inalienable entitlements with privileges that may be given or taken away based on *spatial contingencies*. Indeed, when 'right to exist' gradually slips into related but different languages along the lines of 'right to domicile' or 'belonging to,' or even 'having a natural place' in the given landscape, the wolf's right to exist becomes unhelpfully fixed to national borders, and it cannot ever find a true home. By analogy, this would be equivalent to saying Swedes lose their human rights in Norway, Norwegians in Sweden, and so on. Indeed, basic moral rights, including the right to species to exist, are not philosophically speaking contingent on locations.

Second, 'right to exist but not this particular individual' is also problematic insofar as socio-culturally constructed biological imperatives on purity become the basis for arbitrary discrimination among wolves by hunters: a moral hierarchy not just within the animal kingdom, but imposed upon the wolf species. Indeed, it facilitates the creation of a moral economy of species in which one can distinguish those wolves who 'belong' from those who do not have the same right to exist (Shelton, 2004). Moreover, by alleging the nationally pure wolf has a right to exist, and that wolves of foreign DNA do not have such a right, hunters who use these arguments 'add a moral element to the description of wolves' (Hermans, 2015, p. 268). They imply that the wolf, in its idealized national purity, is faultless and would be accepted (were it ever to materialize).

From the above literature review and empirical results of interviews with Swedish hunters, we hence deduce the following problem. While 'right to exist' offers in principle support for wolves, in practice, wolves can *never* get it right. That is, actual embodied wolves as compared to abstract hypothetical wolves are objected based on genetic, spatial, behavioral and morphological impropriety. This may be understood as a version of NIMBY cloaked in ecological, objective-sounding language that minimizes the element of self-interest, any feelings of injustice in relation to wolf conservation, and indeed ambivalences about wolves.

The reason such cloaked objections have currency, insomuch as hunters continue to use them and indeed hybrid wolves have become something of an outlaw (Von Essen & Allen, 2016), is in large part owed to the salience of the naturalness discourse in contemporary conservation policy. Naturalness becomes a powerfully legitimating rhetoric (Moriarty & Woods, 1997) that enables hunters to disguise NIMBY preferences under the guise of claims of inauthenticity and artificiality. Such environmental concerns have profound traction in many policy contexts and are at play in NIMBY conflicts (Pol et al., 2006), given that mere NIMBY is likely to be dismissed (Feldman & Turner, 2014). This means that hunters can in effect appeal to any caveats to forfeit the wolf's right to exist, so

long as they, first, couch these in unnaturalness and environmental terminology that emphasizes their support for societal goals of wildlife conservation and, second, maintain hypothetical support for the species' right to exist in principle. This could be seen in, for example, assertions that local wolf siting decisions were 'bad for biodiversity,' 'threatened the native wolf population' or destabilized what were characterized as natural and ecologically sound human-carnivore relations (of mutual distance).

Transcending 'Right to Exist' through Deliberative Questioning

We have shown that when hunters provide objections to wolf siting decisions, they nevertheless do so through a NIMBY template, but disguised in ecology to hide self-interest. Their disguising of NIMBY, however, should be taken seriously as an indicator of a discursive climate in which science is the hegemonic form of argumentation and other sorts of arguments are never discussed. Our next claim builds on the ambivalences that hunters have about wolves and which become unhelpfully obfuscated in the latter pseudo-ecological language. Such language results in the bypassing of needed deliberative unpacking of the complex attitudes hunters have in relation to wolves, wolf conservation, and justice.

To move forward, we advocate for new models of deliberation that start from a point of departure of moral commonality rather than difference, self-interest, or ecology. The latter three points head up much of the participation in wolf management today (Von Essen & Hansen, 2015). Indeed, stakeholder models of participation divide the arena from the outset, separating hunters from animal rights activists, and ecotourism guides and wolf conservationists from farmers. This contentious stakeholder approach effectively divides wolves as an issue to be argued for from preconceived interest positions from the outset, and participants struggle to find consensus as management and siting issues of wolves become more complex (Lundmark & Matti, 2015). Not surprisingly, then, the participatory processes around wolf conservation in Sweden are declared to be characterized by deep animosity and polarization (Ekengren, 2012).

By starting from a point of moral commonality, we turn to our operative term 'right to exist.' This is one of the few shared imperatives between diverse interest groups, and one of the few 'pro-wolf' positions that hunters can currently get behind. It is also a term that is host to significant, unpacked and underacknowledged ambivalences about wolves, such as recognizing its beauty and belonging, while observing processes around it are deeply patronizing. By staying with and interrogating positions around the shared imperative of right to exist, we hence flip the current model of stakeholder governance in wolf conservation with a heretofore untried deliberative approach departing from commons and consensus (Hansen et al., 2016). The benefit of this approaching is that it can narrow down the basis of actors' disagreements to specific and fixable issues rather than have them declare they are coming from wholly irreconcilable positions, which has long deadlocked wolf-conservation policy.

What does this mean for deliberative proceedings on the ground, exactly? Interrogating the right to exist term can specify exactly the junctures at which objections to wolves emerge. When we challenge participants in deliberation on their claim that the wolf does not belong to the local landscape, for example, we automatically inquire as to what provides the basis for their opposition. Through this deliberative exercise, one can clarify the basis for hunters' objections by asking, for example, if s/he considers tigers to

be equally out of place in the local landscape in some part of India. Here, if the hunter replies no, contending that tigers have a right to exist there, 'we will have determined that his opposition is not actually about human-carnivore coexistence ... [but rather] something else' (Von Essen, 2016, p. 342). If, however, the answer is no, then the hunter is indeed arguing from a different value ground that is helpful to expose.

Hence, the hunter might be asked: 'Do large carnivores have the right to exist *anywhere* in the world?' Through continued questioning, we may deliberately and openly recreate the values and principles of participants, exposing them to public scrutiny and needed clarification (Manin et al., 1987; Renn, 1999; Von Essen, 2016). Distilling core principles through this questioning approach can demonstrate positions are not so different after all (Pellizzoni, 2003). At the same time, the tool should not be applied too bluntly. There is clearly a leap involved from the statement 'all animals have a right to exist' to 'dangerous animals do not have a right to exist in my backyard.' It is in the nuances between where questioning should be directed. Do we find agreement with the statement 'all citizens should carry some of the burden of biodiversity conservation policy'? What about 'rural residents may incur some losses to accommodate such goals'? If such statements can be conceded, we will have further limited the range of contention.

Our interviews with hunters may be said to represent *mini-deliberations* by employing this line of questioning. This is perhaps why they turned up important ambivalences on the part of respondents. By being questioned, they became through this process more reflexive about their attitudes and ethics to wolves. This was also demonstrated by Anderson (2016), whose repeated questioning of Swedish livestock farmers and hunters in interviews resulted in several respondents scrutinizing their ethical codes to concede that on the level of the species, wolves cannot be held accountable for harms they cause; They form an important part of the ecosystem, and that 'all animals are equal' to any hunter who truly cares for nature (p. 21). This also makes them better attuned to specifying where critiques pertained to *processes* rather than the wolf itself.

This method of deliberative elimination down to the shared baseline of participants may be especially valuable in light of the fact that research from the Fennoscandian wolf-conservation context shows that hunters and wolf conservationists talk past each other, but actually note that they have *more* in common than they anticipated when deliberating under the right circumstances (Hansen et al., 2016; Von Essen, 2016). Additionally, Von Essen (2016) shows Swedish hunters take great offense whenever called out as unsustainable or as the enemies of animals by the media today; they argue this as an untruthful, unnecessarily polarizing and stigmatizing attribution that undermines the 'shared view' (p. 253) they recognize themselves as implicitly having with, for example, urban self-proclaimed nature lovers. This points to a perhaps not unwelcome discussion with hunters that separates wolves from their management premises.

Indeed, if we finally get down to the core of hunters' opposition, our hypothesis is that this is likely to in most cases reveal that objections reside in hunters' experience of injustices. That is, questioning will uncover that it is not arbitrary things like the wolf's genetic make-up with which one takes issue. These may be understood as placeholder arguments for NIMBY preferences that reflect genuine environmental injustices in, for example, hunters' experience of turning their countryside into a reservoir for experimental large carnivore conservation (c.f., Epp & Whitson, 2001). More than that, they indicate the harm that the hegemonic language of ecology can result in; in this case, the

obfuscation and collapsing of complex ambivalences about wolves and justice into dead-end ecological arguments.

Relocating Objectivity in Deliberative Procedure (Not Ecology)

We have argued, then that positions on wolves are becoming *simplified* and *polarized* in the current deliberative climate as either self-interested NIMBYs or as objective-sounding ecological assessments. Indeed, sensing themselves at a disadvantage when read as NIMBYists, hunters have come to adopt the ecological language as the basis for opposing wolves. In this respect, they have turned to the language of a species' right to exist to gain a foothold in deliberation. On the one hand, such language allows hunters to appeal to the ecological sensibilities of urban conservationists concerned with reintroducing wolves into the Swedish landscape. On the other hand, it expresses a sincere belief on the part of hunters that these animals indeed belong in this landscape – objectively, they have the right *to be, to exist* here. Nevertheless, we have also argued that adopting such language is potentially deceptive. Right to exist language belies a deep ambivalence among hunters concerning wolves, demonstrated by their multiple caveats and exceptions to this supposed right, denying the wolf's right to exist in certain areas, with certain behaviors, or in certain ways. This effectively undermines the universalism of rights language, leaving hunters open to the charge that their commitment to the right to exist of wolves is, at best, half-hearted and, at worst, insincere. In other words, it leaves them open to the charge that their appeal to a species' right to exist is a disguised form of NIMBYism.

Nevertheless, we consider this charge oversimplified because it overlooks the genuine ambivalence in hunters' attitudes toward wolves, justice and processes. It is also polarizing because it, yet again, reduces the conservation attitudes of the hunters to mere self-interest, deceptively 'dressed up' in the language of ecology and species' rights. We reject this deflationary view of the hunters' appeal to right to exist as 'disguised NIMBY.' In part, we do so for reasons already identified in the NIMBY literature. That is, NIMBY claims may point to distributive inequalities in the distribution of environmental burdens between urban and rural populations. Indeed, we take seriously the proposition that NIMBYs – even 'disguised NIMBYs' – should be carefully examined for this possibility of their being indexical markers for environmental injustices. However, our contribution in this paper consists in highlighting the ambivalence of the hunters' conservation attitudes concerning wolves, and their rightful place in the Swedish landscape, rather than the indexical properties of attributing NIMBYs to hunters. In this respect, we should also examine the deliberative climate that leads hunters to believe that their only hope of gaining a deliberative foothold is to adopt the hegemonic language.

Something has obviously gone wrong with deliberation over wolf reintroductions if key participants in this debate find it necessary to bastardize their position to the point of rendering themselves vulnerable to charges from their critics of deceptive self-interest. How, though, might deliberation proceed differently? We argue that right to exist language retains some utility for facilitating deliberation between conservationists and hunters despite the difficulties we have stressed concerning its potential for deception and disguise, creating the impression among the urban conservationist critics of hunters that they are not serious at all about wolves belonging in the Swedish landscape. To this extent, we argue that the value of right to exist language is not that it represents some

ecologically objective ticket into deliberation, but a possible starting point for exchanges between the disputing parties. That is, a starting point for them to address legion complexities and nuances of what is owed not only to wolves but also urban and rural populations at loggerhead with one another over the wolves.

The utility of right to exist language in facilitating such dialogue may also be found in the model of meta-consensus and inter-subjective rationality (Niemeyer & Dryzek, 2007). Indeed, as a common starting point for deliberation between planners and hunters, right to exist language may lead to a meta-consensus or agreement about the nature of the issue at hand, if not actual policy outcomes. Meta-consensus on the issue at hand – the conservation of large carnivores as opposed to the adjudication of urban-rural rivalries in terms of competing self-interests – leads to inter-subjective rationality as the basis for agreement about what does and does not count as a relevant reason contributing to a legitimate outcome. In this model, it is expected that disagreement will persist on the specifics of political outcomes and what is most fair to the disputants. Indeed, outcomes may not be the first preference of disputants, and different disputants may assent to outcomes for different reasons, including fear of what may happen to wolf conservation in Sweden absent agreement. Nevertheless, assent is more likely because it is ‘part of a collectively formulated domain of possible outcomes’ (Niemeyer & Dryzek, 2007, p. 508) and it is, as such, ‘accepted as at least legitimate’ by all disputants (Niemeyer & Dryzek, 2007).

In sum, we see the virtue of this approach in substituting objectivity, as procedural legitimacy achieved in the deliberative procedure, for purportedly objective ecological assessments couched in right to exist language. Indeed, based on our analysis, the latter is highly vulnerable to charges of deceptiveness and disguise, given the multiple caveats and qualifications to which it is subjected. However, objectivity as procedural legitimacy starting from meta-consensus on the wolf’s right to exist avoids this kind of charge. It does so by rejecting the right to exist or belong to wolves in the Swedish landscape as any one substantive policy outcome, objectively defining the universal standpoint of right. Instead, it establishes a framework defining a range of possible legitimate outcomes pragmatically binding participants to compromises over they believe wolves, urban and rural populations are ideally owed by right.

Conclusion

Our study originated in observations that even the staunchest critics of wolf-conservation policy, local hunters, often appeared to endorse a ‘right to exist’ on the part of wolves. We argued the way ‘right to exist’ by being circumscribed by ‘but not here,’ ‘not like this,’ and ‘not this wolf,’ approximated a NIMBY template. Indeed, while undermining any objective claim to universal right, this captures the deep ambivalence of hunters concerning the place of wolves and their treatment in this, in the Swedish landscape. In this respect, we argued their appeals to right to exist language are motivated by wanting to gain deliberative uptake in a conservation and management discourse requiring them to use appropriately objective ecological language. Nevertheless, their contradictory use of right to exist opens them up to the charge that they are being deceptive – indeed, right to exist is a ‘disguised NIMBY!’ However, we also contended this language is not deceptive on the part of the hunters as much as indicative of a deep ambivalence among them in their conservation attitudes concerning wolves. Consistent with earlier research on NIMBY, we

showed that this language has indexical utility in exposing environmental injustices between urban and rural communities. Nevertheless, our primary concern in this article was to address the ambivalence of hunters regarding wolf conservation and management by properly distinguishing their criticisms of wolves from procedures for reaching legitimate policy decisions. To this extent, we argued that conservation and management discourse should relocate its demand for objectivity in meta-consensus defining a range of mutually acceptable policy outcomes, rather than ecological assessments per se, leading only to confusion and inconsistency on the part of the hunters. Consequently, our study went further than previous scholarship by outlining deliberative procedures, avoiding the charge of deceptiveness levied against the hunters, acknowledging their deep ambivalences, and identifying a range of legitimate compromise policy outcomes.

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