

1988
Wolf Education
Task Force

WOLVES

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It's called the Wolf Education Task Force. But it's not an attempt to increase the IQ of *Canis lupus*, nor to teach it to roll over or play dead the way Rover can.

No. It's the public—not the wolf—that is the object of the Task Force education effort, because most people think of the wolf only as the heavy in fables such as "Little Red Riding Hood" and "The Three Little Pigs."

Director William Penn Mott asked me to head up the Task Force in the fall of 1987. My assignment: to elevate the wolf's status in the public eye above the level of fairy tale anthropomorphism, and to show the creature as it really is—a fascinating component of the natural ecosystem, and one that should be allowed to play that role in more of our national parks.

The gray wolf has not been on the ecological stage over most of its range in the lower 48 states for decades, dating back to the days when carnivores were considered bad actors. Once common, habitat loss and programs to eradicate the wolf have driven it to the fringes of the country. The largest population lies within Minnesota's Voyageurs National Park, and a small number is found within Michigan's Isle Royale National Park. A few wolves from Canada have recently recolonized the northern reaches of Glacier National Park in Montana, fueling hopes for a stable population there someday soon.

Both the National Park Service and the U S Fish and Wildlife Service are on record as favoring the restoration of the gray wolf to Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks. The Fish and Wildlife Service has even produced a "Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery Plan" that it calls a "road map" to recovery of the wolf in the Rocky Mountains.

But implementation of the plan is slow, in part because of myth, misinformation, and a dislike for large predators that carries over from frontier days. Director Mott's educational task force is a bold move to shore up the wolf's public image, perhaps speeding up the restoration process in places like Yellowstone.

Interpretation

But how do you enlighten a nation of 250 million people about a subject so removed from the public's awareness? That became the critical question that media specialists on the Task Force from Interpretation, Public Affairs, and Harpers Ferry Center had to grapple with.

The best way is by targeting specific audiences. The biggest and best audience is school children, the Task Force decided, and began putting together a program to reach the nation's school children through their teachers. If the wolf is to survive in places like Yellowstone, tomorrow's adults must be aware of its real and aesthetic values to the ecosystem.

Magazine articles and in-depth newspaper stories provided one quick and easy route to public knowledge of the wolf, and many positive articles have been written as the result of Director Mott's unabashed and outspoken support for the wolf.

At present, the Task Force is in the process of putting the finishing touches on an inter-connecting set of tools including a marketing brochure, videotapes, posters, public service announcements, and an educational package that is designed to locate and educate as many people as possible about the wolf as it really is--a carnivore that is inherently neither good or bad--merely a fascinating and important, but absent, factor on our outdoor stage.