

# The Wolf: A Treaty of Cultural and Environmental Survival

## THE WOLF IS KNOWN BY MANY NAMES . . .

Hó'nehe. Shó'tonga. Cheétxiilisee. Šunǵmánitu tǵánka. Ómahkapi'si. Mélemstye. Makoyi. Bia isa. Hooxei. Ruv. Tha:yö:nih. Okwaho. Othahyu-ní. Ma'iingan. Skiri. Nci?cn. Kwewu. Wahya. Himíin. Shin-ab. Tséena. The wolf (*Canis lupus*) is known by many names and for time immemorial has held an esteemed place in the cultures and lifeways of the original inhabitants of this continent. The wolf has guided and influenced indigenous people in a foundational way, literally since the beginning of time. The wolf brought knowledge and understanding of Mother Earth that is mirrored in the stars. The wolf has influenced indigenous societal structures through the pack, imparting the communal responsibility to sustain life. The wolf taught many to survive by the hunt and to live in a spiritual compact of reciprocity. The wolf provided guidance for environmental stewardship and ecological balance. The wolf is a teacher, a guardian, a clan guide – a relative.

## PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE OF THE TREATY

Today the grey wolf is functionally extinct in most of its historic range. The US Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that fewer than 6,000 grey wolves presently exist in the contiguous United States. Some two-million wolves co-habited North America with our ancestors, pre-European colonization; the pre-contact wolf population estimates of scientists correlate with those of our elders. What effects the grey wolf in the lower-48 US states, impacts wolves north of the US-Canada border and south of the US-Mexico border. Like the First People of this continent, the wolf does not recognize imaginary lines transposed upon the land. To honor, recognize, and revitalize the ancient relationship we have with the wolf, it is the collective intention of we, the undersigned, to welcome the wolf to once again live beside us as Creator intended and to restore balance to Mother Earth where we are the stewards and the wolf is a protector of our lands. We will do everything within our means so that with the wolf, we will once again live in the sacred cycle of reciprocity to nurture each other culturally and spiritually. In our collective efforts to protect and recover the wolf – and by doing so protect, preserve and perpetuate indigenous cultures – this treaty is analogous to the “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)” and the principles of the “Rights of Nature & Mother Earth.”

## PARTIES TO THE TREATY

We, the undersigned, including Tribal/First Nations, Traditional Societies, Spiritual Leaders, representative Tribal Organizations and Respective Leaders from each generation and from the four sacred directions of Turtle Island. We recognize Mother Earth as a life-giving force, a living entity of which human beings are a part, rather than as human property to be owned, exploited and destroyed.

## ARTICLE I – CONSERVATION

Recognizing the wolf as a practitioner of conservation, we, collectively, reaffirm that our ancestors were conservationists before the term existed in the Western lexicon, and that in their honor we agree to perpetuate their principles of caring for Mother Earth that is today called conservation. Fundamental to that is respecting the interrelationships between us and “all our relations” which the wolf embodies. The wolf has a critical role in providing balance, health and structure to ecosystems which benefits a wide spectrum of life, be they two-legged, four-legged, winged, or those with roots. Grizzly bears, buffalo, beavers, songbirds, foxes, and pronghorn are among those aided by the wolf. Wolves prey on wild ungulates, those which are the most vulnerable due to age, injury or sickness, thus providing the healthy with a greater chance to survive and renew the herd. Where the wolf exists, so does balance: without overpopulations of elk, trees such as cottonwood, aspen, willow and serviceberry regenerate, providing crucial nesting and roosting sites for songbirds; enhancing root strength which protects streams from soil erosion, and in turn provides food and building elements for beavers whose dams then create ponds needed by fish; and finally, to enabling the growth of berry shrubs that provide sustenance for grizzly and black bears.

## **ARTICLE II – CULTURE**

The wolf taught us to hunt and imparted that “those with hooves and horns” would sustain us physically, but “those with paws and claws” were to provide spiritual sustenance. Wolves gave of themselves to enable us to live the “Dog Days,” offering their progeny to accompany us, to help us travel and traverse vast distances, to protect us, as their descendants – domestic dogs – do today. We commit to perpetuate and continue our spiritual ceremonies, sacred societies, sacred narratives and sacred bundles in which the wolf has a unique place, which in practice is a means to embody the thoughts and beliefs of ecological balance. Realizing that the wolf is a foundation of our traditional ways, we commit to the ideal of preservation and restoration in all aspects of our respective cultures related to the wolf, including customs, practices, naming, beliefs, songs, astronomy and ceremonies.

## **ARTICLE III – MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES**

The federal government has never developed a national strategy to recover wolves in the contiguous United States that is in accord with expanded protections. As a statement of sovereignty and cultural and environmental restoration we commit to rectify this omission. Recognizing that our collective objective is to see the wolf returned to areas of biologically suitable habitat on our traditional lands within the wolf’s historic range pre-colonial contact, and for linkage zones to be established between the existing, fragmented populations, wolf management plans for Tribal/First Nations will be formulated from a cultural foundation, while accommodating the “best available science.” We, collectively, recognize that our ancestors practiced the “best available science” in their stewardship of the land, as they lived in balance with our Mother Earth when the biomass was at its height. Spirituality informs the indigenous worldview, which includes our Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). The US Fish and Wildlife Service describes TEK as “Native Science” gained “over hundreds or thousands of years through direct contact with the environment,” and further expounds how TEK “encompasses the world view of indigenous people which includes ecology, spirituality, human and animal relationships, and more.” Our TEK is the very

definition of “the best available science.” Our people applied their TEK for millennia prior to contact. “The idea that TEK has guided modern biology (or Western science) should encourage conservation biologists to investigate TEK more thoroughly,” remains the prevailing finding of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. TEK will guide our management practices for the wolf and must now become a standard applied to federal, state and provincial management plans, following the examples of Rumphius, Linnaeus, Darwin and Merriam. Patterned on traditional practices, management objectives should strive for balance between maintaining our subsistence cultures where they are dependent upon viable ungulate populations, and the true recovery of the grey wolf population in the contiguous US.

#### **ARTICLE IV – RECOVERY OBJECTIVES**

Tribal/First Nations have the legal responsibility and authority to protect our ecosystems in the best interests of our people. Our rights and interests do not stop at reservation or reserve boundaries, we have ancestral and treaty lands, Ceded Territories, and reserved rights on those lands. A multitude of scientists contributed to a United Nations report which warns that some one-million species are facing extinction. Since the Industrial Revolution, the decimation of 83% of the mammals on earth has been accelerated, resulting in the once-unimaginable reality that 96% of existing mammals on earth are either humans or livestock. By 1967, approximately 1,000 wolves survived in the US, ostensibly in the Great Lakes region; the slaughter of the wolf inspired by federal policies echoes that which resulted in the near extirpation of the buffalo and the grizzly. The wolf now occupies only 10% of its historic range and only 30% of existing suitable habitat. Tracts of current and ancestral Tribal/First Nations’ territory comprise the 530,000 square miles of suitable wolf habitat in the lower-48 states. Areas of indigenous cultural significance in the southern Rocky Mountains, Grand Canyon, Cascade Mountains in Washington, Oregon and California, the Sierra Nevada and the Adirondacks all offer viable wolf habitat. The long-term survival of the grey wolf in the lower 48 depends upon the wolf’s return to critical portions of its historic range. These ecosystems require healing, having lacked the presence of the wolf for multiple generations. By the US Fish and Wildlife Service’s own population estimate, 6,000 wolves are below what scientists have identified as the minimum viable population size necessary to avoid extinction.

#### **ARTICLE V – GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION**

The federal government has a fiduciary obligation to Tribal/First Nations, which includes providing government-to-government consultation on any Endangered Species listing or delisting decision that impacts Tribal/First Nations. Any proposal to delist the grey wolf fits that criteria. The same issues that threatened Tribal/First Nations in the grizzly delisting struggle will resurface with grey wolf delisting: potential harm to tribal sovereignty, undermining treaty rights, stripping religious and spiritual freedoms, and detrimental economic repercussions. Government-to-government consultation must not only be “thorough” and “meaningful” as mandated by Executive Order 13175, but it must adhere to the standard of “free, prior and informed consent.” In 2010, the US endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) but has yet to honor that commitment. In defense of our rights and the preservation of the grey wolf, we, the undersigned, invoke Articles 25 and 26 of UNDRIP.

## **ARTICLE VI – NATIVE AMERICAN ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT (NA-ESA)**

It has become the norm that federal agencies place a far greater emphasis upon the input of energy companies - with considerable influence being accorded extractive industry executives - in Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing and delisting decisions than is accorded Tribal/First Nations. That disregard of the federal-Indian trust responsibility has prompted tribal nations to explore the formulation of a Native American Endangered Species Act (NA-ESA). Sovereign tribal lands hold several T&E species and vital habitat, and it is time for tribal people to have a greater input into the management and protection of these species that hold great cultural significance. In the present political climate, for some species an NA-ESA may be the only viable path to survival. As Tribal/First Nations, our sovereignty is consistently compromised by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the states in respect to wildlife management, including federal administration of the ESA on tribal lands. A NA-ESA would enhance tribal sovereignty, provide vocational opportunity for tribal members, and enable the melding of contemporary biological discipline with tribal Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) in management policies and practices. The NA-ESA would, in essence, be a framework document that could be adopted and amended according to the criteria of individual Tribal/First Nations, be they cultural or economic, as opposed to a “one-size fits all” imposition. We, the undersigned, will continue to evaluate the pathway to a NA-ESA.

## **ARTICLE VII – ECONOMICS**

Recognizing the wolf as a traditional teacher and protector of our lands and people, we, respectively, will research economic development revolving around the wolf in an environmentally and culturally compatible manner, including eco-tourism models with wolf watching, photography and culturally oriented educational tourism, traditional crafts, publishing and literacy materials inspired by traditional narratives to which the wolf is central, and other beneficial by-products arising out of the wolf’s gifts to us. Millions of visitors from around the world travel to Yellowstone National Park annually to catch a glimpse of the wolf, demonstrating that the wolf’s hold upon the human imagination transcends ethnicity.

## **ARTICLE VIII – EDUCATION**

Education and outreach are essential to wolf recovery. Respecting all of the teachings we have received from the wolf, we, collectively, agree to develop programs revolving around the wolf as a means of transferring intergenerational knowledge to the younger and future generations and sharing knowledge amongst our respective Tribal/First Nations to both strengthen and reignite cultural ties that in some instances have been overwhelmed by colonization. We will not adopt state, provincial or federal wolf management plans, as all are infringements of our sovereignty and do not reflect our TEK. We will prioritize vocational and educational programs for our people, so that on our lands, they will be the leaders of our culturally compatible wolf management programs. Upon the signing of this treaty, any management removal of a wolf will be undertaken with ceremony, and such parts of the wolf that have always been kept in sacred bundles or used for traditional practices will be

provided to such persons qualified. We will seek to counter popular myths that have become talking points to justify the eradication of the wolf from large parts of its historic range. Contrary to popular mythology, domestic dogs pose a greater threat to people than wolves. Of an estimated 115,000 wolves worldwide, there are only ten recorded cases of fatal encounters with non-rabid wolves in the last half-century, two of those having occurred in North America. By comparison, dog bites are responsible for sixteen deaths per year in the US, with an estimated 4.7 million domestic dog bites reported annually.

## **ARTICLE IX – HUNTING**

At the inception of our relationship with the wolf, this sacred guide instilled the values of the hunt to our ancestors. Generally, current federal, state and provincial management plans that enable and elevate trophy hunting of species of immense cultural importance are antithetical to those ancient principles. Tribal/First Nations will not allow infringements of sovereignty by the influence of any de facto sovereign. We will formulate vocational and educational programs for our people, so that on our lands, they will be the leaders of our culturally compatible wolf management programs.

## **ARTICLE X – RESEARCH**

Recognizing that learning is a life-long process, we, collectively, agree to perpetuate knowledge-gathering and knowledge-sharing according to our customs and inherent authorities revolving around the wolf that do not violate our traditional ethical standards as a means to expand our knowledge base regarding the environment, wildlife, plant life, water, and the role of the wolf in the history, spiritual, economic, and social life of our Tribal/First Nations. We will seek input from the leading, independent biologists qualified in the study of the wolf to ensure that we continue to lead in the preservation and recovery of the wolf.

## **ARTICLE XI –THREATS**

The US Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that approximately 6,000 wolves presently survive in nine of the lower-48 states. In three of those – Wyoming, Idaho and Montana – some 3,500 wolves have been killed since 2011 after the removal of federal protections in those states. Even without trophy hunting and trapping, studies have found that annual mortality rates in wolf packs can reach 50% but typically average around 35%. In Idaho, state managers resumed the engagement of bounty hunters to kill wolves and requested the intervention of US Department of Agriculture/Wildlife Services' airborne sharpshooters to reduce pack densities. Wyoming designated the wolf with predator status, which permitted the killing of wolves with minimal restrictions, including killing pups in dens. Wisconsin's current management plan provides for the wolf population to be culled by 60%. These examples highlight the greatest threat to the wolf – the removal of federal protections, the lack of consultation with and authoritative input on wolf recovery afforded Tribal/First Nations, and the enactment of state wolf management plans that are motivated by political interests, not scientific findings. Multiple studies have concluded that the existing wolf populations in the Rocky Mountains, Great Lakes and Southwest are below the minimum, viable population sizes to ensure their survival. These populations are also below levels considered necessary to avoid genetic inbreeding. Like threats facing the grizzly bear, the loss of genetic diversity due to small, isolated populations is a threat that must be addressed through recovery plans that prioritize connectivity.

## **ARTICLE XII – CONFLICT REDUCTIONS**

“When I was a child, I used to ride horseback with my dad and sometimes we would see wolves, and they would never attack us. Our people lived in harmony with the wildlife, I don’t believe in shooting them, they were here long before cattle or anything else,” said Barbara Aripa, a respected elder of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation. A 2019 report, *Wolf-Livestock Conflict and the Effects of Wolf Management* (DeCesare et al), “found no evidence that removing wolves through public harvest affected the year-to-year presence or absence of livestock depredations by wolves.” That conclusion was based upon over a decade of data. Since 2014, scientific papers have diverged on whether targeted lethal removals by wildlife managers reduce livestock depredations. There is, however, consensus that proactive non-lethal conflict deterrence methods are crucial to containing wolf and livestock losses. Employing range riders and shepherds, incorporating livestock guardian dogs into conflict reduction strategies, and erecting barriers, be that fencing, fladry, penning or a combination, are effective tools in conflict reduction. Reducing attractants – particularly the removal and disposal of carcasses and separating diseased or ailing livestock – is vital to reducing potential livestock depredations. Livestock – wolf conflict has proven to be predictable and will often reoccur in the same areas. The insightful management of range units and leased lands is necessary to further minimize livestock conflicts, but it should be accepted that when livestock are released onto range units, they are vulnerable, like indigenous species, to a multitude of harms. Where the wolf presently exists, livestock depredations impact less than 1% of available livestock and less than 1% of ranchers in currently populated wolf habitat experience losses to wolves annually. Following the precedent set by some of our sister Tribal/First Nations, we recognize the need for closures to areas that offer the wolf sensitive habitat, particularly for denning sites. In the spirit of our ancestors, we will incorporate contemporary strategies in our culturally compatible conflict reduction programs; such programs will be inclusive, educational, and aim to reconnect our people with the wolf and traditional precepts of tribal society and responsibility.

## **ARTICLE XIII – PARTNERSHIPS**

Tribal/First Nations seek to be equal partners with federal, state and provincial authorities in the true recovery and future management of the wolf. We, collectively, invite representatives of those sovereigns and Non-Governmental Organizations, corporations and others of the business and commercial community, to form partnerships with the signatories to bring about the manifestation of the intent of this treaty. Organizations and individuals may become signatories to this treaty as partners and supporters providing they perpetuate the spirit and intent of this treaty.