



The Bunkhouse Chronicle

Craig Rullman
Columnist

I saw a wolf, and I liked it

Last week I was elk hunting out east and saw, for the first time, a wolf in the wild. I've seen just about all of the other big predators in North America at one time or another: homo sapiens in various stages of sobriety, bears, lions, bobcats, and gators, but seeing a wolf — and very close — was a first.

For the record: I saw a wolf, and I liked it.

A few months back I tried to write a middle-of-the-road sort of column about the return of wolves — you know, one of those “can't we all just get along” sort of essays that acknowledged value on both sides of the discussion and tried to elevate the wolf debate in some way. That was a flop for my hate-readers although, to be fair, the people who like my stuff tend to be the quieter types.

The point is that there is still plenty of room for compromise on the issue. The tradition I come out of sees obvious value in wildlife and biodiversity and actually lives and works on the land preserving wildlife habitat every day of the year. But they are also invested physically, spiritually, and financially and would prefer not to lose their livelihoods to the good intentions of people who live 300 (or 3,000) miles away and are essentially militant, often woefully under-informed, and frequently put emotion in front of reason.

Except for the livelihood part, most of that can be said for both sides in the discussion. It's likely that neither side is sanctified in any way

or has a pure claim to owning the whole truth on the wolf issue.

I thought the original wolf piece hit a solid middle-note but I received some full-throated disgust-mail for trying to be reasonable, mostly from wolf lovers, which is a hazard whenever one steps into the arena these days, because far too many folks are stretched so tight by media saturation and self-absorption that they can easily burst when poked.

The demand for bread and circuses has probably never been higher, by the way, and the produce of that culture keeps showing up in episodes of mass violence at the hands of lunatics.

The wolf piece came on the heels of a vigorous and determined effort to get ODFW to allow me a seat during their winter wolf-counts. I wanted to wade through the hyperbole and emotional vitriol to see for myself what's going on, and then report what I found out to the world. I made it clear that I had no agenda: I wasn't going to write an ODFW hit piece, or cozy up to any particular side in the debate. I just wanted to ride along and see what I saw, then write about it and let the reader decide.

What I got from that effort was one of the more slickly packaged government run-arounds I've experienced since leaving law enforcement. I talked to no less than six different agents of ODFW in four different offices who kept shunting my request into various rabbit holes until finally, in the end, the Big Oregon Bureaucracy machine lit up and spit out a declaration that my efforts at transparent journalism were no match for one of the more deadly plagues cursing the American experiment: phantom liability. The wolf-count plane, turns out, could possibly crash, and I might die in that case, so ... no wolf count for Craig.

Which is, you know, just pure horse-apples.

So one is left to question the transparency of the wolf studies we are occasionally given. It's still puzzling how

OR-7, who made a much-celebrated journey from the Wallowas down into California (becoming the first wolf there in 100 years) before returning and settling into the southern Cascades, managed to find a mate in a place where there were allegedly ZERO wolves. OR-7 has made a bunch of wolf-pups, and some of them are now eating cattle that belong to my friends in Lassen County, California, where I was raised.

I like wolves, and I want them to be out there in the woods. I want them to be there when I go into the wilderness because it adds perspective and dimension and we owe that gift of biodiversity to our great-great-grandchildren. But I also don't want one for a pet and if I found one in my barn or attacking my animals I would kill it.

Which is a reasonable position. There are lots of folks who love the post-card version of mountain lions — until they get one in their garage, watch it kill a horse, or find it stalking their children. And then, in that moment, they seem to understand that these animals are predators capable of immense, ugly, and costly violence.

And it's probably important to remember that human beings are predators. We have opposable thumbs, canine teeth, forward looking eyes, and outsized brains capable of complex planning. We can, and have, eradicated entire species from the planet forever. We are by far the most brutal, remorseless, and successful killer to have ever walked the earth.

Which is something I proved when I killed an elk last week in wolf country — where I was privileged to see a beautiful wolf — then cleaned and quartered my kill in the field, and happily brought it home to feed my family.

Landscape work begins...



PHOTO BY JERRY BALDOCK

Work is underway on the art and landscaping for the Highway 20/Barclay Drive roundabout at the west end of Sisters.

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Sisters salutes...

• Sisters Trails Alliance (STA) wrote:

Thank you Dan, Julia and Emily Rickards, and all the staff of The Open Door restaurant, for their “Dine for a Cause” program.

In October, a portion of Tuesday night dining proceeds are being donated to STA. This money will help STA with several trail

projects, including refurbishing the Jeff View Shelter, a new snowshoeing trail, and restoration of the Tollgate to Sisters High School Trail.

The Rickards family has given back to this community by supporting many non-profits. Please support their business and thank them when you visit The Open Door.

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