

Unit 15 Handout

Wolf Reintroduction Role Play

Public Information

This information should be distributed to everyone.

Proposal and Background

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has put forth a proposal to reintroduce 50 red wolves in packs of ten to the Pisgah National Forest in western North Carolina. A survey of the ecological trends of the region identified the following three reasons for bringing the wolf into the area: 1) until the 1950s the area supported an undetermined (but large) number of wolves; 2) the deer populations in the Forest have grown dramatically over the past dozen years, leading to excessive browsing of low-lying forest vegetation, and a high number of highway accidents; 3) and the general health of many small animals is endangered as the deer populations expand, producing more undernourished and weak animals that are prone to contracting and spreading diseases. The wolves will be given "experimental" status, protecting them from hunters until an animal is identified as a troublemaker. If a wolf is "bad" it can be dealt with forcefully—the first incident leads to re-capture, the second, death.

Statistics show that 30-40,000 wolves live in the wild between Alaska and Canada, technically removing them from once pressing extinction threats. There have been similar reintroductions in eastern North Carolina, Yellowstone National Park, Minnesota, and Olympic National Park in Washington state, so public awareness of wolf programs is generally high. The proposal calls for the creation of two new U.S. Fish and Wildlife offices to be opened in the region for the monitoring of the ecosystem impact and migration patterns of the wolves. The current timeline is to release the wolves in four months, making today's gathering of regional stakeholders crucial. In attendance is D.J. Pelfrey, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife environmental scientist who drafted the proposal, Jackie Green of the Blue Mountain Environmental Protection Association, Cade Fisher of the North Carolina Sportsman's League, Chris Hayman of the Piedmont Livestock Council, Pat Sellers from the State Tourism Commission, Sam Levitt of the regional Homeowner's Interest Project, and Leslie Billups, the neutral brought in to preside over the negotiations of the proposal.

The purpose of the stakeholder meeting is to consider the proposal made by the Fish and Wildlife to release 50 wolves in the Pisgah National Forest in the next four months, and to open the two wildlife offices in western North Carolina.

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D. J. Pelphrey, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service environmental scientist

Your studies of the Pisgah National Forest ecosystem reveal growing imbalances in the food chain and an increased incidence of disease among many mammal species. Research on other reintroductions indicate that wolves can be an important part of reductions in pest-level deer populations. Not only will the red wolves reduce the total number of deer, they also have a preference for weak and sickly prey—those animals most likely to carry and spread diseases. You believe the wolves will gradually improve the overall health of the food chain of the Forest.

The wolf reintroduction in the eastern part of the state led to much public debate and legislative wrangling. Despite the fact that the eastern program is viewed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a statistical success (with the wolf population reproducing and trimming deer numbers steadily), recent legal actions, brought by cattlemen and environmentalists, have led your agency to seek broader public support and input in future reintroduction plans. The agency has instructed you to be sensitive to public concerns, but to also demonstrate the essential role red wolves can play in the regional ecology.

You feel that the high profile of wolf programs across the country and research polls that show 70% approval rates of reintroductions make it more likely that your proposal will be accepted at this time. Anticipating claims that wolves over-harvest and pose a menace to deer populations, you have data from a Fish and Wildlife Service study in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan showing that of the roughly 125,000 deer killed in 1995, wolves accounted for less than 1,000 of the total, cars for over 8,000 and hunters took 116,000. This proves, beyond a doubt, that the threat wolves pose to deer populations is far less than that of humans. If what people are worried about is the number of deer killed, we need to start talking about limiting human hunters, not natural predators such as wolves.

The southeastern U.S. was a native home to red wolves for thousands of years until humankind "played God" and eliminated them from the region. Considering the burgeoning ecological pressures, you believe the time to reintroduce is at-hand. You're hoping for a rational dialogue between the stakeholders. You don't want drama and emotion to lead the discussion away from the scientific facts.

Specifically, your proposal would do the following:

- Introduce 50 wolves in five packs over a one-year period starting in four months.
- Reduce the number of deer hunting licenses by 25% to allocate some of the deer herd for wolf predation. You estimate that each wolf needs a base population equal to 0.5% of the total deer herd ($50 \times 0.5\% = 25\%$) from which to hunt.
- Place radio collars on the females and the five of alpha males. This will provide a statistically sound sampling and monitoring program at the least cost. Monitoring of the wolf population will be undertaken by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Biologists housed at the two new wildlife offices.
- Prohibit any taking (killing) of wolves within the national forest service boundary by anyone other than U.S. Fish and Wildlife personnel, and then only after the second incident in which the specific animal threatened livestock or domestic animals (the red wolf poses absolutely no danger to humans).
- Animals that stray beyond the national forest boundary will be considered "unprotected" and may be taken (killed) if they are a threat to livestock, domestic animals. Any taking of the animals must be reported to the Fish and Wildlife Service.
- Open two wildlife service office buildings (you and your staff have been in cramped quarters for the past four years and are really looking forward to some state-of-the-art laboratory and office space. It is expensive but worth it). If for some reason you must increase your budget for population monitoring, you will have to sacrifice one of the offices buildings).

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Jackie Green, Blue Mountain Environmental Protection Association

Your group recognizes that the Pisgah National Forest's ecosystem has been put under duress by the large deer herds that have few natural predators in the area. Something must be done. You oppose the U.S. Fish and Wildlife proposal on several grounds. First of all, the number of wolves proposed is too high to place in the forest at once. Estimates derived from the reintroduction experience of Yellowstone National Park indicate that 50 wolves will kill about 4,500 big-game animals annually (at two deer per wolf monthly). This number is a much higher kill-rate than what a Michigan study the U.S. Fish and Wildlife is relying on about for expected wolf impacts. Their data claims that the wolves would eliminate only several hundred deer—a manipulation of the statistics because they have not fitted their estimates with the large scale of the proposed reintroduction. Fifty wolves will eat much more than "several hundred" animals.

Your second reason for opposition to the proposal is that the plan has inadequate provisions for monitoring the adaptations of the wolves to life in the wild. Raised in pens, we simply don't know if these wolves can make it in the wild. This ties into a third problem with the proposal: the lack of concrete criteria upon which we can evaluate the success of the reintroduction. There needs to be watchdog environmental groups to monitor the program, not just the possibly self-serving U.S. Fish and Wildlife agents.

Another important reason for opposition is the fact that the proposal does not give the wolves a clear status outside of the forest. The "experimental" designation protects them while they are within the forest, but says nothing about their safety when they drift outside of the forest confines. The migratory patterns of these wolves is unpredictable. We must be able to accurately track the wolves in order to know how to protect them from hunters. You think that allowing only four months before the proposed reintroduction is ridiculously short. If there is to be a reintroduction, it should take place at the beginning of the next spring—that's when sickly and weak deer are most vulnerable.

Your group would support the reintroduction program if it conforms to the standards you and your group have proposed. Namely, you want to see:

- A maximum of 30 wolves in three packs introduced next spring
- A more extensive monitoring program that uses independent biologists employed by a national environmental organization. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would pay into a fund administered by an independent trust that will pay the salaries of the independent biologists. This type of monitoring keeps the number of animals that require radio collars to a minimum, yet insures better monitoring than the Fish and Wildlife Service can provide.
- Protection of wolves inside and outside of national forest boundaries by applying a strict "no takings" provision (that is, wolves cannot be purposefully harmed, even if they appear to threaten livestock). Only wolves that have actually been proven to harm livestock can be removed from the population. These animals must be live trapped and removed from the forest. No animal should be killed.

The ecosystem of the forest is being disturbed by the lack of natural predators of deer herds. You would prefer that nature itself restored the delicate balance rather than increasing hunting quotas to cut populations, as hunting does nothing to control the spread of diseases among animals. Currently the proposal is unacceptable to your group, and you will make it clear why you oppose the plan.

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Chris Hayman, Piedmont Livestock Council

The wolf reintroduction program in the eastern part of the state has met strong resistance from livestock farmer groups, and your group shares their apprehension. You've heard horror stories from farmers all over the country about cattle and sheep herds that have been attacked by wolves. A reintroduction program in the eastern part of the state led to several cattle being killed, a story that circulated quickly among the region's livestock producers.

Without provisions for protecting the economic interests of regional livestock farms your group will oppose the wolf program.

A second worrisome issue is the possibility that wolves could spread rabies among the livestock. A cow with rabies is a financial loss, and the proposal does not address how the agency will deal with our losses. As one farmer told you, "We're just sitting ducks for these wolves. Not only can't I afford to lose any head of cattle, I can't afford to build the length of fences I'd need to keep the wolves out. And once they come in and kill my investments, I don't see how the government plans to track the animals that did the killing." This inability to monitor the movements of the wolf has been dealt with in other parts of the country through the use of radio signal collars. You won't be comfortable with the entire safety issue unless the Pisgah reintroduction uses this type of tracking technology on every single wolf. That way, offending wolves could be dealt with and cattle can be protected. Lastly, you don't understand why the Fish and Wildlife Service wants to move so quickly. It is clear to you that more data on other reintroductions is needed before moving forward in the Pisgah Forest.

As it stands, livestock interests are ignored by this proposal. You are opposed with the proposal unless the following provisions are included:

- The government compensates any livestock owner for animals killed by wolves. If there is any doubt about the cause of livestock mortality, it is up to the government, not the farmer, to prove that a wolf was not involved.
- All wolves are to wear radio collars and their movements are to be constantly monitored. Any wolf leaving the forest boundary shall be trapped and returned. If a wolf repeatedly strays over the forest boundary (more than once), that animal is to be exterminated.
- You would prefer all animals to be vaccinated for rabies before being sent into the wild, and wolves captured and revaccinated every three years.
- You've brought along a 20 minute video tape produced by the Piedmont Livestock Council that describes the interests and mission of the group, and highlights the importance of livestock producers to the local economy. You want to show this video at the beginning of the meeting so everyone else understands the role of the Council, and why you must therefore oppose the proposal as it stands.

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Cade Fisher, North Carolina Sportsman's League representative

As the representative of the largest state group of hunters, you are concerned that the reintroduction of wolves could have potentially serious effects. Contrary to what the public may expect, support for reintroduction is high among hunters. You are not here to stop the program from being implemented, but rather to secure the interests of hunters. Specifically, you want to know what sort of new restrictions on hunting licenses and kill quotas will be imposed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife. Secondly, you want to know what the policy towards the hunting of wolves will be. The proposal designates the wolves to be of "experimental" status—meaning they are not to be hunted within the national forest. But what about those that wander outside of the forest boundaries? And since "experimental" status does permit the destruction of wolves that are "bad" twice ("bad" meaning that they've killed livestock or human pets), who will be allowed to shoot such animals? You want to secure this privilege for local hunters, and turn away from the precedent set in Minnesota, where officials from the government conduct the shoots. Lastly, you want to get a sense of how the wolf population will be controlled in the long-term. It is known that the reintroduction of 14 wolves in Washington in 1980 resulted in 200 descendants of the original packs. Your group is committed to promoting the overall health of the forest's ecosystem—healthy animal populations make for better game, but you want to make sure hunters are the first option if and when the wolf numbers grow too large to support themselves. Hunting should be a part of the ecological balance!

You would support the reintroduction program under the following circumstances:

- You will accept no greater than a 15% reduction in the number of deer hunting licenses as a result of the reintroduction. You are not sure why the Fish and Wildlife Service is calling for a 25% reduction in licenses, but you think that it is way too high.
- Hunters, chosen through a special lottery, should have the opportunity harvest wolves identified by the Fish and Wildlife Service as "bad" and maintain ownership of the carcass for trophy purposes. You would also like to harvest any wolf that strays beyond the forest boundary during a season to be determined by the State Game Commission, not the Fish and Wildlife Service.
- You want the total wolf population to be capped at 80 animals. When the wolf population exceeds this number, then you want a limited hunting season established to cull the population.

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Pat Sellers, State Tourism Commission official

Surveys have shown that 78% of visitors to Yellowstone National Park have favored the reintroduction of wolves there. This seems to bode well for the future of tourism in Yellowstone—a trend you want to replicate in the Pisgah region. Currently, outdoor activities, including skiing at the several resorts in and around the forest, hunting, fishing, and camping account for an enormous percentage of the tourist dollars brought into the area. As a state tourism official you view the wolves as an attraction to east coast travelers who haven't traveled west to Yellowstone, western Montana, or Washington to see wild wolves. Not only will wolves attract tourists who might have traveled elsewhere, they will bring people to the region who have vacationed here before—this is a brand new attraction! You envision the development of a wolf education center, where tourists can learn about the life cycle and patterns of this symbolically powerful creature. There are a lot of myths surrounding wolf behavior that an education center could address. For example, a University of Minnesota study found that wild wolves rarely approach heavily populated areas, and despite popular fear, they are typically disinterested in rummaging through human trash (A nuisance more common among raccoons and coyotes).

Wolves have captured humankind's imagination for centuries, now they can help capture needed dollars by diversifying and expanding the tourist industry of the region. Hotels, tour services, and restaurants will all reap the benefits of the reintroduction. And that is on top of the ecological benefits wolves will bring! Reducing the near-pest levels of deer populations will enhance the both the health and beauty of the forest's vegetation. You vigorously believe that the reintroduction is in the area's best interests, outweighing any potential expansion of human hunting access both economically and environmentally. You support the Fish and Wildlife Service proposal with the following provisions:

- Reintroduce 50 animals this year, and allow the population to expand upwards of 200 animals.
- Minimize the use of radio collars (tourists want to see wild wolves).
- Allow no hunting of wolves, and removal of any animals must be done discreetly and only by Fish and Wildlife personnel.

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Sam Levitt, Homeowners Interest Project regional leader

Your group protects the interests of homeowning residents in the Pisgah region. You've weighed in on other environmental safety issues such as water pollution and pesticide use near suburban populations, and you consider this wolf reintroduction business to be questionable. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife has not convinced you that the safety of homeowners is secured by this proposal. First of all, pets that are left outdoors are in great peril. Secondly, who's to say that these wolves won't turn on humans? Wolves are wild and dangerous animals, and these government scientists may have altered their natural instincts by having raised them in captivity (typically for several generations). So we could have wild animals running around that are familiar enough with humans to approach them—making this a dangerous proposal indeed! We already saw in the eastern part of the state that wolves have attacked cats, geese, and dogs, so what's to say a child is not far behind?

You believe that the safety failures of the proposal stem from two facts: the large number of wolves will cause intense competition over hunting grounds, eventually pushing the wolves towards residential areas, and secondly, the difficulty of limiting the migration of the predators without extensive monitoring. You've heard that the "experimental" status will allow hunters to kill wolves outside of the forest, but what about the property and lives of homeowners within the forest? Can they protect themselves if threatened? These questions have to be answered satisfactorily before you'll support any reintroduction efforts.

Specifically, you want the program to contain the following provisions:

- All wolves wear radio collars and their whereabouts closely and carefully monitored.
- Introduce only 30 wolves and cap the total long-term population to 50 animals.
- Allow taking (killing) of "bad" animals within the forest after the first reported incident.

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Leslie Billups, neutral brought in from Mississippi State University to preside over negotiations

You received a call late last week from someone at the Fish and Wildlife Service who needed a neutral to help guide the negotiations over a proposal to reintroduce wolves in western North Carolina. There are six stakeholding parties that will take part in the negotiations. You've been informed that there are disagreements over the projected environmental impacts the wolves could have. You also know that some of the stakeholders don't agree with the timeline that the proposal calls for.

You were contacted to assist in this case because someone in the Fish and Wildlife Service is aware of your role in trying to develop a research center at MSU focused on the resolution of environmental conflicts. Successfully directing these negotiations would spread your own reputation as a neutral, and enhance the public perception of your budding research center.

You have a no nonsense style as a neutral. "Spare me the drama" could be your motto. You like to keep discussions on-track and timely, and you won't tolerate grandstanding. You pride yourself in your even-handedness and appearance as a neutral. Your primary interest today is conducting the negotiations in a professional and expedient manner. That way, you and your research center win too.