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FEATURE STORIES

Faith

**A Moose Hunt
Worth the Wait**

Birthday Black Bear



Guide Outfitters
Association of British Columbia
Wildlife Stewardship is our Priority™

A full-page photograph of Shane Mahoney, a man with a long white beard and a black cowboy hat, standing on a rocky mountain peak. He is wearing a dark jacket and light-colored pants. The background shows a vast, hazy landscape with mountains and a body of water under a blue sky. The photo has a torn-edge effect.

ABOUT SHANE

Shane Mahoney is considered one of the leading international authorities on wildlife conservation. A rare combination of historian, scientist and philosopher he brings a unique perspective to wildlife issues that has motivated and inspired audiences around the world. Named one of the 10 Most Influential Canadian Conservationists by Outdoor Canada Magazine and nominated for Person of the Year by Outdoor Life Magazine, he has received numerous awards including the Public Service Award of Excellence from the government of Newfoundland and Labrador and International Conservationist of the Year by Safari Club International. Born and raised in Newfoundland he brings to his writings and lectures a profound commitment to rural societies and the sustainable use of natural resources, including wildlife and fish.

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The D

Wolves have figured prominently in the lives and imaginations of men seemingly forever. Feared for their capacity as predators, loathed for their depredation on our domestic stock, and admired for their complex social behaviour and extraordinary beauty, wolves were destined to become legendary, or so it would seem. Their howls, sent skyward in the winter darkness or rolling over the color-drenched landscapes of autumn, have never failed to inspire the soulful musings of our own species. They were to eventually walk the earth with us, transformed from a distant relationship of competition to one of



CONSERVATION MATTERS™

with Shane Mahoney

ancing of Wolves and Men

companionship and playfulness. Their derived cousin, the domestic dog, has been of extraordinary significance to human societies for thousands of years. Yet despite the long road and many changes that have occurred since we first domesticated him, the wolf retains the capacity to draw from modern human societies an intense debate

as to his value, his proper place in today's world, and yes, even his right to exist. Few animal centered debates have raged so furiously and for so long. In this sense our relationship with *canis lupus* represents the very essence of our complicated tension with those others who demand a share of earth's limited space and resources.

We may see in their presence a more limited possibility for ourselves, but in their absence a sense of loss and disconnectedness that haunts our own desire for a world of beauty and completeness.

In both the Great Lakes region and in the Northern Rocky Mountains

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wolves, specifically the Gray Wolf, have been increasing in numbers and expanding their range. Arising from their beleaguered status that saw them placed on the United States Endangered Species List in 1967, the snow dog is once more roaming over great territories ripe with herds of elk, mule deer and fat cattle. Howling with his newfound opportunity, his kind now muscularly probe an expanding array of habitats and ranges, growing ever stronger and advancing with certainty towards final legal delisting. Emerging from the protective carapace of the *Endangered Species Act* the wolf now enters the domain of state policy and wolf management plans. Regardless of how strongly some individuals may feel, the wolf will again be hunted and his death, like his life, will stir the deep longings and fear that humans have always held towards him.

But the question that looms before hunters is not so much whether wolves should be managed for both ecological and social carrying capacity—for that will surely happen to some extent—but what position should we take as conservationists? To kill a wolf is a challenge, and managers will certainly find “managing” them an elusive prospect if fair chase recreational hunting is their only option. We ought to remember that this is not something we are well versed in. It is hard to find examples of where recreational hunting has had much effect on wolf numbers, although with extraordinary efforts such as aerial shooting their numbers can be more effectively decreased. Where roads are few and timber plenty the recreational hunter will find the task especially difficult and managers may be forced to consider alternative means if the objective is large scale wolf reductions on a continuous basis. This is not to argue against making our best attempts to use hunters under fair chase restrictions to manage healthy



wolf populations. Quite the contrary, we should make every effort to do so. However, we must also be prepared for the difficult decisions that will ensue if this fails. Fair chase hunting, in itself, will probably not be sufficient to the task. Will we, as hunters, be prepared then to recommend taking wolves by any and all means to keep their numbers within limits we consider reasonable? And how will we decide what is reasonable? Will it be when our hunting opportunity is diminished just a little or only when it has been drastically curtailed? And what effect will these positions have on how we are perceived by the mainstream public? It might be easy to say we don't care about that, but the reality is we had better care a great deal. We need public support and where we stand on wolves can make a big difference in how much we get and how much we maintain.

However, simply accepting wolves as part of the landscapes we hike, ranch and hunt may prove far more difficult than finding ways to manage their numbers. Many people fear wolves

and many people loathe predators whenever they intrude on human space. It is not about how many there are or how much damage they do, rather it is simply that they do not want dangerous animals anywhere near them. Often other arguments are put forward to justify removing predators, but often, deep down, it really is our species-old fear of the great beasts that pursued and ate us. Wolves have done this in the past and probably will in the future. Like snakes and spiders, carnivores often elicit deep and negative evolutionary reactions, not logical considerations of ecology or biophilia (love of nature).

So the very much larger question for us as hunters is this: how will we like dancing with wolves, now that they are truly in our midst, regardless of whether they are “managed” or not? No longer a mythical prospect, the wolf is here; a real life predator with extraordinary capacity to alter ungulate populations, and significantly affect our opportunities to hunt the experiences and animals we desire.

Furthermore, the snow dog will bring many social partners to the ball, partners who will use his iconic status to argue against all hunting, and suggest that it is man who must move aside. Infuriating, naive and distracting, this viewpoint we must recognize is here to stay and a portion of society will agree with it. Our challenge as hunters is to make sure that we do not, by our reactions, increase the percentage of the public who will agree with this notion of wolves first and humanity second.

Like all dances, the first and most important technique to be mastered here is balance. The wolves are here to stay, and most hunters will agree that having them with us is important. Maintaining the big carnivores has been one of the great achievements of North America's hunter-led conservation movement. We must not jeopardize this, nor ever be seen to want to do so. What we really want is to maintain some equilibrium between wolf numbers and the prey that both wolves and men seek. Hunters must be the champion of the wolf, the champion of the elk, and the champion of sustainable use for them all. We need to walk carefully in this debate, and keep our balance. The dancing with wolves is here to stay.

The Guide Outfitters Association of British Columbia (GOABC) wants to start a fundamental shift among hunters from caring about hunting to caring about all wildlife. Ranchers care about cattle and anglers care about fish, but hunters seem to only care about their sport. Hunters must be committed to the responsible use of wildlife resources and passionate about preserving a diversity of wildlife species. The GOABC is a strong supporter of the North American Wildlife Conservation Model, which stipulates that law and science should be used to manage wildlife. This model is the result of hunters and anglers who were dedicated conservationists. As anti-hunting pressure becomes louder, it becomes increasingly important to continue and enhance the legacy of the hunter conservationist.

