

The Eradication of the Wolf

A History of Unfounded Hatred that nearly completely exterminating the species from North America.



Unknown date: *On a Saturday afternoon in Texas...three men on horseback rode down a female red wolf and threw a lasso over her neck. When she gripped the rope with her teeth to keep the noose from closing, they dragged her around the prairie until they'd broken her teeth out. Then while two of them stretched the animal between their horses with ropes, the third man beat her to death with a pair of fence pliers. The wolf was taken around to a few bars in a pickup and finally thrown in a roadside ditch.*

The wolf was at one time, the most widely distributed large land mammal in the world. Within North America, gray wolves formerly ranged from coast to coast throughout Canada down through Mexico. The gray wolf inhabited the North American continent long before any humans did -- for about 40 million years. Before Europeans settled the US, 250,000 wolves roamed the country.

The first documented wolf bounty was reportedly paid sometime between A.D. 46-120, when Greek officials awarded five silver drachmas to a hunter for bringing in a dead male wolf. Years later, in France, the Statutes of Charlemagne (A.D. 742-814) recorded that "two hunters were to be employed in each French community to destroy wolves." During the Middle Ages, Europeans bred large wolf-hounds and mastiffs for the specific purpose of killing wolves and keeping wolves away from farms.

Nov. 9, 1630, only 10 years after the Mayflower landed, the Massachusetts Bay Colony was the first in North America to begin offering a bounty on every wolf killed. Wolves were effectively eliminated from the eastern United States by the end of the eighteenth century.

In the 19th century, the demand for pelts sent hundreds of hunters out to kill every wolf that they could. At the same time, ranchers moved into the western plains to take advantage of cheap and abundant grazing land. Livestock took over and the wolves' natural prey base retreated. Wolves began depredating on livestock and this led to a massive campaign to exterminate wolves completely in the west. Professional "wolfers" working for the livestock industry laid out strychnine-poisoned meat lines up to 150 miles long. Wolves were shot, poisoned, trapped, clubbed, set on fire and inoculated with mange, a painful and often fatal skin disease caused by mites. Barry Holstun Lopez writes in *Of Wolves And Men*, "[people] even poisoned themselves, and burned down their own property torching the woods to get rid of wolf havens."

Between **1870 and 1877**, bounty hunters employed by the United States government killed approximately 55,000 wolves each year, for a total of 385,000 wolf deaths in only seven years.

In the state of Montana alone, between 1883 and 1918, 80,730 wolves were exterminated and \$342,764 in bounties were rewarded.



Wolf caught in a leghold trap near Decker, Wyoming, in 1921

In 1907, with westward expansion in full-swing, "the United States Biological Survey declared the extermination of the wolf as the paramount objective of the government," and President Theodore Roosevelt labeled wolves "*the beast[s] of waste and destruction.*"

The Club Ranch in **Colorado offered a \$50 bounty per wolf in 1909**, while the Piceance Creek Stock Growers' Association in north-central Colorado **offered \$150 per wolf in 1912.** Many of the bounties stood for years. In Ontario, Canada, the wolf bounty wasn't repealed until 1972.

By 1914, the western states were paying over \$1 million dollars per year in predator bounties.



Red Wolf trapped in 1929 near Gillham, Arkansas. It was collared with a leather belt, tied to a wooden stake, and had its jaws wired shut. Such wolves frequently died of dehydration or were dismembered by hunters' dogs.

Government hunters destroyed the last known wolf in the Yellowstone area in the 1940s.

In 1948, the Alberta government unleashed "an astonishing arsenal of poison" on the wolves in that province. There is no record of the number of wolves that were killed by the 106,100 cyanide cartridges, 628,000 strychnine pellets, and 800 sodium fluoroacetate poison bait stations, but among the "incidental killings" were 246,800 coyotes.

By the 1970s, only a few hundred wolves remained in the lower 48 states (Northeast Minnesota and Isle Royale in Michigan), occupying less than three percent of their former range.

Wolves were listed as endangered on the ESA in 1974, one of the first animals to be listed. However some states are still living in eradication days. Among others, Minnesota developing a state management plan that includes a \$150 reward for killing a wolf, Idaho's legislature recently voting to remove wolves from the state "by any means necessary", and Colorado still listing a wolf bounty on the state books.

The Move Westward: A partial timeline of the enactment of wolf bounties

1630	Massachusetts Bay Colony
1632	Virginia Bay Colony
1695	South Carolina
1697	New Jersey
1793	Upper Canada (Ontario & Quebec)
1839	Newfoundland
1840	Iowa
1843	Oregon Territory
1861	Quebec
1871	Washington
1878	Manitoba
1884	Montana
1893	Arizona & New Mexico Territory
1899	Alberta & Saskatchewan
1900	British Columbia
1915	Alaska



In their frenzy to kill any and all wolves, trappers frequently set two traps close together in order to completely disable the defenseless animal and reduce its chances of escape.

**Become an active voice for the wolf and
join the fight in securing their future survival in North America!**

Alliance for the Wild Rockies
Renee Van Camp, Wolf Program Director
PO Box 8731
Missoula, MT 59807

<http://www.wildrockiesalliance.org/issues/wolves/index.html>

406-721-5420

renee@wildrockiesalliance.org