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The Debate over El Lobo: Can Historians Make a Difference?

MARSHA L. WEISIGER

In February 2003, historians, wolf-experts, ranchers, environmental activists, and some two hundred members of the general public gathered in Las Cruces, New Mexico, to discuss the past, present, and future of the Mexican gray wolf. “Leopold Forum: El Lobo” explored the history of wolf extirpation in the early twentieth century and the recent contested effort to reintroduce wolves into the Southwest, under the Endangered Species Act. The program included keynote addresses by a historian, a wolf biologist, and a ranching spokesperson; a series of panel presentations; a dinner featuring an environmental activist as speaker; and a roundtable discussion. A private breakfast-discussion among the stakeholders, facilitated by a professional conflict negotiator, followed the conference. The article narrates the history of wolf extirpation and reintroduction, and describes the logistics of organizing the conference and its outcome.

IN FEBRUARY 2003, historians, wolf experts, ranchers, environmental activists, and some two hundred members of the general public gathered in Las Cruces, New Mexico, to discuss the history and future of the Mexican gray wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*).¹ Titled *Leopold Forum: El Lobo*, the symposium

MARSHA WEISIGER is an assistant professor of history at New Mexico State University, where she teaches environmental history, U.S. western history, and public history. Vanessa Stewart, then a graduate student in public history, coordinated the myriad logistics that made the forum described in this article run smoothly. Financial support came from the Environmental Leadership Program, the New Mexico Endowment for the Humanities, the Thaw Charitable Trust, the McCune Charitable Foundation, the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, and the NMSU Southwest and Border Cultures Institute.

1. There is controversy among biologists about whether the Mexican wolf is distinctive from the other gray wolves found in Canada and reintroduced into the northwestern United States. Some scientists hold that *Canis lupus baileyi* is the most genetically distinct subspecies of the

grew out of a belief that an understanding of environmental history can help inform public policy. Because relatively few people read the books that we environmental historians write, I had decided to explore other ways of connecting discussions about environmental policy with the lessons the past offers us.

Those lessons are often sobering. Sadly, history reveals that in the process of setting aside land for national parks, forests, and wilderness areas, conservationists evicted those—typically Native Americans, Hispanos, often the poorest among us—who made their homes on those lands and depended on them for hunting, fishing, farming, and grazing. On the other hand, history tells us that foresters have, for example, knowingly permitted lumber companies to cut timber at unsustainable rates in an effort to protect blue-collar jobs and sawmill communities. It also suggests that the jobs vs. environment debate—so popular among opponents of environmental regulation—is based on a false dichotomy. Environmental issues are rarely, if ever, zero sum games, even though the historical players themselves often experience them that way. The interactions between humans and the ecological webs we inhabit involve choices that reflect not only our environmental knowledge (and often ignorance), technological developments, and financial constraints, but also our economic, social, aesthetic, political, cultural, and moral values.²

Environmental historians tell often ironic and complicated stories about the unintended ecological and social consequences of environmental decisions, stories I hoped would encourage a more constructive dialogue about the controversial federal program to reintroduce wolves into the forested lands of eastern Arizona and western New Mexico, initiated in 1998. In months spent discussing wolf reintroduction with scientists, policymakers, and especially environmentalists and ranchers, it struck me that many of those shaping the public discourse viewed the world in dualistic terms. It was a depressingly familiar, mutually exclusive equation that pitted wild nature against human enterprise. I hoped that by facilitating a public conversation among stakeholders from various perspectives and placing environmental history at

North American gray wolf; others believe that the division of gray wolves into “races” is a product of late-nineteenth-century racial theories. For the latter viewpoint, see David E. Brown, ed., *The Wolf in the Southwest: The Making of an Endangered Species* (1982; reprint, with new foreword, preface, and epilogue, Silver City, N.M.: High-Lonesome Books, 2002), epilogue; but also consult Jaime García-Moreno, et al., “Relationships and Genetic Purity of the Endangered Mexican Wolf Based on Analysis of Microsatellite Loci,” *Conservation Biology* 10 (April 1996): 384, and the caveat on 386, and Philip W. Hendrick, et al., “Genetic Evaluation of the Three Captive Mexican Wolf Lineages,” *Zoo Biology* 16 (1997): 57–59, 65.

2. See, for example, Louis S. Warren, *The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); William deBuys, *Enchantment and Exploitation: The Life and Hard Times of a New Mexico Mountain Range* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985); Nancy Langston, *Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995); Susan R. Schrepfer, *The Fight to Save the Redwoods: A History of Environmental Reform, 1917–1978* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).

its core, all sides would come to view the issue as more complicated than they had yet acknowledged. History tells us that humans are deeply entangled within the ecological web we call the “natural world.” We ignore that truth at our peril. The trick is in learning to develop a sustainable relationship with the world in which we live, one that comprehends humans and nonhuman nature as interdependent members of the same community.³

In thinking about the reintroduction program, I realized that those of us who cared about wolves could not ignore the likelihood that their southwestern territories would overlap with ranch lands for the foreseeable future. Southwestern ranchers graze their cattle on the public domain, and their deeded lands lie adjacent to and even within the national forests where reintroduced wolves now roam. Thus it seemed to me that we must find a way for wolves and ranchers to inhabit the same landscape, however difficult that proposition might be. This insight, admittedly, is not particularly original. The team of biologists who evaluated the reintroduction program’s initial progress observed that success would require “a systematic and rigorous approach to wolf recovery that integrates the social and economic aspirations of humans with the ecological necessities of wolves.”⁴ This quest for coexistence, most certainly, will not be easy. Most of the area’s ranchers have attempted to thwart the program at every turn with lawsuits and lobbying. For their part, environmentalists have often scorned cattle growers, dismissing them as a dying breed, even though ranchers exert a powerful political force in New Mexico, remain symbolically and often economically important to rural counties, and help maintain open space on the peripheries of national forests.⁵

I had no illusions that a history-centered conference would resolve this impasse, nor that it would solve the problems plaguing wolf reintroduction. I simply hoped that it would add complexity and nuance to the ongoing public conversation regarding the history of wolf extirpation, the science undergirding reintroduction, and the economic impacts of the program on local ranchers. There were other goals, too. I wanted environmental activists to recognize that they must pay attention to ranchers’ often-legitimate concerns or risk the demise of the wolf reintroduction program. At the same time, I hoped ranchers might come to understand that wolves play an important—albeit

3. William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), 83–90.

4. Paul C. Paquet, *Mexican Wolf Recovery: Three-Year Program Review and Assessment*, prepared by the Conservation Breeding Specialist Group for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Apple Valley, Minn.: CBSG, 2001), 67.

5. Many environmentalists argue that ranchers erode ecosystems by allowing cattle to overgraze and degrade riparian areas, negating their contribution to the maintenance of open space. The encroachment of housing developments on forests and wilderness areas in Arizona, Colorado, and other states, however, suggests that the detrimental effects of ranching must be evaluated in relation to likely economic alternatives. For two sides of the debate on an admittedly complex issue, consult Ed Marston, “Cow-Free Crowd Ignores Science, Sprawl,” and John Horing, “Ranching Advocates Lack a Rural Vision,” both in *High Country News*, 9 Dec. 2002; conversations with wildlife ecologist John Perrine have informed my thinking on this issue.

poorly understood—role in forest ecosystems and offer the potential for creating healthier forests and better habitat for deer, elk, and other animals. Some ecologists, for example, theorize that the effects of predation by wolves and other large carnivores on deer and elk cascade downward through the ecosystem, increasing the diversity of plant and animal communities in complex ways.⁶ I also wanted to show that science does not offer unambiguous answers to environmental questions. We cannot simply “follow the science,” because scientists themselves disagree with one another. Instead, we must make choices that are informed not only by science but also by our values. I hoped that history would illuminate these and other pertinent arguments.

I named the forum in honor of the conservationist Aldo Leopold, who began his illustrious career in the wilds of New Mexico and Arizona at the beginning of the twentieth century. The conference celebrated the seventieth anniversary of a speech he delivered on the campus of what is now New Mexico State University, in May 1933, an address that became a foundational pillar for his most famous philosophical treatise, “The Land Ethic.”⁷ In that essay, Leopold observed that we must recognize the interdependence of all life on earth and develop an ethical relationship with the land. “A thing is right,” he concluded, “when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”⁸

There were other reasons, too, for naming the forum after Leopold. He was one of the first scientists to recognize the importance of history to our understanding of environmental change. He knew well that history leaves its marks on the land, but more than that, he believed that we should look upon history not simply as a chronicle of human enterprise but as a complex tale of “biotic interaction between people and land,” one in which each shaped the other. I can think of no better definition of environmental history.⁹ Importantly, too, he did not view human enterprise as merely a disruptive force but recognized that people are full-fledged members of the biotic community, albeit members with a special responsibility for community stewardship.

6. Barbara L. Dugelby, et al., “Rewilding the Sky Islands Region of the Southwest,” in David S. Maehr, Reed F. Noss, and Jeffery L. Larkin, eds., *Large Mammal Restoration: Ecological and Sociological Challenges in the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2001), 70–71; Brian Miller, et al., “The Importance of Large Carnivores to Healthy Ecosystems,” *Endangered Species Update* 18 (Sept.-Oct. 2001): 202–11. Also consult L. David Mech, *The Wolf: The Ecology and Behavior of an Endangered Species* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1970), Chap. 9, and Rolf O. Peterson, “Wolves as Top Carnivores: New Faces in New Places,” in Virginia A. Sharpe, Bryan G. Norton, and Strachan Donnelley, eds., *Wolves and Human Communities: Biology, Politics, and Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2001), 151–60.

7. Curt Meine, *Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 302–6; *idem*, “Building ‘The Land Ethic,’” in J. Baird Callicott, ed., *Companion to “A Sand County Almanac”: Interpretive and Critical Essays* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 173–78; Susan L. Flader, *Thinking Like a Mountain: Aldo Leopold and the Evolution of an Ecological Attitude Toward Deer, Wolves, and Forests* (1974; Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994, with an added preface), 25–26, 34.

8. Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (1949; reprint. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, with an introduction by Robert Finch), 224–25.

9. Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*, 205.

There was one more, karmic reason for naming a forum on the reintroduction of the Mexican wolf after Aldo Leopold: he had played an important part in their extirpation. Significantly, too, the wolves had proved instrumental to the development of a land ethic that continues to instruct much of the movement to preserve wild nature.

In his essay, “Thinking Like a Mountain,” Leopold told a parable that environmentalists frequently invoke to buttress the frameworks of their own environmental ethics. It is a tale of tragic insight and conversion that has become holy writ for an important segment of the environmental movement, especially for the movement to reintroduce Mexican wolves into southwestern forests. The year was 1909, and Leopold was working for the U.S. Forest Service, leading a timber reconnaissance crew in the Blue Range of Arizona’s Apache National Forest.¹⁰ He and a crew member were eating lunch on a rimrock when they saw what they thought was a doe fording the river below them. Soon they realized that the animal was an adult wolf, followed by a frolicking pack of grown pups. The two men grabbed their rifles and, as Leopold later recalled, “in a second we were pumping lead into the pack, but with more excitement than accuracy.” They managed to cripple one pup and mortally wound the mother. Then, as Leopold narrated the story:

We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes—something known only to her and to the mountain. I was young then, and full of trigger-itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters’ paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view.¹¹

In watching the fire die in the wolf’s eyes, Leopold later wrote, he realized that he had until then failed to grasp the interdependency between wolves, deer, and mountains. The flickering light also had illuminated a profound moral: all of the world’s glorious creatures have a purpose on this earth, whether we understand it or not. It may even be that the wildness that wolves embody is valuable for its own sake. “Perhaps,” Leopold concluded, “this is the hidden meaning in the howl of the wolf, long known among mountains, but seldom perceived among men.”¹²

Leopold told this story as an epiphany, one that transformed his view toward killing wolves and other predators. And yet Leopold did not immediately perceive the ecological value of large carnivores as he watched the green fire die. He did not cease hunting wolves in 1909. Instead, six years later, in

10. John Tallmadge, “Anatomy of a Classic,” in *Companion to “A Sand County Almanac,”* 124–27; Meine, *Aldo Leopold*, 93. Evidence for the year this incident took place is circumstantial; for Meine’s discussion of the evidence, see p. 543, n. 10.

11. Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*, 130.

12. *Ibid.*, 133. I draw the moral using words from an editorial Leopold wrote for the *Pine Cone*, the newsletter of the National Protective Game Association, in July 1919.

1915, he organized the New Mexico Game Protective Association, an organization that called for the complete eradication of predators and worked with the U.S. Bureau of Biological Survey, the Forest Service, and the New Mexico Game Department to extirpate wolves.¹³ Their efforts were a whopping success. Still, Leopold was not satisfied. “It is going to take patience and money,” he argued, “to catch the last wolf or lion in New Mexico. But the last one must be caught before the job can be called fully successful.”¹⁴

Leopold told his story as an epiphany, but that “epiphany” evolved over a period of years from the mid-1920s through the early 1940s, when he finally recorded his memories of the dying wolf and the last embers of the fierce green fire.¹⁵ In the intervening years, he had witnessed the effects of wolf eradication. “I have watched,” he wrote,

the face of many a newly wolfless mountain, and seen the south-facing slopes wrinkle with a maze of new deer trails. . . . I have seen every edible tree defoliated. . . . In the end the starved bones of the hoped-for deer herd, dead of its own too-much, bleach with the bones of the dead sage, or molder under the high-lined junipers.

I now suspect that just as a deer herd lives in mortal fear of its wolves, so does a mountain live in mortal fear of its deer.¹⁶

Only after long observation of the fate of deer and forests in the absence of large predators had Leopold changed his mind. Only after travels to Germany, where he saw intensively managed, sterile forests with few predators, and northern Mexico, where natural processes, including large carnivores, produced healthy landscapes, had Leopold developed an ecological understanding of the role of wolves in maintaining forest ecosystems.¹⁷

Leopold came to value wolves because the Biological Survey had largely extirpated the Mexican wolf from the Southwest, in response to demands from ranchers and, later, sport-hunters.¹⁸ The numbers of sheep and cattle grazing

13. Meine, *Aldo Leopold*, 151–56. Leopold later recorded that he “sensed only a vague uneasiness about the ethics” of his role in the extirpation of predators. See his unpublished foreword to *Sand County Almanac* (then titled “Great Possessions”), written in 1947, in *Companion to “A Sand County Almanac,”* 284.

14. Quoted in Flader, *Thinking Like a Mountain*, 93, and Meine, *Aldo Leopold*, 181.

15. Flader, *Thinking Like a Mountain*, 1–4, 93–94. The first known record of this story appears in Leopold’s “Thinking Like a Mountain” essay; however, it should be noted that his diaries for the Sept.–Nov. 1909 and Sept. 1911–Oct. 1912 periods are missing.

16. Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*, 130–32.

17. Thomas Dunlap, *Saving America’s Wildlife* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 89–92; Meine, *Aldo Leopold*, 354–55, 367–68. Leopold’s understanding of the dynamics between predators, deer, and vegetation were based, in part, on an erroneous analysis of the fate of deer in the absence of predators on Arizona’s Kaibab Plateau during the 1920s. For a debunking of the still widely accepted story of the Kaibab deer, see Graeme Caughley, “Eruption of Ungulate Populations, with Emphasis on Himalayan Thar in New Zealand,” *Ecology* 51 (Winter 1970): 54–56; Christian C. Young’s *In the Absence of Predators: Conservation and Controversy on the Kaibab Plateau* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002) offers a fascinating analysis of the true story of the Kaibab deer.

18. Thomas Dunlap, in *Saving America’s Wildlife*, provides an excellent survey of the evolving attitudes toward predators in the United States, the program to exterminate wolves and other

the area had boomed in the 1880s, with the arrival of the Southern Pacific Railroad, the availability of surplus capital from British investors, and the abundance of free grasslands. By 1890, as the geographer Conrad Bahre has observed, “the entire region must have looked like one huge cattle ranch.” Those cattle had begun dying in droves during an extended drought from 1891 through 1893, and their carcasses may have stimulated an increase in the wolf population.¹⁹ At the same time, drought and overgrazing had brought a decrease in the numbers of deer and other prey. More wolves and fewer deer had meant more livestock depredations, although the amount of actual damage remains unclear. Most ranchers had assumed that wolves were the culprits when they lost livestock, but by 1923, as the numbers of wolves plunged, cattlemen came to realize that coyotes had been largely to blame.²⁰ Even then, conservationists remained convinced that the extirpation of wolves was crucial to the conservation of deer and other game animals, and no one yet lamented the wolf’s demise.²¹

The first decades of the twentieth century had witnessed an all-out war against wolves in the Southwest. Wolf predation had posed the biggest problem in forests, where the lobos made their dens and arid-lands ranchers seasonally pastured their stock.²² Sheep and cattle ranchers had convinced the Forest Service to battle wolves in the forest reserves, especially after the agency started charging grazing fees in 1907.²³ That year, the Forest Service killed 359 lobos in Arizona and New Mexico, and local stockmen and their bounty hunters killed countless more. The Biological Survey assumed re-

“varmints,” and the beginnings of the recent movement to protect them. Also consult Lisa Mighetto, *Wild Animals and American Environmental Ethics* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991), chaps. 5 and 6, and Barry Holstun Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), parts 3 and 4.

19. Nathan F. Sayre, *Species of Capital: Ranching, Endangered Species, and Urbanization in the Southwest* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002), 30–32, 40–42; Conrad Joseph Bahre, *A Legacy of Change: Historic Human Impact on Vegetation in the Arizona Borderlands* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991), 116.

20. Brown, *The Wolf in the Southwest*, 42; idem, “Wolves, Lions, Tigers, and Bears: Arizona Territory’s Big Predators,” in “Man and Wildlife in Arizona II: The Territorial Years,” draft ms. courtesy of the author; telephone conversation with Marsha L. Weisiger, 6 Oct. 2003. Depredation estimates generally lumped together losses from wolves, bears, mountain lions, and the large numbers of coyotes roaming the region. Moreover, those who estimated losses—including ranchers and federal agencies—had motives for inflating those figures. See, for example, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Biological Survey, *Report of the Chief* (hereafter USBBS *Report*) (Washington, D.C., 1918), 3; *ibid.*, 1923, p. 5.

21. J. Stokley Ligon, *Wild Life of New Mexico: Its Conservation and Management* (Santa Fe: New Mexico State Game Commission, 1927), 14–15.

22. Vernon Bailey, “Wolves in Relation to Stock, Game, and the National Forest Reserves,” U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service Bulletin 72 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1907), 8, 12–13.

23. This battle actually began in 1906, amid ranchers’ charges that game protection in the reserves boosted wolves’ numbers. Gifford Pinchot, *Report of the Forester for 1906* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1907); Vernon Bailey, “Destruction of Wolves and Coyotes: Results Obtained During 1907,” U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Biological Survey Circular No. 63, April 1908; Brown, *Wolf in the Southwest*, 47; Thomas Dunlap, “Values for Varmints: Predator Control and Environmental Ideas, 1920–1939,” *Pacific Historical Review* 53 (1984): 143.

sponsibility for predator control in 1914, and J. Stokley Ligon, the head of the survey's Arizona-New Mexico district, hired a dozen trappers for the Predatory Animal and Rodent Control branch (PARC). This effort peaked in 1920, when PARC trappers killed 110 wolves. In all, PARC eliminated more than 500 wolves in Arizona and New Mexico between 1920 and 1925, and ranchers poisoned untold numbers with strychnine sulfate, after which the lobo population plummeted.²⁴ A few packs remained, and wolves continued to drift up from the wilds of northern Mexico. That haven, too, began to close after the 1930s, when Mexican President Lazaro Cárdenas broke up the large ranchos of Chihuahua and Sonora, redistributed them to peasants, and renewed efforts to eradicate lobos south of the international boundary.²⁵ By the mid-1950s, with the aid of a highly lethal poison known as Compound 1080 (Sodium Fluoroacetate), Mexican gray wolves stood on the brink of extinction.²⁶

The last lobo in the southwestern United States died in 1976. That animal likely wandered up from Mexico into Aravaipa Canyon, an extraordinary wilderness area in Arizona that the private conservation group Defenders of Wildlife had recently acquired.²⁷ Surely, if there was any moment in the twentieth century in which a wild wolf might have found protection, this was it. A private trapper killed this last lone wolf and, so the story goes, collected a \$500 bounty from local stockmen.²⁸

That same year, the federal government listed the Mexican wolf as an endangered species protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The act, as amended in 1982, requires the Secretary of the Interior to develop and implement recovery plans for endangered species and subspecies and, when feasible, to reintroduce those that have been extirpated.²⁹ Because no wild wolves remained in the Southwest, in 1977 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which administers the ESA, hired Roy McBride, a veteran trapper. He brought back from the states of Durango and Chihuahua, in northern Mexico, six lobos, including one pregnant female. Three of these animals (plus

24. Brown, *Wolf in the Southwest*, 48, 54–71; Bailey, "Destruction of Wolves," 6–7; Dunlap, "Values for Varmints," 144; Stanley P. Young and Edward A. Goldman, *The Wolves of North America*, Vol. 1 (1944; reprint. New York: Dover, 1964), 383; USBBS *Report*, 1922, p. 3; *ibid.*, 1924, p. 3; Ligon, *Wildlife in New Mexico*, 52. See *U.S. Statutes at Large*, 38 (1914): 434, for legislation authorizing the BBS to destroy wolves.

25. Brown, *Wolf in the Southwest*, 101–2. Cooperative agreements with Mexico to help control wolf migrations across the international boundary began in fiscal year 1922. See USBBS, *Report*, 1922, p. 3.

26. Brown, *Wolf in the Southwest*, 103, 108–14. Survivors of the anti-predator onslaught, probably migrating from Mexico, occasionally surfaced until the 1970s. In 1961, a rancher named Schilling made the last authenticated wolf-kill in Arizona, and in 1970, a wolf died from poisoning in New Mexico, and two others met their fate in Texas. PARC targeted coyotes with Compound 1080, but it proved equally lethal to wolves and other canids.

27. This property is now owned by the Nature Conservancy.

28. Brown, *Wolf in the Southwest*, 114–15.

29. *Federal Register* 41 (1976): 17740, microfiche; "Endangered Species Act," 16 *U.S. Code* §§ 1531–43 (1994); Mimi S. Wolok, "Experimenting with Experimental Populations." In Donald C. Baur and William Robert Irvin, eds., *Endangered Species Act: Law, Policy, and Perspectives* (Chicago: American Bar Association, 2002), 360.

the newborn pup), along with others from two lineages already held in zoos, became the breeding stock for the reintroduction program.³⁰ Ironically, those trapped wolves may have been the last to have been living in the wild. There have been no confirmed reports of wild wolves in either the southwestern U.S. or northern Mexico since McBride's expedition.

Although the idea of reintroducing lobos had widespread support in the urban Southwest, those who lived and worked near prime wolf habitat largely opposed the program. Indeed, ranchers' opposition helped stall wolf reintroduction in the Southwest for more than two decades. The government attempted to mitigate ranchers' objections, in particular, with several special provisions. Under a 1982 amendment to the ESA, the federal recovery plan classified the wolves as "nonessential experimental," which allows the agency a large measure of flexibility, including the ability to kill or relocate those animals who prey on livestock or establish territories beyond the official recovery area's imaginary boundary, and it allows ranchers to kill wolves in the act of attacking livestock.³¹ As part of this program, moreover, the private conservation organization Defenders of Wildlife offers compensation to ranchers who can prove that they have lost livestock to predation by wolves.

While ranchers continued to oppose the program, various local and national environmental organizations filed a series of lawsuits and conducted a grass-roots lobbying campaign to spur the Fish and Wildlife Service into action. Finally, in 1998 the agency released eleven Mexican wolves from their acclimatization pens into Leopold's old stomping grounds, the Blue Range of Arizona's Apache National Forest, from which they could disperse into New Mexico's Gila National Forest. Within twelve months, three wolves had been shot dead, another had been hit by a car, and the whereabouts of one was unknown.³² Since that first year, sixty-seven more captive-raised wolves have been released, another eleven have died from gunshot, and four more have been run over. Nine others are back in captivity, punished for gravitating toward livestock or humans, and the Fish and Wildlife Service has shot one wolf for persistently stalking one rancher's herd. All in all, twenty-four radio-collared wolves (including eight breeding pairs) now roam the Apache and Gila forests, an area covering about 7,000 square miles, and there are at least thirty, perhaps forty, more running wild, including those born in the wild, those re-

30. Hendrick, et al., "Genetic Evaluation," 48; García-Moreno, et al., "Relationships and Genetic Purity," 377–78.

31. U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service (hereafter FWS), *Reintroduction of the Mexican Wolf Within Its Historic Range in the Southwestern United States: Final Environmental Impact Statement* ([Albuquerque, N. M.], 1996), Sec. 2, p. 5; Wolok, "Experimenting," 359–77; Dale D. Goble, "Experimental Populations: Reintroducing the Missing Parts," in *Endangered Species Act*, 389.

32. FWS, *Reintroduction of the Mexican Wolf*, Sec. 1, p. 1; Sec. 3, p. 1; *idem*, Southwest Region, "Mexican Wolf Frequently Asked Questions," www.mexicanwolf.fws.gov/faq.cfm (7 May 2003), 1–2; *idem*, "Latest Note from the Field," 23 April 2003, <http://mexicanwolf.fws.gov/Notes/NotesDisplay.cfm>. For a history of the environmentalists' effort to restore the wolf to New Mexico between 1979 and 1990, consult James C. Burbank, *Vanishing Lobo: The Mexican Wolf and the Southwest* (Boulder: Johnson Books, 1990), chaps. 10 and 11.

leased as pups without radio collars, and those who have lost their collars and, therefore, cannot be tracked. Already, sixteen litters have been conceived and born in the wild, including two second-generation wild litters. Once natural reproduction in the wild is sufficient to sustain population growth—which the Fish and Wildlife Service currently defines as one hundred free-roaming animals—the government will judge the recovery effort successful.³³

Ranchers continue to oppose the reintroduction program. Many feel economically threatened by the wolves, even with Defenders of Wildlife's compensation program. In part, they believe that environmentalists are mostly using the ESA as a tool to push them off the public domain. Indeed, the Mexican wolf is only one of several endangered species protected on public lands within the recovery area, forcing ranchers to alter or restrict their livestock operations. Many also see the reintroduction program as a pernicious symbol of long-hated federal interference in the local economy.³⁴

At the same time, some of the environmentalists who demanded wolf reintroduction criticize the Fish and Wildlife Service's intensive management of the animals. The agency traps and relocates wolves found hanging around ranches or straying outside the boundaries of the official recovery area, and in a few instances wolves have been killed or maimed in the process. Since wolves are highly social animals who bond in packs and carry cognitive maps of their range, relocation disrupts pack structure and normal territorial behavior, and thus diminishes their chances for survival. Environmentalists also criticize the spatial limitations that the Fish and Wildlife Service has imposed on the reintroduction effort. In response to the New Mexico State Game Commission's opposition to wolf reintroduction, the agency divided the recovery area into primary and secondary zones. Field biologists release wolves only into the Arizona section and allow them to disperse into New Mexico; ironically, only those wolves with a history of "management problems" can be re-released directly into New Mexico's expansive Gila Forest, most of which is designated wilderness. As the wolf packs increase in the Apache National Forest, it becomes difficult for wolves to find unclaimed territory, resulting in conflict between packs.³⁵ It makes ecological sense to release—not just re-

33. Paquet, *Mexican Wolf Recovery*, 1, 68; FWS, Southwest Region, "Mexican Wolf Frequently Asked Questions," 1; idem, "Latest Note from the Field," 8 September 2003, <http://mexicanwolf.fws.gov/Notes/>; idem, 23 April 2003; *Arizona Republic*, 31 May 2003; John Oakleaf, Mexican Wolf Field Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, telephone conversation with Marsha L. Weisiger, 6 Oct. 2003. Conservation biologists question whether 100 free-ranging animals is sufficient for a viable population over the long term.

34. See, for example, Testimony by Laura Schneberger, "Public Land Grazing Task Force, Gila National Forest Hearing," Western New Mexico University, Silver City, 15 June 2000; D'Lyn Ford, "The Catron Way," *New Mexico Resources*, Fall 1995; Mark Dowie, "The Wayward West: With Liberty and Firepower For All," *Outside Magazine*, Nov. 1995.

35. Michael Robinson, Mexican Wolf Coordinator, Center for Biological Diversity, telephone conversation with Marsha L. Weisiger, 13 May 2003; Brian Kelly, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Mexican Wolf Program Coordinator, telephone conversation with Marsha L. Weisiger, 16 May 2003; Paquet, *Mexican Wolf Recovery*, 16, 72; FWS, *Reintroduction of the Mexican Wolf*, Sec. 2, pp. 14–16.

release—wolves directly into the Gila Forest, which offers the best habitat, much of it free of livestock. Politics stands in the way.

To facilitate a better understanding of all of these matters, I created a two-day symposium, designed as an interdisciplinary “public conversation.”³⁶ Translating that vision into reality required two years of grant-writing and organizing effort, which I squeezed into my busy teaching schedule. Raising money for anything in impoverished southern New Mexico, particularly a conference that would be free-of-charge to the public, proved to be no easy task. It required more than \$32,000 to cover honoraria for all the nongovernmental speakers, travel and lodging, printed invitations and programs, mailings, a web site, conference facilities, refreshments, and supplies, plus the small salary of a graduate assistant, Vanessa Stewart, who skillfully coordinated myriad logistical matters. Fortunately, a handful of grantmakers found the Leopold Forum’s concept intriguing. The Environmental Leadership Program, a national organization that offers training and project support for a diverse fellowship of environmental activists, generously provided seed money. Those funds helped leverage grants from the New Mexico Endowment for the Humanities and several local and regional foundations that support environmental and humanities projects.³⁷

As I raised money, I began recruiting speakers. I had already enlisted five historians, who also served as advisors for planning the program. Next, I approached officials with the Fish and Wildlife Service, local environmental leaders, and local ranchers who had publicly opposed the wolf reintroduction program, asking each to speak and to recommend other potential speakers who might offer somewhat different perspectives. I sought to secure not only “the usual suspects” who could be counted on to appear at every local forum on wolves, but also those who might help reveal the full spectrum of an issue often conveyed only in black-and-white. For example, I invited ranchers who welcomed wolves as well as those who despised them. I enlisted environmentalists who sought to build bridges with ranchers, as well as those who railed against cattle growers. I invited scientists who remained skeptical about the wisdom of the federal program to restore wolves to southwestern forests, and those who had participated in its creation. Tellingly, those positioned at the poles of the debate resented the inclusion of colleagues whom they felt might muddy the clarity of their own stance.

With each call, I took care to reveal my own position on the issue, mindful that I should avoid betraying anyone’s trust. Those on each side of the divide hoped to sway the dialogue, so feigning neutrality during lengthy con-

36. For a different model of an interdisciplinary conference on wolf reintroduction, consult Virginia A. Sharpe, Bryan Norton, and Strachan Donnelley, eds., *Wolves and Human Communities*.

37. The Thaw Charitable Trust and the McCune Charitable Foundation, both in Santa Fe, New Mexico, provided generous matching grants. The Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University and the Southwest and Border Cultures Institute at New Mexico State University, with financial support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, also provided valuable funding.

versations with speakers struck me as hazardous. I explained that I favor wolf reintroduction, but that I also hope ranchers can remain on the land and believe that the wolves' success depends on our ability to address the problems ranchers face in the presence of predators. Those who committed to speak also received a written description of the proposed forum and its intent, and as the program took shape, I forwarded lists of speakers, co-sponsors, and funders. Candor certainly carried risks. My support of wolves made some ranchers wary, just as my empathy for ranchers provoked some environmentalists. Indeed, my position may have discouraged some on both sides of the issue from participating. But in asking people to engage in a public dialogue, I was also asking them to open themselves to public conflict. They deserved honesty.

I originally envisioned that the forum would open with a single keynote address and a field trip to the Gila National Forest, where wolf habitat and ranch lands commingle. I have always found it valuable to think about environmental issues "on the ground." Viewing the landscape in which history has unfolded offers fresh insights and a better understanding of the complexity of the questions at hand. So I tried to arrange an excursion to the Sevilleta Wildlife Refuge or the Ladder Ranch, where biologists are breeding wolves in captivity and acclimating them for release into the wild. I had hoped that visitors might view wolves at long range through telescopes and discuss the captive-breeding program, then venture to a local ranch, where we could think about the problems ranchers face. That vision quickly faded. Neither of the captive-breeding facilities would allow visitors, even at long distance, mindful of the criticism that captive-bred wolves become habituated to humans through contact. Nor were any of the ranchers I contacted willing to open their land to van loads of strangers who might question the way they run their cattle.

Still determined to create some type of field trip experience, I took a dry run with my husband to the nearest locale in the Gila forest where wolves and ranchers share contested ground. After three hours of driving, we arrived at a spot suggested by a Forest Service biologist, who had warned me that the travel-time would prove infeasible. It was a lovely place that provided a pleasant hike, but offered few visual clues for understanding the issues involved. With tongue planted firmly in cheek, my husband offered to paint some German shepherds and run them in front of the vans as we entered the forest. People might then at least imagine they had seen something worthwhile. Otherwise, he believed, visitors would judge the six-hour round-trip, packed in a van, a waste of time. Instead, "El Lobo" opened with a more elaborate keynote session designed to set the tone for the event by juxtaposing the perspectives of history, science, and ranching.

As nearly two hundred members of the public assembled in the auditorium at the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum, tension electrified the air, no doubt exacerbated by the presence of security guards on either side of the stage. The museum, a co-sponsor of the forum, had received complaints from anonymous ranchers for hosting a discussion of wolf rein-

roduction, protests that sounded to some staff members like threats. And one of the speakers, a rancher and attorney, expressed fear of violence from “wolf-huggers.” The museum responded by hiring extra guards. Their extremely high visibility that first night struck me and at least some members of the audience and press as overkill.³⁸ They communicated a level of mistrust that dismayed me, but did not appear to dampen the discussion.

As environmentalists wearing pro-wolf tee-shirts took their seats in the theater, and ranchers in cowboy regalia milled about in the back, I was nonetheless glad that I had taken several other specific measures to promote a reasoned discussion. From the outset of planning this event, I had recognized that bringing together “people who revile wolves, people who revere wolves, and everyone in between” was freighted with danger.³⁹ Stories of fistfights at a similar Montana forum and shouting matches at meetings in the heart of New Mexico’s wolf country made me well aware that I—an untenured professor at a land-grant university—could be setting my own trap.

So I had done what I could to avoid disaster. When I had first conceived the forum nearly three years earlier, I had met with the university president, formerly chief scientist for the National Park Service, who had advised me to strike a balance among the various speakers. Eventually (but not so soon that I would lose control of the program), I had recruited not only the Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum as a co-sponsor, but also the College of Agriculture and Home Economics, whose dean took one look at my draft agenda filled with environmental historians, pro-wolf activists, wolf biologists, and officials who administer the reintroduction program, and suggested more ranchers. In one of my first moves, though, I had engaged Diana Hadley, an environmental historian who was also a former Arizona rancher, to serve as the moderator. Diana proved uniquely suited for the task of showing empathy to both sides and bringing history to the heart of the conversation.

Most important, I had hired an experienced conflict negotiator to advise me and moderate the private discussion scheduled to follow the forum. As a fellow with the Environmental Leadership Program, I had attended a workshop on conflict negotiation organized by another ELP fellow at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government. That short-course had helped me glimpse the art of getting antagonists to move beyond entrenched positions and think about mutual interests and problem-solving. To help mediate this conflict, I had recruited Melinda Smith, a neutral party and professional conflict negotiator, whose experience ranged from the Middle East to Catron County, a New Mexico battleground for ranchers and environmentalists. As luck would have it, she had used the wolf program as a case study for a training workshop and was personally familiar with many participants in the El Lobo forum.

My chief regret is that I didn’t contact Smith much earlier in the process,

38. Jeff Berg, “Wolf!” *Desert Exposure*, March 2003; Barney Nelson, “Groundhog Day at the Wolf Wars,” *Range* (Summer 2003): 56–60.

39. The phrase comes from L. David Mech, “Wolf Biology and Behavior,” tape of proceedings in possession of the author.

instead of three months before the forum took place. She critiqued my over-stuffed agenda and insisted that speakers keep their remarks brief, to allow for response and discussion. Most valuably, she developed a set of “ground rules” for a productive conversation that promoted active listening, respect for different opinions, and considerate language, and asked each participant to acknowledge the insights they gained from others. These are among the basic guidelines for conflict negotiation.⁴⁰ We distributed those ground rules, along with the program, to each person who attended the forum, in an effort to make each person feel safe to express his or her opinion openly yet with civility. Judging from the murmurs, some audience members were put off by what they viewed as unnecessary instructions on “how to behave in public.”⁴¹ Others openly welcomed this effort to foster civil conversation. The audience proved *so* polite, though, that I wondered whether the ground rules inadvertently discouraged people from challenging some of the “facts” presented by the speakers. On the other hand, the discussion never devolved into a shouting match, unlike similar forums elsewhere, and much of the audience seemed to really listen to what others had to say.

The keynote session featured Susan Flader, historian and biographer of Aldo Leopold, and author of *Thinking Like a Mountain*; L. David Mech, the country’s foremost wolf biologist and author of *The Wolf: The Ecology and Behavior of an Endangered Species*; and Caren Cowan, executive director of the New Mexico Cattle Growers’ Association. Flader’s thoughtful sketch of Leopold’s career and his famous epiphany—for many, the highlight of the forum—emphasized that Leopold had championed a grassroots approach to environmental policy that grew out of communities of local stakeholders, not out of the offices of federal policymakers.⁴² Leopold’s story resonated with people on either side of the rancher-environmentalist divide and composed a recurrent melody throughout the conference. “What might Leopold tell us today?” one audience member asked Flader. “He would probably call for dialogue and working things out among actual communities, as we are doing today,” Flader responded.⁴³ Mech stressed the success of wolf recovery in other areas of the country and showed a riveting videotape of two wolves singling out and taking down a lame elk. Cowan challenged the audience to consider “who benefits from wolf reintroduction?” Her own response: urbanites who want to know that wolves are “out there” but don’t have to live with them.⁴⁴

The second day we assembled on the campus of New Mexico State Uni-

40. See, for example, Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), Chap. 2.

41. See, for example, Nelson, “Groundhog Day,” 57.

42. Susan Flader, “Aldo Leopold and El Lobo in the Southwest,” tape of the proceedings, in the possession of the author.

43. Sam Truett, “Evaluator’s Report, Leopold Forum: El Lobo,” [p. 1], prepared for the New Mexico Endowment for the Humanities, 2003, in the possession of the author.

44. Mech, “Wolf Biology and Behavior,” and Caren Cowan, “Who Really Benefits from Wolf Reintroduction?” tape of the proceedings, in the possession of the author.

versity, this time with the single security guard I had hired seated unobtrusively in the back. Unaccountably, as one observer noted with a twinkle in his eye, environmentalists, who composed perhaps two-thirds or more of the audience, congregated on the left side of the hall, while ranchers took seats on the right. The program included a series of panel presentations, organized into “stakeholders groups,” each followed by a chance for the speakers to respond to each other and a question-and-answer period with the audience. An optional luncheon provided an opportunity for informal conversation between the audience and speakers, one or two of whom were assigned to each lunch table. We concluded the forum with an optional dinner and a featured speaker, followed by a round-table discussion.

We began with surprisingly philosophical remarks by the panel of historians, who set the tone for the day. Thomas Dunlap, the author of *Saving America's Wildlife*, drew lessons from Ernest Thompson Seton, the naturalist, founder of the Boy Scouts, and author of the short story, “Lobo, King of the Currumpaw.” Dunlap admonished the audience that Seton’s discovery upon killing a wolf, that “we and the beasts are kin,” holds an analogous moral: pro-wolf and anti-wolf antagonists need to cultivate community, listen to one another, and discover local solutions.⁴⁵ The next two historians targeted, in turn, those who revered wolves and those who reviled them. Louis Warren, author of *The Hunter's Game*, offered environmentalists a cautionary tale. After describing the ways in which early-twentieth-century hunting regulations in New Mexico had dispossessed Native American subsistence hunters, he ended by asking us to think about the way we would like *this* story to end: with dispossessed ranchers, or with ranchers and wolves both living on the land. Then Dan Flores, author of *Horizontal Yellow*, took aim at ranchers, framing his remarks with a sketch about the cowboy artist and ranching icon Charlie Russell, who throughout his legendary career used the wolf as a symbol for the Wild West, or what an art critic once described as “Dreamtime Montana.” Pointing out that the history of wolves in the West spanned back 20,000 years and that the wolf-less West amounted to a brief, unnatural anomaly, Flores celebrated the wolves’ return and concluded that “we’re living a great historic event,” one even Charlie Russell could only dream of.⁴⁶

Each of the historians—including Diana Hadley, who chronicled Arizona and New Mexico’s campaign to extirpate the wolf in the early twentieth century—provided a somewhat different perspective, designed to give the various factions in the debate something to ruminate. In hindsight, however, I wish we had dispersed the historians among the subsequent panels, rather than grouping them together in the first one. David Meyers and Jonathan Wacks used this strategy effectively at a conference in Santa Fe commemo-

45. Dunlap quoted Ernest Thompson Seton, *Wild Animals I Have Known* (New York: Scribners, 1898), 11.

46. Dan Flores, “Living with Wolves and Other Big Nasties,” unpublished paper in the possession of the author.

rating the blacklisted labor film, *Salt of the Earth*, which I attended after the El Lobo forum. Such an approach would have forged stronger links between the various positions and their historical contexts, and the historians would have engaged in dialogue throughout the day, rather than simply framing the discussion. On the other hand, one observer noted that the clustering of historians allowed the other groups to frame their own panels and claim their own historical interpretations. The structure, he added, allowed the discussion to “take its natural course,” instead of forcing “the issues into a predetermined ‘humanities-oriented’ mold,” showed “respect for multiple voices and perspectives, and opened up the forum to serendipitous discoveries of common ground and parallel visions.”⁴⁷ Certainly, many of those who attended the forum found the historical focus enlightening, evidenced by long lines to buy the historians’ books during the breaks.

Environmentalists and ranchers squared off in the next two panels. Two of the three environmentalists focused on the need to create and enhance financial incentives to mitigate the economic impact of wolves on livestock operations. Wolf tourism, noted one, could benefit local backcountry outfitters (many of whom are also ranchers) and add ecotourism revenue to the rural economy, just as similar programs have done in Minnesota and Idaho.⁴⁸

The fireworks began, however, with Michael Robinson, the Mexican wolf coordinator for the Center for Biological Diversity, and Laura Schneberger, a rancher and the president of the Gila Permittees Association, which represents those with grazing permits in the Gila National Forest. They represented the extremes of the debate, but each expressed important viewpoints. Robinson blamed ranchers for failing to remove cattle carcasses from the public domain, thereby encouraging wolves to develop a taste for beef and ultimately to prey on cattle. He also sharply criticized the Fish and Wildlife Service for “running amok” in its efforts to control the dispersal of wolves beyond the recovery area in an effort to placate ranchers.⁴⁹ Schneberger charged that ranchers were not being compensated for all their losses and expressed fears that wolves would attack children and pets. She concluded that “the Mexican wolf reintroduction program is proving that those who don’t learn from history are doomed to repeat it. . . . In the end, we’re going to have to destroy the wolves again.”⁵⁰

Other ranchers echoed Schneberger’s themes. Hugh B. McKeen, a powerful political figure in Catron County and a third-generation rancher in the

47. Truett, “Evaluator’s Report,” [p. 2].

48. Kevin Bixby, “Mexican Wolves: A Different Perspective,” and Craig Miller, “Restoring Relationships,” tape of the proceedings, in the possession of the author.

49. Michael Robinson, “The Continuing Federal War Against the Mexican Wolf,” tape of the proceedings, in the possession of the author. These remarks reiterated the critique offered by a team of independent biologists in the official evaluation of the first three years of the reintroduction program; see Paquet, *Mexican Wolf Recovery*, 65–67.

50. Quoted in Tania Soussan, “Wolf Forum Looks to History for Answers,” *Albuquerque Journal*, 9 Feb. 2003.

Gila National Forest, whose family has grazed cattle there since 1888, argued that the existing unhealthy forests do not support sufficient prey for wolves—except cattle. Darcy Ely, too, claimed that cattle have become the wolves' chief prey, an argument she illustrated with gory pictures of her mauled and dead livestock, snapshots that underscored her own vehement objection to allowing wolves into her "neighborhood."⁵¹

Not all ranchers oppose the reintroduction of wolves, although those who don't are a distinct minority, loudly vilified by some of their neighbors. Jan and Will Holder, who market "wolf-friendly," organic beef, and Jim Winder, a fourth-generation stock-grower and a leader in the Quivera Coalition, an organization that promotes ecologically sound livestock management, argued that the presence of wolves encourages better livestock management and thus improves range conditions. The Holders nonetheless chided the Fish and Wildlife Service for failing to communicate and collaborate with ranchers before releasing wolves. Winder ended the ranchers' panel on a philosophical note. He sympathized with his fellow ranchers who find it difficult to handle the additional costs that come with wolves, costs that are not reimbursed, such as monitoring livestock, documenting depredation, and attending meeting after meeting with federal bureaucrats. But he argued that ranchers must quit living in the past, adapt to changing circumstances, and focus on being good land stewards.⁵²

The next panel on policy proved disappointing, largely a result of my own naiveté. I had held especially high hopes for this panel, scheduled to include representatives from both of the Apache reservations adjacent to the recovery area—one vehemently opposed to wolves on grounds of tribal sovereignty and economics, the other a partner in the reintroduction program—as well as the coordinator of the Mexican wolf program for the Fish and Wildlife Service. The program coordinator had endorsed the El Lobo forum early on, and his presence not only as a speaker but also as an active listener seemed key. Unfortunately, both he and the representative of the pro-wolf White Mountain Apache Tribe were forced to cancel at the last minute. Still, I thought that the experiences of those who administer the program "on the ground" might provide fresh insights. They had confided their frustrations in private conversations with me, but proved unwilling to air their grievances in public. I had been foolish to expect otherwise.

The afternoon's highlights came from David Brown, biologist and author of *The Wolf in the Southwest*, and Michael Phillips, the dynamic director of the Turner Endangered Species Fund. Brown questioned whether *captive* wolves could be reintroduced successfully, raised doubts about the genetic

51. Hugh McKeen, "Unhealthy Forests Can't Support Wolves," unpublished paper, and Darcy Ely, "The Impact of a New Gang in the Neighborhood," tape of the proceedings, both in the possession of the author.

52. Jan and Will Holder, "Ignoring the Social Issues: A Rancher's View of Why Wolf Reintroduction Is Not Working," tape of the proceedings in the possession of the author; Jim Winder, "A Pragmatic View of Wolves," unpublished paper in the possession of the author.

distinctiveness of the “Mexican” subspecies, and proposed reintroducing wild wolves from Yellowstone. If *wild wolves* were not used, he predicted failure.⁵³ Phillips absolutely disagreed. He called for the expansion of the program with the ultimate goal of restoring the entire length of the North American wolf’s range from Canada to Mexico. Exhorting those who revere wolves to make their voices heard in the halls of Congress, he quoted the late environmentalist David Brower: “Politicians are like weather vanes and our job is to make the wind blow.”⁵⁴ It was a powerful speech. But Phillips did not have the last word.

As we moved to the banquet hall for dinner, I told the audience that their meal selections made for a kind of ethnographic study, offering food for thought. In recognition of the dietary needs of a diverse audience, we had offered three menu choices, and it appeared that many used the opportunity to position themselves politically. Some environmentalists who wanted to build bridges with ranchers chose meat, some who normally eat meat chose a vegetarian entree. One rancher made sure we were not serving bison from the Ted Turner ranches. In the end, I announced, about 10 percent wanted vegan pasta, another 20 percent (including one rancher) chose vegetarian lasagna, and the remaining 70 percent selected steak. We in the environmental community, I observed, must think about the implications of those choices.

Hank Fischer, the featured dinner speaker, echoed the theme that Susan Flader first raised with her story of Aldo Leopold’s belief in the wisdom of locally conceived conservation policy. Formerly with the Defenders of Wildlife in Montana and now special projects coordinator for the National Wildlife Federation, Fischer had helped lead the successful effort to recover wolves in Yellowstone National Park. (With nearly seven hundred gray wolves living in Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho, the federal government has recently downgraded their status from “endangered” to “threatened.”) Fischer now challenged his listeners to stop the polarized debate, give up the lawsuits and counter-suits, and collaborate on a grassroots recovery plan, one that envisions coexistence between wolves and ranchers. “We now seem locked in some Greek tragedy, Sisyphus eternally rolling his rock up the hill,” Fischer observed. “Conservation today is a never ending game of check and checkmate, endless confrontation where no one seems to get what he wants.” Leopold, he noted, had championed a better way. Like Leopold, Fischer advocated the creation of citizen management committees representing a cross-section of interests, which, he argued, would result in more creative solutions to conflicts and better conservation.⁵⁵ Fischer’s speech inspired some and infuriated others. Many, like

53. David Brown, “Adaptation vs. Representation: Another Look at Mexican Wolf Recovery,” unpublished paper in the possession of the author.

54. Michael Phillips, “History, Current Status, and Future of Wolf Recovery,” notes for talk in the possession of the author.

55. Todd Wilkinson, “Call of the Wild Echoes in West as Wolf Recovery Succeeds,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 1 May 2003; Hank Fischer, “Getting Past the Wolf Wars,” unpublished paper in the possession of the author.

me, were likely numb with exhaustion. If I could have rewound the tape, I would have ended the program at this point. Still, there was more to come.

The round-table discussion proved significant, even though the audience had dwindled to some fifty people, perhaps fewer. Throughout the conference, the faculty members who introduced each session also served as “trackers,” taking notes on the issues raised. Melinda Smith and I listed the most salient questions on a PowerPoint slide, to guide the moderated discussion. One key issue emerged: how might ranchers and wolves coexist in the same landscape? (Indeed, for some in the audience, the real issue was: *could* ranchers and wolves coexist in the same landscape?) Rancher Laura Schneberger perhaps said it best when she admitted that “wolves are here to stay. The question is whether ranchers are.”⁵⁶ Taking the bait, the audience and the panelists explored a series of problems ranchers face in a search for solutions, but most of the ranchers found fault with each idea the environmentalists offered, some of which would require major, costly changes in ranching operations. Ranching opponent Michael Robinson and ranchers Schneberger, McKeen, and Ely dominated the conversation, with sparks flying between them. Never did the debate seem more polarized.

At the last moment, I decided to give historian Louis Warren the last word. He began by considering the historical narratives he had heard over the course of the day. Each and every speaker had told a heartfelt story about a place and about their hopes for the future. People on both sides of the rancher-environmentalist divide, he observed, feel their backs are against the wall. “To sit and listen to the questions and people’s responses tonight is to get a wealth of stories about heartbreak and frustration. . . . I don’t think I’ve seen so many frightened people on opposite sides of the same issue.”⁵⁷

History, he continued, tells us that we can find solutions to the conflict between wolves and ranchers, if only we think creatively. For example, people once believed it would be impossible to restore wetlands for ducks while simultaneously preserving farms. “And we’ve got them both today, through a compensation program, through big farm subsidies, through lots of things.” History, he reminded us, provides us with models for success, as well as for failure.

Then Warren returned to the philosophical issue he had raised in his talk at the beginning of the day. “The stories that we’re going to tell about what happens *here* haven’t been written yet. . . . It all comes down to what kind of stories . . . we want to tell about where we were on this issue and what we at least *tried* to do.” Warren raised a set of profound questions. Would we use wolves to dispossess ranchers, just as we had used hunting laws to dispossess Native Americans a century ago? Would we finally exterminate every last Mexican wolf? Or would we find some path in between?

56. Tape of the proceedings, in the possession of the author.

57. All quotes of Warren’s remarks come from tapes of the proceedings, in the possession of the author.

Knowing that in a public forum all participants would likely hold fast to their positions, I had also scheduled a private discussion for breakfast the next morning, moderated by Melinda Smith, the conflict negotiator. Here the speakers could engage in conversation and problem-solving away from the pressure of performing well in front of their constituencies, their opponents, and the press. Here they could talk candidly, away from the tape recorders used to transcribe the public forum.⁵⁸ Here we could begin to move the discussion away from its focus on conflicting positions, toward a consideration of the participants' underlying concerns and the interests that both sides might share, such as good land stewardship.⁵⁹ A few participants had already gone home, frustrated, angry, or just plain tired. But a solid contingent of historians, ranchers, biologists, and one pro-wolf activist hung on. Over coffee, sweet rolls, and egg burritos, people seemed more willing to at least listen to their opponents.

Smith skillfully facilitated the conversation and kept track of each point on an easel pad. We began in round-robin fashion, asking each participant to relate something new he or she had learned during the forum. A biologist began the discussion by observing that he had not realized that ranchers faced so many challenges: numerous endangered species demanding protection, drought, low cattle prices. A cattle grower then noted her surprise at how little the environmental community knew about the logistics of southwestern ranching, and the activist responded that he would love to learn, if someone were willing to show him. Another rancher observed that the forum had taught him that not all environmentalists wanted to put him out of business. Bit by bit, we seemed to be talking *with*, not at, each other.

We then began to list solutions that we might agree upon: grassroots decisionmaking, better communication between federal officials and ranchers, rewards for ranchers' conservation efforts, a federally funded compensation fund. The group later circulated a summary of these recommendations by e-mail and forwarded them to the Fish and Wildlife Service, along with minority opinions. A memorable moment came when a member of the Fish and Wildlife Service asked Schneberger if she would stand by a statement she had made the night before. Challenged by Robinson, and no doubt exhausted by that time, Schneberger had endorsed a proposal to stop removing wolves who stray outside the official recovery area, except in response to actual behavioral problems. Schneberger replied that she, indeed, favored such a policy change, and Cowan, the stock growers association director, seconded the motion. Not all of the ranchers agreed, but for a moment it felt like the earth had moved.

When I organized the El Lobo forum, I hoped that looking back at history

58. These proceedings will be distributed, at least initially, only to participants; public demand has encouraged us to consider wider distribution, contingent on the participants' permission.

59. For more information on the principles of conflict negotiation, consult Fisher, Ury, and Patton, *Getting to Yes*.

would offer clues for resolving conflicts between wolves and ranchers. By “history,” of course, I meant the stories scholars tell. But as I looked back on this conference, I realized that the historian Carl Becker was right, that Everyman (and woman) was a historian. Most of the speakers had been intrigued by the historical framework, and in my initial calls, nearly everyone asked for the opportunity to offer his or her own historical narrative. Many speakers framed their remarks with a story that connected their own personal histories—and often their family histories—to the environments they most cared about. Each interpreted the meaning of the tale of deteriorating forests and declining deer herds. Each drew a moral about the campaign to exterminate wolves. Each used history to persuade his or her listeners. And faced with competing narratives about the causes of environmental change, all held steadfastly to their own memories of the past and the righteousness of their personal relationship to nature.⁶⁰

Did adding history into the discussion make any difference? It’s hard to say. For many of the speakers themselves, their own personal and competing narratives rang with more clarity than the scholars’ tales, which sounded distant and sometimes irrelevant. On the other hand, written evaluations, book sales, and audience comments indicate that many of those in attendance found the formal histories thought-provoking. Importantly, framing the conference with history seemed to make the gathering less threatening and less contentious than it might have been otherwise. People did listen. Although some heard only what they wanted to hear, others came away with a new understanding of the complexity of the problems that wolves and ranchers face.⁶¹

Certainly, in the short run, the Leopold Forum did nothing to bridge the gap between those who revere wolves and those who revile them. In the months after the conference, the Gila Permittees Association, the New Mexico Cattle Growers Association, and other livestock groups have filed suit against the Fish and Wildlife Service to stop the reintroduction program dead in its tracks. More troubling, at least seven wolves have died of apparent foul play within the seven months since the conference. That looks like powerful evidence of failure. And yet not long after the conference, the San Carlos Apache Tribe, which opposes wolf reintroduction, entered into a cooperative agreement with the Fish and Wildlife Service to monitor wolves. Unlike in the past, the tribe seeks to determine whether wolves have actually been responsible for livestock losses, instead of simply assuming that they are.⁶² Most

60. For an understanding of the ways in which Americans use history, a good starting point is Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). Also consult Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), Introduction.

61. For an example of the disjuncture between the ways in which audience members experienced the conference, depending on their own political position, compare the review by environmentalist Jeff Berg, “Wolf!” with that of rancher Barney Nelson, “Groundhog Day.”

62. Tania Soussan, “Approach to Reintroducing Wolves Under Attack,” *Albuquerque Journal*, 31 Aug. 2003; FWS, “Agents Seek Information in Suspected Illegal Deaths of Mexican Wolves,”

important, over the course of the forum, the discussion seemed to have moved from the question of “whether” wolves should be reintroduced toward “how” to make it work in a landscape where ranchlands and wild lands commingle. It was a small step, but it felt like progress.

Organizing public conversations about contentious environmental issues is not for the faint-hearted. And yet, I hope that the Leopold Forum can serve as a model for those who long to engage history with policy. Interdisciplinary discussions that bring multiple perspectives to bear on a given problem have the power to challenge, corroborate, and thereby clarify competing truths. They can help us to see that fostering an ethical relationship with nature, one that respects both the human and the nonhuman members of the biotic community, is not as simple as it seems. By bringing together the perspectives of history, science, advocacy, and the lived experience of those most affected by environmental policies, we can contemplate the paths that brought us here and reimagine the road ahead. That Janus-like approach, it seems, is the essence of public history.

3 Oct. 2003, <http://news.fws.gov/newsreleases/r2/C20FE0AB-C7Fa-4D39-A17A418D2025944E.html>; Brian Kelly, personal communication, 16 May 2003; Colleen Buchanan, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, acting Mexican Wolf Program Coordinator, 20 Oct. 2003; John Kamin, “Ranchers Sue to Remove Wolves,” *Eastern Arizona Courier*, 23 Oct. 2003.