

Predation: Lies, Myths and Scientific Fraud

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By Kerin Clark, Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation (Written May 2006)

“A great deal of misinformation surrounds predators, in general, and wolf recovery in particular,” Dr. Charles Kay told the audience at the WyFB wolf seminar. “Simply put, the government lied to minimize opposition to wolf recovery.”

“And, unfortunately this has not been the only lie,” Kay continued.

Dr. Charles Kay delivered the keynote address at “Wolves: Wyoming’s Reality,” a seminar sponsored by the Wyoming Farm Bureau Foundation May 25-26 in Riverton.

“Did you ever wonder how we went from our forefather’s view that wolves and other predators decimated your herds to today’s widely held belief that predators have little or no impact on wildlife numbers or prey populations?,” He said.

Dr. Kay jumped back to the 1960s and reviewed five events that have changed the public’s perception of wolves.

First—Mowat’s Book

The first event, a 1963 book titled “Never Cry Wolf” by Farley Mowat. This book was written about wolves in the Canadian Arctic.

The book was a national best seller that was later made into a movie by Walt Disney. According to Mowat, wolves did not kill caribou, but instead lived on mice and thus wolves did not decimate game herds. “A recent report found that this book was instrumental in changing the public’s opinion about wolves and other predators,” Dr. Kay said.

“The trouble is that the entire book is a work of fiction,” Dr. Kay continued. “Not only did Mowat get wolf biology all wrong, but he was never at the places he claimed in the book.”

“Although the book is a scientific fraud, it is amazing how many people still believe its message,” Dr. Kay continued.

Dr. Kay's research points to how unapologetic Mowat was for his fictional work. "When questioned on all this, Mowat contends that the end, protecting wolves, justifies the means, lying." Dr. Kay said. "Mowat has also said that he would do it all over again, if given the chance."

Second-Hornocker's Wildlife Monograph

Maurice Hornocker conducted a study of mountain lion predation on mule deer and elk in central Idaho in the 1960s. The study was published as a "Wildlife Monograph" by the Wildlife Society. Hornocker claimed that mountain lions had little impact on mule deer and elk numbers because they socially regulated their numbers. "That is to say, mountain lions used social means to purposefully regulate their population below the level where the cats would affect prey numbers," Dr. Kay explained.

In that same year, Douglas Pilmott claimed that wolves too socially regulated. "Unfortunately, this is not how evolution works," Dr. Kay said. "Instead, mountain lions and wolves are in the business of turning deer and elk into more lions and wolves as quickly as they can without any concern for prey populations."

According to Dr. Kay's research, David Mech and other wolf biologists have also acknowledged that wolves do not socially regulate.

Third—Mech's 1970 book on Isle Royale

The island of "Isle Royale" was first colonized by moose and then wolves. "The popular press likes to cite Isle Royale as an example of how moose and wolves live in harmony," Dr. Kay said. "Now it is bad enough that at least four different interpretations of the Isle Royale data have been published by the scientific literature, but it also turns out that Isle Royale is not representative of predator-prey relationships anywhere in North America!"

Dr. Kay explained that several factors play into this "unnatural state." First, moose densities on the island are ten times higher than the rest of the continent. According to Dr. Kay, "As Isle Royale wolves kill most of the more vulnerable moose, wolf numbers fall and remain low long enough for the moose to increase. Because this is an island, vacated wolf territories are not automatically filled by lone or dispersing wolves."

Second, there are no bears on Isle Royale, either black or grizzly. "Throughout the rest of North America, one or both species of bear are common," Dr. Kay said. "Bear predation and wolf predation are additive and together they have a

significant impact on big game populations. So, Isle Royale, it turns out, is an entirely unnatural situation.”

Fourth—Kaibab Deer Incident

The Kaibab Plateau is located north of the Grand Canyon in Arizona. “It was known for producing large-antlered mule deer, and because of that, it was set aside as a game preserve by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906,” Dr. Kay explained. “To protect the deer, wolves, mountain lions, bears and coyotes were systematically killed until most predators were eliminated.”

According to Kay, for nearly 40 years, the Kaibab was cited as proof that predators limited ungulate populations and that hunting was necessary where wolves and mountain lions had been eliminated. “That is until an Australian ecologist, Graeme Caughley, claimed it never happened in a 1970 paper,” Dr. Kay said.

Fifth—Caughley’s Research

Caughley’s paper was on introduced Himalayan thar in New Zealand and his belief that ungulate populations are food-limited and that predators have little effect on prey populations. “First, however, Caughley had to discredit the prevailing paradigm of the day, namely the Kaibab Deer Incident, which he did,” Dr. Kay said. “...or at least he said he did.”

“Others, citing Caughley’s “Ecology” paper have called the Kaibab a myth and deny it ever happened,” He continued. “The Kaibab myth cited that deer numbers are set by available habitat.”

“Now unlike Caughley, who in a later publication admitted that he had never set foot on the Kaibab, I have been to the Kaibab numerous times,” Dr. Kay said. “I have spent a great deal of time looking for Kaibab documentation in various archives and I can unequivocally report that the Kaibab happened just like Leopold said it did. It turned out that Caughley spread this misinformation because of his political agenda.”

Caughley also developed mathematical models of plant-herbivore and plant-herbivore-predator interactions. Dr. Kay has conducted sensitivity analysis on the mathematical models to determine the model’s universal use.

“If you change any of Caughley’s parameters by even as little as one-tenth of one percent, you get an entirely different result,” Dr. Kay explained. “Caughely picked the only numbers in the entire world that give this result because it is what

he needed to support his preordained views of how ecosystems work. Whatever this is, it is NOT science.”

Caughley’s text book on wildlife management is still used in University classes today. “The next time you talk to your local fish and game biologist and he tells you predators have little or no impact on deer or elk populations it is because this is what he was taught,” Dr. Kay said. “Unfortunately, there is no truth in this whatsoever.”

Yellowstone National Park History

“When Yellowstone National Park was established in 1872, there were very few game animals so they fed wintering elk,” Dr. Kay explained. “And they killed predators. By 1926, the Park Service had eradicated wolves from Yellowstone.”

“The Park Service became convinced the elk were destroying Yellowstone so they transplanted them to areas outside the park,” He continued. “The Park Service also shot over 13,000 elk in the northern range which led to a public outcry.”

According to Dr. Kay, the Park Service was told by a Congressional oversight committee to devise another solution to the elk problem and this occurred in 1968. “This was about the same time that the aforementioned books and studies were being written and receiving media attention,” He said.

Predation Research

- According to Dr. Kay, recent research in Canada and Alaska has shown that wolves and other predators often limit ungulate numbers to only ten percent or less of what the habitat would otherwise support.
- Arizona Game & Fish has maintained a predator-free area since 1968. According to Kay, both inside and outside of the enclosure the habitat has been affected by the worst drought in the last 800 years. Research here is showing that when you have high predator numbers, habitat is largely irrelevant. The fawn/doe ratio outside the predator-proof enclosure is only 18 fawns/100 does. Inside the predator-free enclosure the ratio is 100 fawns/100 does.
- According to Kay, a recent paper published in the scientific journal “Ecology” cites long-term predation studies in central Alaska and affirms that habitat is found to be largely irrelevant when predation numbers were not controlled.

Canadian Research

“Unlike the U.S. Park Service and USFWS, that have actively worked to suppress my research, I have been invited by Parks Canada to conduct research on long-term ecosystem states and processes in the central Canadian Rockies,” Dr. Kay said. “This included several, long horseback trips to evaluate conditions.”

Dr. Kay spent over 30 days in the back country and covered more than 500 miles via horseback. “We found miles upon miles of the best moose habitat you could ever want,” Dr. Kay said while showing pictures of the area. “Yet, there are virtually no moose due to wolf and bear predation, a fact readily acknowledged by Parks Canada. Moreover, the number of mule deer we saw could be counted on two hands.”

Wolf impact examples

- “In southeast Alaska’s Game Management Unit 2, hunters kill around 3,000 black-tail deer a year,” Dr. Kay explained. “While wolves kill approximately 12,000 deer a year. In this management area, 40 percent of this wolf population is killed each year.”
- Dr. Kay also pointed out the difference in permits issued in Montana for North of Yellowstone National Park. “Prior to wolf introduction, 4,000 late season elk permits were issued per year,” He explained. “But now that wolves have been introduced, permit numbers have fallen to less than 400 and the state has indicated they may close that season all together.”
- Biologist David Mech has reported that un hunted wolves in Alaska killed wolves at 36 percent per year. “Thus, wolves kill wolves at a rate of 36,000 per 100,000 per year—this is how the FBI reports crime statistics,” Dr. Kay said. “For comparison, the murder rate in the U.S. is around 7 people per 100,000 per year. The wolf homicide rate in Alaska is 5,000 times the U.S. murder rate. Whatever else wolves may be, they are stone cold killers.”
- “Another lie is that wolf depredation on livestock is only a minor problem,” Dr. Kay said. “100 percent of the wolf packs in Wyoming, Montana and Idaho have turned to killing livestock and I have this in writing from the USFWS and Wildlife Services.”

“Unfortunately, most media coverage is biased so you won’t see the truths reported,” Dr. Kay concluded. “The lies and scientific fraud help them with their agendas.”

Dr. Charles Kay is an Adjunct Associate Professor in Political Science and a Senior Research Scientist with the Institute of Political Economy at Utah State University. He received his Ph.D. in wildlife ecology from Utah State University, his M.S. in environmental studies and his B.S. in wildlife biology both from the University of Montana.

