WOLF RECOVERY: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE[TWS]

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Every wolf population and associated human culture have unique characteristics that effect management decisions and recovery efforts. Wolves are recovering in the US, Canada, and Europe because of a combination of increasing ecological awareness and affluence that allows conservation efforts to succeed. I will describe three stages of wolf recovery, which involve increasing levels of management: 1) *Natural recolonization*: Wild wolf populations exist within dispersal distance in landscapes with connectivity (e.g. northwestern Montana, southern Canada). Wild wolves recolonize unoccupied habitat through dispersal and rely on their wild experience for survival. 2) *Wolf reintroduction from wild, native stock*: Wild wolf populations exist for reintroduction stock but dispersal to desired area is severely compromised (e.g. Yellowstone National Park, central Idaho, Olympic Peninsula). Wild-caught wolves are reintroduced into an area and rely on their wild experience for survival. 3) *Wolf reintroduction from captive-raised, remnant stock*: Wild populations of the distinct population segment are extinct (e.g. red wolf of southeastern US, Mexican wolf of southwestern US). Captive-reared wolves are reintroduced into an area and must learn skills necessary to survive in the wild. As habitat is degraded, we move down this list and recovery requires more precious resources and intensified management. Furthermore, our endeavors may result in creating island populations, which face an increased risk of extinction. We must take a long hard look from ecological, ethical, and sociopolitical perspectives, and evaluate the successes and failures of previous recovery efforts to improve upon the potential outcome of future efforts.