

BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES – TERRESTRIAL

PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS

MONTANA CHAPTER OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY 52ND ANNUAL MEETING

Splitting the Baby? Public Trust, Multiple Use and Current Policy in Wildlife Management

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MONTANA CHAPTER OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

I gape at the complex tapestry of wildlife policy that has been woven over the past century in our state, and the concepts that color it from much further back and wider in history. Whether considering the interplay of Native American hunting rights with state game management regulations and private land rights during my Master's research, working on NEPA analyses for the Forest Service, or interpreting ESA wording for wolf depredation response during my time with MFWP, I always felt uneasy when it came to understanding where I fit into the policy picture as a wildlife biologist.

When I had to come up with a conference theme, it was those experiences that boiled to the top and left me with this raft of disquietude to examine for clues. Underneath it all I wondered whether the concept we work toward as management biologists, essentially the orchestration of human activity for the perpetuity of wildlife and its habitat, ultimately works in the favor of wildlife. Or, will wildlife and its habitat, so beloved by so many people for so many reasons, ultimately be torn asunder in the gaping maw of clashing policy?

I pictured the tale of King Solomon facing two women both desperately bereaving a lost infant and a living one. As he raised his hand to split the living infant in two - a fair compromise – the true mother, as the tale goes, reneged her claim on the child in order to save its life. As biologists and citizens, we strain to influence wildlife and habitat constituencies through both the concepts of public trust and multiple use; to redirect a most basic human desire to hold something, use something, own something that fulfills them and channel it productively. But we are constantly pushed and pulled by forces beyond our control that are also driven by this same desire. In the face of this, can we even hope to split the baby, to manage wildlife, like sagacious Solomon? What do we need to know about ourselves, our constituencies, our political history and current surroundings in order to be successful in our work? I don't have answers, just questions. I hope that our presenters will offer a long perspective as well as inspire a creative inquisitiveness in us that will help us navigate our work world with humble sagacity and abundant enthusiasm.