

## British Columbia's wolf policy

I was most upset to read Tina Harrison's 'British Columbia's disastrous wildlife policies' (*Oryx*, 21, 69–70). While I recognize this was an 'opinion piece', there is, to my mind, a great difference in publishing opinions based on factual information, compared to opinions based on error and mis-interpretation. Ms Harrison uses her own data and her own interpretation of our activities, which sometimes do not coincide with ours.

We recognize that our wildlife programmes will continue to generate controversy and we accept the fact that not everyone will agree. However, we value the wolf very highly in British Columbia. In the 1950s, when world-wide and publicly supported wolf removal programmes were in place, British Columbia began protecting wolves and controlling their harvest. The long-term survival of the wolf will depend on some level of control where there are major shifts in their numbers and the numbers of their prey. In no case do we counsel or work to effect the extermination of wolves, as suggested by Ms Harrison. Indeed, in 1979 we published and released for public comment a preliminary plan for the conservation and management of wolves, along with plans for other wildlife species. Those were the first comprehensive plans produced in Canada by any province or territory to confirm the objectives, policies and strategies for the conservation and management of wolves or other wildlife.

Since then wolves have extended their range from covering roughly 90 per cent of the province to over 95 per cent. At the same time their density has increased in most areas and dramatically so in one or two areas. The total area in which wolves are being controlled to maintain a balance between themselves and their prey, as well as controlled to protect livestock, is less than 5 per cent of the province. We are pleased and proud of our efforts to restore the wolf in our province.

The methods of control we use in British Columbia are the most humane available. Contrary to what Ms Harrison suggests, shooting from helicopters is not contrary to federal regulations—staff are fully authorized to do this work and the method minimizes the period of stress on the wolves and ensures a quick and effective kill.

Moreover, after several years of controlling wolves using helicopters, staff report no escapes of crippled animals.

Funding for wolf control programmes has been solely from government sources. Private funds from lotteries or other sources have not been used for wolf control, as stated by Ms Harrison. On private lands where livestock are harassed, mauled or killed by wolves, government control assistance is refused unless the producer has made every reasonable effort to avoid and not aggravate the problem. On crown lands leased for grazing, ranchers are expected to care for their animals to minimize conflicts with wolves as much as they are on private lands. Government control of wolves on leased lands is the same as on private lands. Those parts of our programme were developed with the support of livestock producers, naturalists and sportsmen. Cattle-men's organizations have repeatedly supported responsible control and have rejected the elimination of wolves.

Ms Harrison is also wrong about the black bear problem. We have a regrettable situation near cities and towns where we are forced to remove or kill a large number of black bears every year, as they wander into inhabited areas. These animals are not harmless and in some of the wilderness areas of British Columbia they are becoming more aggressive. This year so far we have had six serious bear attacks, four by grizzlies and two by blacks. Two people have been killed and others have been seriously injured. We are exploring ways to attempt to reduce the necessity of destroying these bears near cities, but relocation is rarely a solution and most bears wander back. Allowing hunters to chase bears out of season with dogs is only done where we think we will have a bear problem later. We believe that if the hunter harasses the bear (they are not allowed to kill them in this special season), it will teach the bear to avoid the area and thus we should not need to shoot it later. We feel it may save the lives of some bears in the long run and it is designed with this in mind.

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*Oryx Vol 22 No 1, January 1988*