

A SOCIETY OF WOLVES: NATIONAL PARKS AND THE BATTLE OVER THE WOLF, BY RICK MCINTYRE

REVIEWED BY TIMMOTHY J. KAMINSKI

WOLVES HAVE LONG CAPTURED the imagination and attention of peoples of many cultures. Fear and admiration are commonly cited from within the many treatises about wolves, stemming from human-wolf encounters that include the past and present. That there is realism in each of these human emotions contributes to the rich literature that spans the experiences of people and wolves. *A Society of Wolves: National Parks and the Battle Over the Wolf* by Rick McIntyre is among the most recent additions to a long list of technical, historical, and personal accounts.

A Society of Wolves is introduced with commentary by Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell of Colorado, a Native American Indian, and by Jay D. Hair, President, National Wildlife Federation. The book is laced with outstanding photographs that portray wolves in their natural environment, many of which appear to be from Alaska. Book chapters are organized to assist the reader in understanding basic life history and ecology of the wolf; their relation to Old and New World peoples, beliefs, and settlements; persecution of wolves by European arrivals to North America; and finally their current status and the ongoing efforts to restore this native carnivore to portions of its former range.

At a glance, this book appears to be similar to the many coffee table books designed for the casual or moderately interested reader in the behavior and ecology of gray wolves throughout North America. The focus of recent books, like this one, addresses the status and recovery of gray wolves in national parks of the Rocky Mountains and particularly, Yellowstone National Park. Among the features that set this

RICK MCINTYRE



Wild Alaskan wolf belonging to the East Fork pack, the same pack biologist Adolph Murie studied in the 1930s-40s.

book apart are that it is well-researched, and that it is written as a tome of personal experience. McIntyre has succeeded in producing a well-written account that will be of value to any with interest in the evolution of our thinking about the role of carnivores and their importance to national park conservation.

This book is easy to read, draws considerably from the many experts in the field, pans beautifully a broad spectrum of wolves in their natural surroundings, and captures the reader's interest through personal accounts by the author. McIntyre supplies a section (called Season of the Wolf) that is an accurate, if general, account of our collective knowledge of the ecology, behavior, and threats to long-term conservation of the species. The text is seldom leading and is carefully written to emphasize the dynamic nature of what has been learned over better than 30 years

of wolf research and its interpretation by experts. McIntyre has also made a considerable effort to incorporate information from historical accounts through investigations of his own, and has condensed what already was written into an easy-to-read-and-understand documentary. He gives credit to others where appropriate, and acknowledges the many field biologists that he learned from and with whom he spent time. Many of the experiences gleaned while with these experts are described throughout the text.

The organization of the book is a weakness, however, and is at times choppy enough to be annoying, particularly for a reader perusing the chapters from beginning to end. An added shortcoming is that sections on the status of recovery efforts in the national parks (for example, Great Smoky Mountains, Yellowstone, Glacier) and areas where wolves are returning on

their own are overly condensed. In fairness, the book contains inserts or sidebars that concisely summarize recovery efforts and may be entirely appropriate for the coffee table reviewer; however, they could still have been improved upon by adding detail and altering their placement in the text.

McIntyre has carefully watched and experienced wolves in their natural environments, a complement to his writing style that adds greatly to the appeal of his book. Among the most appealing portions are his own experiences and his recounting of them. While interpretations in a few instances are anthropomorphic and subject to question (for example, "vindication" by the wolf Rags the Digger), his introduction, the account of Bill Caywood versus the wolf Rags the Digger, his portrayal of the East Fork (Toklat River) alpha male in Alaska (a return to Murie's time observing the East Fork den about which Murie also wrote in his 1944 account of the Wolves of Mt. McKinley—now Denali), his epilogue to the spirit of the wolf, and finally his revisit to Colorado bring these experiences to life for the reader.

McIntyre's time spent as a naturalist, particularly his years in Alaska and in other parks, serves as the basis for this account, more personal than a thorough documentary of the long-standing efforts dedicated to returning gray wolves to North America, especially select national parks of the United States. His insights and photos lead to an accurate and positive image of the wolf and its rightful place in these remaining vestiges of available habitat.

It is not a shortcoming of this book that the story of the tremendously costly and highly political efforts to obfuscate the return of wolves to our national parks has been waged for nearly two decades, and still has not been told. Few would understand from his account, for example, that efforts

formally began in 1975 to restore wolves in Yellowstone, that the recovery plan, approved in 1987, sat on a bureaucrat's desk for more than two years following completion by a group of dedicated scientists in 1984, or that a 70-year old visionary played a tremendous role in commencing efforts underway today; the American public is deserving of a more full account. To this end, *A Society of Wolves*, like other books that will follow, is an important

volume that will extend an important dialogue on the ecological role of large predators not readily gleaned from scientific publications. This book stands out among those that similarly describe the plight of wolves in our national parks. McIntyre is to be commended for a fine effort and a valuable contribution to the general public and those interested in learning more about wolves in our past and we hope, our future. 

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*Author Rick McIntyre is working his thirty-sixth season with the National Park Service this winter as a Park Ranger (naturalist) at Big Bend National Park, Texas. In 20 years with the agency, he has served in Glacier, Death Valley, Joshua Tree, and Denali, among other units. This past summer, McIntyre specialized in interpreting wolves and the reintroduction effort at Yellowstone where he also raised all the funding for his own position. His second book on wolves, *The War Against the Wolf: America's Campaign to Exterminate the Wolf* (Voyageur Press), is due in March. This book is a 500-page anthology documenting the evolution of American attitudes toward the wolf.*

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