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BUSINESSES NEAR YELLOWSTONE FEAR DRAMATIC INCREASE IN WOLF HUNTING WILL IMPACT REVENUE AND JOBS (Gardiner, Montana, - January 23, 2022)

Local southwest Montana business owners whose livelihoods are tied to viable wildlife populations were surprised to learn that the Governor's pro-jobs administration would result in Montana's Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) commission deploying new wolf hunting regulations that pose a threat to the annual \$200 million+ tourism industry in gateway communities like Livingston, Gardiner, West Yellowstone, and Cooke City, Montana near Yellowstone National Park. As a result of the new regulations, 10% of wolves killed in Montana this season have been taken in an area comprising less than 0.5% of the state. This area, known by MFWP managers as Wolf Management Units (WMU) 313 and 316, is adjacent to the northern boundary of Yellowstone National Park. Wolves being harvested are members of packs with their primary territories inside of Yellowstone National Park that temporarily leave the park boundaries to pursue prey especially during the winter season. "These were some of the most viewable wolves in the lower 48, if not the world. In terms of drawing visitors, their value cannot be overstated," says Cara McGary, owner of In Our Nature Guiding Services.

In just over two months, 100+ local businesses have come together through a group called the Wild Livelihoods Business Coalition to address these concerns. Casey Anderson, a world-renowned film maker born and raised in Montana describes the group as a think tank, not a cause: "We are a growing coalition of local businesses near Yellowstone National Park whose livelihoods depend upon wild places. We are made up of tax-paying, job-creating business owners who share common ground in our belief that keeping the Greater Yellowstone region wild is critical for the viability of our livelihoods. We represent the largest economic sector by revenue in Park County."

The Wild Livelihoods Business Coalition is calling on MFWP to overturn their decision to dramatically increase the harvest of wolves in WMUs 313 and 316. Adopted in August 2021 by five (now seven) Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks commissioners, new regulations were implemented throughout the state. The business coalition is not trying to address national or state regulations. They are focused on changes to regulations along the border of Yellowstone. Until these new regulations were passed, only two wolves could be hunted from the areas adjacent to Yellowstone's northern boundary, a sustainable trajectory for the wolves and Yellowstone wildlife viewing tourism. Now, theoretically, 82 wolves (with the potential for more) could be taken in these two WMUs. Furthermore, 10 wolves can get hunted by one person. That same person could trap 10 more.

"Some of the iconic brands of western recreation such as Chico Hot Springs, Sage Lodge, and Mountain Sky operate businesses here," notes Jeff Reed of Reedfly Farm. "Heck, the tv show *Yellowstone* claims to be about this place. Let's put Montana's recreational economy where it belongs on the map. I make a living on both the recreational and agricultural economies which are roughly equivalent in statewide revenue generation. I have a deep respect for many of our

ranchers. They pay for the views on private land that tourists love. But here next to Yellowstone, the tourism economy, just in lodging revenue, exceeds agriculture 8 to 1. The driving factor for visitation are the wide-open spaces, clean water and diverse wildlife that co-exist both here and in Yellowstone Park. A river runs through it. But so do predators and prey, including wolves. Whether you run a gas station, lodging, restaurant or wildlife tours, trout and wolves are critical to the supply chain of Park County, Montana. Just like the 2016 fish die-off on the Yellowstone River resulted in national attention and a dramatic decrease in local business activity, the ongoing press about wolf kills on the Montana border to Yellowstone will impact tourist decisions to visit. No business in its right mind would be chipping away at its brand like we are here in Montana.”

Since September 15, 2021, 19 wolves have been officially killed in Montana’s WMUs 313 and 316. That’s roughly 20% of the wolf population that are residents of Yellowstone and possibly up to 40% of wolves in the northern range, a hydrological and ecological area that extends north of Yellowstone. The data becomes even more telling when considering WMU 313 represents less than .5% of the entire hunting region 3, and yet accounts for 21% of all that region's wolf kills. (Statewide data may be viewed here: <https://bit.ly/3rOGtFC>) The reason is obvious: easy access for hunters to target wolves coming out of Yellowstone. “More importantly, it's *which* wolves that are killed, not simply *how many* that impacts the viability of wolf packs. Just like in human nuclear families, certain members play critical roles in the social cohesion of the unit, without whom things start to go awry,” Asheia Mills, owner of Walking Shadow Ecology Tours of Yellowstone, states. The resident Phantom Lake Pack has lost so many members to hunting since October that Yellowstone officials now consider it “eliminated”.

Technically, a wolf's region is often defined by biologists as where they den and if they spend more than 50% of their time. Most of the wolves being labelled "Yellowstone" wolves who become "Montana" wolves when they cross the northern border of Yellowstone spend more than 95% of their time in Yellowstone. Humans would revolt if they were taxed by a state if they resided 5% of their time in that state. We only mention this to put in perspective the knee-jerk argument that these wolves being shot in WMU's 313 and 316 are "Montana" wolves when they step across the border.

The group is not “anti-hunting”. As Reed puts it, “The tourism and recreation economy includes hunting and fishing. We have members from both industries. Nonetheless, consumptive and non-consumptive uses need to be viewed proportionately; here, on the border to Yellowstone the one million+ tourists visiting the area annually are primarily non-consumptive users. The hunting industry, one which I participate in, needs it’s own ‘catch and release’ moment in time. Wolves are at the heart of that issue. Hunting is not the only way to learn and gain from wildlife.” Evan Stout, owner of Yellowstone Wildlife Guide Company, adds, “Ecological benefits for both hunting and agriculture can be achieved through sound wolf management here on the border of Yellowstone. Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is on the rise in Montana, specifically in region 3 putting prized hunting of elk and deer at risk. Research shows that in areas where CWD and wolves are present, the spread is slowed by the wolves.” Reed, who is a hunter and irrigator, builds on Stout’s argument: “Elk are habituating to local irrigated fields in Paradise Valley,

creating losses for agricultural producers. Wolves can help stir the pot...in a good way. Pushing elk around the valley creates a more balanced system for all interests...hunting, agriculture and tourism.”

To acknowledge the common ground shared between the hunting (consumptive) and wildlife viewing (non-consumptive) industries, Casey Anderson explains that the coalition is “staying local. This is a local issue; everyone else wants to make it a political and national issue. Our local business coalition’s position is not to tell other parts of the state or country how to treat wolves. But, here on the border of Yellowstone, where recreational tourism is the dominant economy and, consequently, locals with different economic interests had worked out a co-existence strategy with the wolves, we expect a seat at the table discussing what it means to make a living in Montana. With this decision, the state of Montana is doing the opposite of supporting local jobs and the economy.” Coupled with that reality, according to Reed, “...the last thing the ranching community in Paradise Valley needs is a re-listing of wolves by the federal government, which is what this change to wolf quotas in WMU's 313 and 316 might incite.”

The coalition is not just “about the money” as is stated on their website: **We seek to perpetuate what is good and improve what could be better for our community, our landscapes, our wildlife and our future.** That’s their long-term business strategy. But in the short-term they are laser-focused on the immediate economic threat created by the appointees of the MFWP commission. As Cara McGary, who leads wolf viewing tours, notes, “The new wolf hunting regulations have reduced the number of wolves and our opportunities to view them on the northern range. This will have a big impact on my business and other guide companies as well.” Nathan Varley, another member of the coalition and life-long resident of the area states, “The state hasn’t responded to my pleas so far, except to remind me that when wolves leave Yellowstone they can be killed but they seem to be missing the point. The damage being done is to Montanans—our income, our livelihoods, and ultimately our reputation as stewards of a world-renowned resource.”

The Wild Livelihoods Business Coalition continues to reach out to the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks commissioners asking them to reinstate the two-wolf quota for wolves in WMUs 313 and 316. Two of the commissioners have responded. The coalition will continue to follow the legal process of engaging with FWP. For more info on their position, see <https://www.wildlivelihoods.com/wolf-quotas>.