



Study of the attitudes, perceptions and knowledge of hunters of the Mauricie region regarding the Eastern Wolf

April 2007

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Parks Canada
Contract number: 5P201-060414 - POR-213-06
Award date: 2006-10-11

REALIZATION OF THE STUDY

The realization of a study on the Eastern Wolf such as the one carried out in 2007 with hunters of the Mauricie region entails the participation of many people. The individuals mentioned below greatly contributed to the present study through their dedication to and involvement with the national park and its protection and presentation mandate.

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Database, weighting, analysis and report

INTRODUCTION

In the winter of 2007, Parks Canada conducted a study on the Eastern Wolf with hunters of the Mauricie region. This study is part of a vast three-year project (2005-2008) aimed at improving the communications and educational components pertaining to the Eastern Wolf's interpretation and conservation, and which are intended for the following target audiences: visitors, school groups, trappers, hunters and residents of the park's region.

The project also aims to provide useful and relevant information for the management of the Eastern Wolf, with respect to the human dimensions of these audiences (including hunters), namely their attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and behaviours concerning the conservation of the Eastern Wolf.

By determining the human dimensions of the region's hunters, as well as their attitudes and perceptions, it will subsequently be easier to work on the factors which influence these audiences' human dimensions through better communication and better management of the Eastern Wolf population. This project thus will have a positive effect on the park's ecological integrity by improving the knowledge of hunters, communication tools and the protection and conservation of the species.

Another goal of the project is to cultivate, as far as possible, a standard approach that could be easily incorporated into other similar projects.

The population targeted by this study consists of the hunters of the Mauricie region.

A total of 355 self-administered questionnaires were filled out by hunters and returned by mail between January 9 and February 6, 2007, with a sample of hunters randomly selected from a list of all the hunters living in the Mauricie region, including hunting zone #26, and hunting in this same zone.

To ensure a representative sample, a weighting was applied based on the type of permits held.

The maximum margin of error is 5.2% for a confidence level of 95%.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Experience with the wolves

Hunters appear to come into contact with wolves relatively frequently.

- Fifty-six percent (56%) of the hunters affirm that they have previously seen a wolf and 28% claim to have heard wolves in the wilds of the Mauricie region.
- Moreover, 26% of the hunters say they have previously seen a wolf and 19% have heard wolves in populated areas of the Mauricie region.

Factual knowledge about wolves

This study shows that certain facts are more or less known by the hunting community.

- Nearly half of all hunters (49%) believe that there are different types of wolves in Quebec.
 - In their opinion, the main differences that make it possible to distinguish between these species are colour (53%), geographic region (27%) and the size of the animal (25%).
- The majority (55%) of hunters think that wolves and coyotes cannot mate. Two percent of them claim to have previously seen an animal resulting from the crossbreeding of these two species.
- For 47% of the hunters, only two individuals in a pack can mate and have offspring in any given year.
- For the great majority of hunters (62%), a male wolf weighs between 25 and 50 kilograms on average.
- For 44% of the hunters, a wolf pack succeeds in killing a wild prey each time or one time out of two.
- Nearly half of all hunters (44%) believe that wolves travel in no particular direction.

Beliefs about the wolf

Hunters have relatively positive feelings concerning the wolf, and have little fear of it.

- The wolf (4%) is feared by a lower proportion of hunters compared to the bear (35%). However, for 28% of the respondents, these two species are both seen as dangerous to humans.
- The feelings of hunters concerning the wolves are relatively positive: 54% like them, 22% are neutral and 24% dislike them.

Beliefs and attitudes concerning the number of wolves

A good many hunters overestimate the number of wolves in the Mauricie region and in the national park. In their opinion, the wolf population is stable or has been growing since the past few years.

- The wolf seems to have little presence in the hunting territories. Indeed, only 13% of the hunters said that it could be found in abundance on their usual hunting ground. And for 41% of the hunters, wolves are rarely encountered on their hunting ground.
- Perceived average number of wolves in a pack in the Mauricie region: 7.1 wolves / pack.
- Perceived average number of wolves in the Mauricie region: 649 wolves. However, 23% of the hunters estimate that there are between 1 and 100 wolves.
- Only 13% of the hunters think that the proportion of wolves has diminished in the Mauricie region, 34% think it is stable and 35% believe it has increased.
- Perceived reasons for the reduced wolf population in the Mauricie region: deforestation and forest clearing (17%) and hunting (10%).
- Perceived reasons for the increased wolf population in the Mauricie region: less hunting (24%) and availability of food (21%).
- Perceived average number of wolves in La Mauricie National Park: 80 wolves. However, half of the hunters (50%) estimate that there are between 1 and 100 wolves in the park.
- Less than one respondent out of 10 (7%) believes that the population has diminished in the park, 35% think it is stable and 29% believe it has increased.
- Perceived reasons for the reduced wolf population in La Mauricie National Park: the presence of humans (8%), trapping (7%), deforestation and forest clearing (6%), and lack of food (6%).
- Perceived reasons for the increased wolf population in La Mauricie National Park: less hunting (23%) and availability of food (20%).

Perceptions and attitudes concerning other aspects of the wolf

While hunters are in favour of protecting the wolf, they are nonetheless reluctant to increase the number of wolves. The wolf seems to have an impact on their hunting activities.

- Nearly half of the hunters believe that there is a sufficient number of wolves in the region (49%) and in the park (46%), 28% of the hunters would agree to increasing the number of wolves in the region and 29% would agree to increasing the number of wolves in the park.
- However, 65% of the hunters view as important the issue of the wolf's management in the region and 71% of the hunters wish to be kept abreast of developments in the area of management.
- For 68% of the hunters, it is important to maintain the wolf population in the Mauricie region for the benefit of future generations.
- Moreover, whether or not they ever come into contact with a wolf, 71% of the hunters believe that wolf populations in the Mauricie region should be maintained.
- For 67% of the hunters, it is equally important to impose restrictions on the number of wolves that can be trapped/hunted.
- Finally, 67% of the hunters agree that logging has a significant impact on wolves.
- However, it appears that the wolf has a certain impact on hunting activities.
 - Nearly half of the hunters say that the wolves significantly reduce the number of available big game (44%) and small game (41%) animals.
 - For 39% of the hunters, the wolves reduce the number of wild animals available for hunting.

Motivations and hunting profile of hunters

Nature, rest and exercise are what motivate hunters to hunt. The wolves occasionally disrupt hunting activities. Very few hunters have hunted wolves over the past three years.

- What motivates hunters to hunt: appreciation of nature (98%), spending time outdoors (96%), rest and relaxation (95%), and exercise (91%).
- During the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 hunting seasons, 88% of the hunters practised hunting.
- On average, the respondents have been hunting for 23.5 years and travel 104.2 kilometres to reach their usual hunting ground.
- Wolves disrupted the hunting of 24% of the respondents. Most of the time, the wolf had scared off the game (58%), had hunted or killed the game (21%), had responded to moose calls (10%), or had been prowling around the hunters (8%).
- Moreover, 36% of the hunters have previously found carcasses of animals which appeared to have been killed by wolves.
- Only 5% of the hunters have hunted wolves over the past three hunting seasons.

Conclusions and opportunities for reflection

The main purpose of this study was to gain better knowledge of the perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of hunters living near the park regarding the wolf, in order to improve the communications and educational activities intended for them. With respect to this objective, it is relevant to emphasize the following points:

- The majority of hunters are sympathetic to the cause of the Eastern Wolf. Indeed, many of them say they have already seen or heard one.
- Many hunters attach importance to the wolf's presence in the Mauricie region. However, a certain percentage of respondents said that wolves reduce the number of opportunities for small game hunting.
- The majority of hunters appear to overestimate the number of wolves in the region and in the park. This might explain why a lower proportion of hunters are in favour of increasing the wolf population, compared to the positive attitude hunters seem to have regarding this species.
- Very few hunters appear to have hunted wolves over the past three years.
- Finally, this study also shows that hunters have better knowledge of the wolf than other communities.

Opportunities for reflection

- It is important to better inform hunters to dispel false beliefs about the wolf. This information could be disseminated via oral and written communications distributed to homes in the area, via mail, hunting magazines, etc.