



# Study of the attitudes, perceptions and knowledge of residents of the region bordering La Mauricie National Park regarding the Eastern Wolf

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## REALIZATION OF THE STUDY

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The realization of a study on the Eastern Wolf such as the one carried out in 2006 with residents of the region bordering La Mauricie National Park of Canada 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

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In the winter of 2007, Parks Canada conducted a study on the Eastern Wolf with residents of the region bordering La Mauricie National Park of Canada. 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 residents), namely their attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and behaviours concerning the Eastern Wolf.

By determining the human dimensions of the region's residents, 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 residents, 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 residents aged 16 and over who live in areas adjacent<sup>1</sup> to La Mauricie National Park of Canada.

A total of 300 telephone interviews, lasting 16.4 minutes on average, were conducted between December 7 and 14, 2006 with a sample of residents randomly selected among the regions targeted by the study.

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<sup>1</sup> The regions targeted by the study were grouped into three major sectors:

Southeast sector of the park: Saint-Alexis-des-Monts, Charrette, Saint-Élie, Saint-Boniface-de-Shawinigan, Saint-Mathieu-du-parc, Lac-Wapizagonke, Saint-Gérald-des-Laurentides, Lac-à-la-Tortue, Saint-Jean-des-Piles, Grandes-Piles, Hérouxville, Rivière-Mékinac, Saint-Séverin, Saint-Tite, Sainte-Thècle, Lac-aux-Sables, Notre-Dame-de-Montauban, Saint-Adelphé

Grand-Mère/Shawinigan sector: Grand-Mère, Saint-Georges-de-Champlain, Shawinigan, Shawinigan-Sud

Northern sector of the park: Lac-des-Cinq, Kiskissink, La Bostonnais, La Tuque, Lac-Berlinguet, Lac-des-Moires, Lac-Pellerin, Lac Tourlay, Lac-Édouard, Langelier, Obedjiwan, Parent, Petit-Lac-Wayagamac, Rivière-Windigo, Weymontachie, Rivière-Matawin

To ensure a representative sample, a weighting was applied based on the population of the various regions under study.

The maximum margin of error is 5.7% for a confidence level of 95%.

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

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### **Experience with the wolves**

*Residents' contact with the wolves seems relatively high among residents of the Mauricie region, particularly in the Regional Municipality of County (RMC) of La Tuque.*

- Fifty-one percent of the respondents affirm they have previously heard a wolf. Of this number, 48% have had this experience at least four times.
- Thirty-four percent of the residents appear to have previously seen a wolf. More than half of these residents (60%) have seen a wolf at least twice.
- In both cases, the RMC of La Tuque is the region where this experience occurred the most often.
- The reactions of residents were mixed. Some were afraid, surprised or worried, while others found the experience enjoyable.

### **Factual knowledge about the wolves**

*This study shows that certain facts are more or less known by the population.*

- Half of the respondents (51%) believe that there are different types of wolves in Quebec.
  - In their opinion, the main differences that make it possible to distinguish between these different species are colour (36%), size (19%), weight (17%) and leg length (12%).
- For 45% of the residents, a wolf pack succeeds in killing a wild prey each time or one time out of two.
- For 59% of the residents of the Mauricie region, the wolf is considered an endangered species in Canada.
- One resident out of five (21%) says that the wolf feeds mainly on beavers.
- Nearly a third of the residents think that the park's area is not big enough to ensure the wolf's survival, and 32% believe that attacks on humans are more frequent in the most populated regions.

## **Sources of information about the wolves**

*A relatively low proportion of the population has had previous access to information about the wolf. Moreover, residents seem rather unaware of Parks Canada's efforts to communicate and disseminate information about the wolf in La Mauricie National Park.*

- A third of the residents (36%) have seen or received information about the wolf.
  - Among the most frequently cited sources of information are books (35%), television (31%) and magazines (22%).
- The vast majority of residents (88%) have never received information about the wolf from Parks Canada.
  - On the other hand, the Parks Canada communication methods that have reached the greatest number of residents are the picnic grounds interpretation activity (4%), the campground talk (3%) and the La Mauricie National Park Web site (3%).

## **Beliefs about the wolf**

*Residents have relatively positive feelings concerning the wolf, and very few of them are afraid of it. However, the wolf is perceived as being much more deadly than it is in reality.*

- The wolf is feared by a lower proportion of residents (8%) compared to the bear (36%). However, for 36% of the respondents, these two species are both seen as dangerous to humans.
- The feelings of residents concerning the wolves are relatively positive: 46% like them, 36% are neutral and 18% dislike them.
- Residents perceive this animal as being more deadly than it is in reality. In fact, there has been only one officially documented case of death caused by a wolf in the last one hundred years in Quebec. However, 29% of the respondents believe that this species has killed more than five people during this same period.

## **Beliefs and attitudes concerning the number of wolves**

*A good many residents overestimate the number of wolves in the Mauricie region and in the national park.*

- Perceived average number of wolves in a pack in the Mauricie region: 11.5 wolves / pack.
- Perceived average number of wolves in the Mauricie region: 592 wolves. On the other hand, 28% of the residents estimate that there are between 1 and 100 wolves.

- A third of the residents (32%) believe that the proportion of wolves has diminished, 38% think it is stable and 19% believe it has increased.
- Perceived reasons for the reduced wolf population in the Mauricie region: trapping (21%) and hunting (17%).
- Perceived reasons for the increased wolf population in the Mauricie region: less hunting (5%) and availability of food (4%).
- Perceived average number of packs in La Mauricie National Park: 20.5 packs.
- Perceived average number of wolves in La Mauricie National Park: 173 wolves. On the other hand, nearly half (48%) the residents estimate that there are between 1 and 100 wolves in the park.
- A quarter (25%) of the residents believe the population has diminished, 43% think it is stable and 21% believe it has increased.
- Perceived reasons for the reduced wolf population in La Mauricie National Park: presence of humans (18%), trapping (11%) and lack of food (10%).
- Perceived reasons for the increased wolf population in La Mauricie National Park: less hunting (5%) and protection of the park (5%).

### **Perceptions and attitudes concerning other aspects of the wolf**

*While a high proportion of the population is in favour of protecting the wolf, a smaller proportion would agree to increasing the number of wolves in the region and in the national park.*

- A somewhat higher percentage of residents believe that there is a sufficient number of wolves in the region (45%) and in the park (46%); 38% of the residents would agree to increasing the number of wolves in the region and 40% would agree to increasing the number of wolves in the park. Reluctance to increasing the number of wolves is mainly due to the danger this species poses to humans (51%).
- However, 76% of the residents view as important the efforts made by Parks Canada to protect the wolf population.
- According to residents, the negative impacts on wolves include human presence (16%), their negative image (10%), hunters (8%) and deforestation (8%).
- When asked for their opinion, 60% and 59% of residents agree that negative impacts include trapping and logging, respectively.
- There seems to be a place for the wolf in the region and it is important to maintain it as a species:

- For 69% of the residents, wolves occupy an important place in the park's ecosystem.
- Moreover, whether or not they ever come into contact with a wolf, 68% of the residents believe the wolf's presence in the Mauricie region is important.
- For 67% of the residents, it is equally important to maintain wolf populations in the region for the benefit of future generations.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR REFLECTION**

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### **Conclusions**

The main purpose of this study was to gain better knowledge of the perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of residents 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 residents are sympathetic to the cause of the Eastern Wolf. Indeed, many of them say they have already seen or heard one.
- Most agree that the wolf is an endangered species and that wolf populations must be protected.
- The majority of residents tend to overestimate the number of wolves in the region and in the park. This might explain why a lower proportion of residents would be in favour of increasing the wolf population, compared to the positive attitude residents seem to have regarding this species.
- This study also shows a lack of knowledge about the wolf. Very few residents claim to have previously consulted information on this topic.

### **Opportunities for reflection**

- It is important to better inform residents to dispel false beliefs about the wolf. This information could be disseminated via oral and written communications in La Mauricie National Park, distributed to homes in the area, made available in tourist information centres, schools, libraries, etc.
- Other presentations and conferences given by specialists could also be considered.

Residents' perceptions and attitudes concerning wolves can be changed over the long term. By pursuing these communication and educational initiatives, La Mauricie National Park will meet the objectives it has set itself.