

Bath and Associates

Dr. Alistair Bath
Bath and Associates
48 Old Pine Line
Middle Cove, NL, A1K 5A1
Phone: 709 437-6780

Attitude and Knowledge Study

Human Dimensions in wolf conservation:

Understanding trapper's attitudes toward wolves in and around La Mauricie
National Park of Canada

Ce rapport sommaire est aussi disponible en français à l'adresse : <http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/200/301/pwgsc-tpsgc/por-ef/index.html> sous Parcs Canada.

December, 2006

Bath, A.J. 2006. Human Dimensions in wolf conservation: Understanding trapper's attitudes toward wolves in and around La Mauricie National Park of Canada. Report submitted to Parks Canada, Quebec Service Centre. 96 pp.

Acknowledgements

Many individuals and organizations have participated in this study. These people contributed greatly to this study by their devotion, their passion and their interest in understanding and addressing wolf conservation issues in and around La Mauricie National Park of Canada.

Project manager

Planning, monitoring, supervision, part of analysis and reporting

Marie-Andrée Leith, Evaluation advisor
Parks Canada

Memorial University of Newfoundland

Planning, analysis and reporting

Dr. Alistair Bath
Suzanne Smith

La Mauricie National Park of Canada

Marie Lavoie, Superintendant
Jacques Pleau, Denis Masse, Mario Villemure, Albert Van Dijk and Mélanie Bernier

Parks Canada Species at Risk Recovery Action and Education Fund

Stéphane Bruneau and Sylvain Paradis

Ministry of Natural Resources and Wildlife Quebec

Pierre Canac-Marquis and Hélène Jolicoeur

Executive summary

The purpose of this human dimension (HD) research study is to identify and document using a quantitative approach the key beliefs, attitudes, behavioral intention and actual behavior of a representative sample of trappers who trap near the park and in the La Mauricie region toward wolves and wolf management issues.

Basically, the study explores whether attitudes toward wolves differ across trapper experience, distance to trap lines, type of permit, whether trappers specifically trap for wolves, age, type of land and location.

A final part of the study and this report addresses specific aspects of trappers' behavior: the month they capture wolves, the number of captures and where these captures occurred, the trapping devices and techniques used, and the means of information trappers use to learn more about wolves.

A total of 312 questionnaires were returned producing an acceptable response rate of 54% from a mail-out questionnaire that consisted of approximately 50 items.

Given the median age of trappers (51 years old), it is interesting that such a large percentage of trappers (46%) have less than 15 years experience suggesting that participation in the activity may have occurred later in life than as a child influenced by an adult. Perhaps even more interesting is the relatively large percentage (19%) of trappers who have less than six years of trapping experience.

Most trappers (71%) use public lands, although nearly one third (29%) did indicate trapping in the ZEC or reserve lands, rather than crown land. For many trappers (47%) their place of residence is within 50kms of their trap line, however, slightly more than 31% of trappers travel greater than 100kms to participate in this recreational activity.

While most trappers (83%) when asked about their motivations for trapping stated that they enjoyed the challenge and the opportunity to test their skills and abilities (78%), a

large percentage (76%) agreed or strongly agreed that they trapped because wolves were present on their territory.

Wolves are an important part of a trapper's overall income for approximately 21% of the trappers in our study.

Trappers hold positive attitudes toward wolves generally liking the animal, believing that it is important to have the wolf for future generations, and believing in the right of the wolf to exist. Trappers, however, do not agree that the wolf contributes to tourism.

While 51% of trappers did believe that wolves have a significant impact on big game hunting opportunities, most trappers did not believe that wolves had a significant impact on wild game available for trapping, small game available for hunting, or on livestock in the region. In contrast, approximately 74% of trappers did believe that forestry exploitation has a significant impact on wolves. Interestingly, trappers who had trapped wolves or who had tried to trap wolves were statistically significantly more likely to agree that wolves had a significant impact on big game hunting opportunities than trappers who did not attempt to trap wolves.

While in general, trapper's knowledge about wolves is reasonably solid. Close to 40% of trappers believe wolves are extremely successful in killing prey. Such a belief could lead trappers to perceive much greater impacts of wolves in the region. Focusing educational messages on the success ratio of wolf attacks and providing a better understanding of this predator-prey relationship could be beneficial to improving acceptance of the wolf.

In 2001, the eastern wolf was given special concern status indicating that the population should be carefully managed. While most trappers hold positive attitudes toward wolves and support having wolves in the region, most trappers believe that the wolf population is stable or increasing, and thus it is unlikely this interest group will see the necessity to practice the required conservation measures to further protect the wolf. Hence, there is a great need to better communicate the issue of population size to the trappers.

While 39% of trappers believed the wolf population in the La Mauricie region was increasing, only 28% perceived wolf numbers as increasing inside La Mauricie National Park of Canada within the last three years.

Trapper's attitudes toward specific management actions like increasing numbers and whether there are enough wolves seem to be less formed amongst trappers as large percentages are both in favor and against these statements. For example, 42% of trappers disagreed to some degree with increasing wolves in the La Mauricie region but 29% agreed in some way, and 29% were neutral suggesting that this group may be swayed in either direction depending upon communication messages designed and targeted toward these trappers. When asked the same question regarding the national park, a larger percentage of trappers (35%) were neutral and approximately one third were in favor and the other third against.

Attitudes of trappers toward imposing limits on the number of animals permitted per trapping season were quite divided. While 49% disagreed to some degree with limiting the number of wolves permitted per trapping season, 41% of trappers agreed with limits; 10% of trappers neither agreed nor disagreed. It would seem for Parks Canada and wildlife managers interested in engaging trappers further in decision-making, this topic could be worthy of some facilitated discussion.

Most trappers agreed that wolf management is important to them personally within the La Mauricie region and a large percentage of trappers (over 80%) also wanted to be kept informed about wolf management issues inside the national park. Such results should be encouraging to Parks Canada managers who wish to continue actively working with key interest groups on important park management issues.

The more years of trapping experience held, the more likely the trapper's attitudes will be less positive toward wolves or slightly negative toward wolves.

Trappers under professional, trapper's aid or the general permit do not have any differences in their attitudes toward wolves and wolf management issues.

Perhaps the most important variable influencing trapper attitudes toward wolves is their perception of the status of the wolf population both within the La Mauricie region and the national park. If trappers believed that the wolf population was increasing, they tended to disagree with placing limits on the number of animals that could be harvested during the trapping season. If they held beliefs of a stable or declining population they supported limits.

While park brochures have indicated that the wolf is vulnerable and a species of concern, population status of wolves remains a topic that is not widely communicated well and yet this message is the key to wolf conservation. If trappers believe the wolf population is stable or increasing they do not support increases of wolves and become less positive or negative to the large carnivore. Knowledge that the population is decreasing directly affects attitudes and gains public support for wolf conservation.