

WILDLIFE

Wolf killing will never be solved

Candace Burns**October 2, 1995**

Note: This article is a sidebar to this issue's feature story, [Did Idaho libel the feds?](#)

The wolf shot on Gene Hussey's remote ranch south of Salmon, Idaho, trotted to her death just nine days after federal biologists set her free in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness.

B13 parted from 14 other transplanted wolves to travel some 60 miles alone, leaving the wilderness and entering Hussey's pasture where she came upon cattle. Hussey discovered the shot wolf Jan. 28, three miles from his house. It was lying in blood, its nose just inches from a dead calf (HCN, 2/20/95).

Before Hussey notified federal authorities, he arranged to videotape his walk through the kill site with a local veterinarian, Bob Cope. "Whoever shot it probably thought it was a coyote," Hussey said then, "and I think anybody who killed it would be a damn fool to admit it."

If Hussey or his representative had killed the wolf in the act of wounding or killing his livestock on private property, it would have been considered legal under the Endangered Species Act, as long as authorities were notified within 24 hours.

If the wolf was killed eating a dead calf, then the shooting would have been illegal and the penalty as much as one year in prison and a \$100,000 fine.

What happened? It depends on which experts you listen to.

In and around Salmon, the question is usually answered this way: The wolf pulled down a live calf; the “feds” doctored the necropsy to make a legal act look illegal.

Locals still talk about Hussey’s videotape, which seems to show the calf’s lungs had been inflated, indicating it was born alive. When Layne Bangerter, a local Animal Damage Control officer, examined the body, he says he found the calf showed some hemorrhaging on three of its four legs as well as on the throat. Bangerter also says the calf had ingested its mother’s milk.

But a later necropsy by Richard Stroud, who works at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s forensics lab in Ashland, Ore., found “no evidence that the calf was killed by the wolf.” Stroud found the lungs were poorly inflated and the calf’s tissues showed no sign of hemorrhage. Evidence of hemorrhage would indicate that the calf’s heart had been beating when the wolf tore into its abdomen. Stroud found no bruising in the neck, either. His conclusion: although the calf was born alive, it died shortly thereafter of causes related to birthing. The wolf “scavenged the carcass,” concluded Stroud, and that means whoever killed the wolf broke the law.

Veterinarian Cope believes no one will ever know what happened on Hussey’s ranch. “Can we prove the wolf killed the calf? No. Can they prove the wolf didn’t kill the calf? No,” said Cope. “Ain’t nobody going to come up with the answer to it.”

Some good news came out of the brouhaha. Wolf recovery team leader Ted Koch says cooperation between his agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Sheriff Brett Barsalou “has been excellent.”

Hussey, who believes no law was broken on his land, has asked the federal government to reimburse him \$500 for the loss of his calf to a reintroduced wolf. He is represented by the Mountain States Legal Foundation, a conservative group in Denver.

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