

Wolves

From the beginnings of the park in 1927 until the 1950s, Park Management was concerned about predation of elk, moose, and deer. The primary target of this concern was the timber wolf. There were poison bait programs and wardens were ordered to shoot wolves at every opportunity. Ironically, by the 1960s, Park Management was ordering elk kills due to overpopulation.

Unintended Consequence

Warden Ed Sipes Sturgeon Crossing District

When I was about six years old I went with my dad on a back country truck patrol near Lofthouse Creek at the north end of Sturgeon Crossing district. My dad spotted a pack of wolves sunning themselves on a ridge beside the trail. The dominant male wolf was standing atop the ridge and watching us intently while the rest of the pack was behind him slightly over the crest of the ridge. Dad turned off the truck ignition and we coasted to a stop. He quietly opened his door and got out sliding his rifle out from under the seat as he went. He braced the rifle across the hood of the truck. What he did not realize was that I had picked up his binoculars and was watching the wolf through the window on the other side of the truck. When he fired I got to see the wolf's head explode at 7X magnification. I had nightmares for weeks after that.

The Wolf Gun

The Wolf Gun was an absolutely diabolical contraption. It was a cylindrical metal object that looked somewhat like the nozzle for a garden hose. The nozzle end was the muzzle that could be screwed off to access the chamber. The chamber accepted a .32 caliber pistol cartridge. Rather than being loaded with a lead bullet, the cartridge contained a poison cyanide capsule. The other half of the gun was the trigger mechanism. The trigger looked like the head of a nail protruding out the rear of the gun. When loaded and screwed back together the nail head could be pulled out until it clicked into the cocked and ready position. There was no safety. Each gun came with a metal stake to which the gun could be attached by hooking the nail head of the trigger mechanism into a notch on the stake. The gun was baited by wrapping something like a piece of animal skin around the muzzle. Any tug on the bait would fire the poison capsule.

The guns were totally non-selective. Any creature that would take the bait would be blasted by cyanide poison including the operator in the event of an accidental firing.

The wolf gun issued to my dad resided at the very back of the very top shelf of a cabinet in the warden's equipment warehouse. To the best of my knowledge, it never moved from there until he returned it unfired to the Park warehouse.