

Return of the Wolves

Endangered wolves could make a comeback, but first, people have to agree that "the big bad wolf" is not so big and bad after all.

Once the howl of the wolf was heard all over the wilderness in the United States. But by 1900, only a few thousand wolves roamed free in the U.S., mostly in Minnesota and Alaska. In 1973, the government put wolves on the endangered species list.

Animal activists are working to bring back the wolf. However, some farmers and ranchers worry that this meat eater will endanger their way of life.


In an experimental program, 31 wild wolves were brought from Canada and released in Yellowstone National Park in the last two years. Nine wolf pups were born in the park. Now, animal activists want to repeat this success story in New York, Maine, New Mexico, and Arizona.

The Wolf Debate

In New York, dairy farmers worry that wolves will attack them or their livestock, but animal activists disagree. "The big bad wolf image is a lie," says one activist. "There is no record of wolves ever hurting humans."

On the other hand, wolves have been known to attack livestock when the wolves' normal food supply was scarce. A farmer near Adirondack (ad-uh-RON-dak) Park in New York, where wolves may be released, is worried. "Big dairy farms are 200 miles from the park. That's within the traveling distance of wolves," he said.

Similarly, in New Mexico, ranchers worry about wolf attacks on their cattle. In response, one group of activists, Defenders of Wildlife, has agreed to pay for livestock lost to wolves. They paid a



This gray wolf pup and its mother are two of about 200 gray wolves living in the Northwestern U.S.

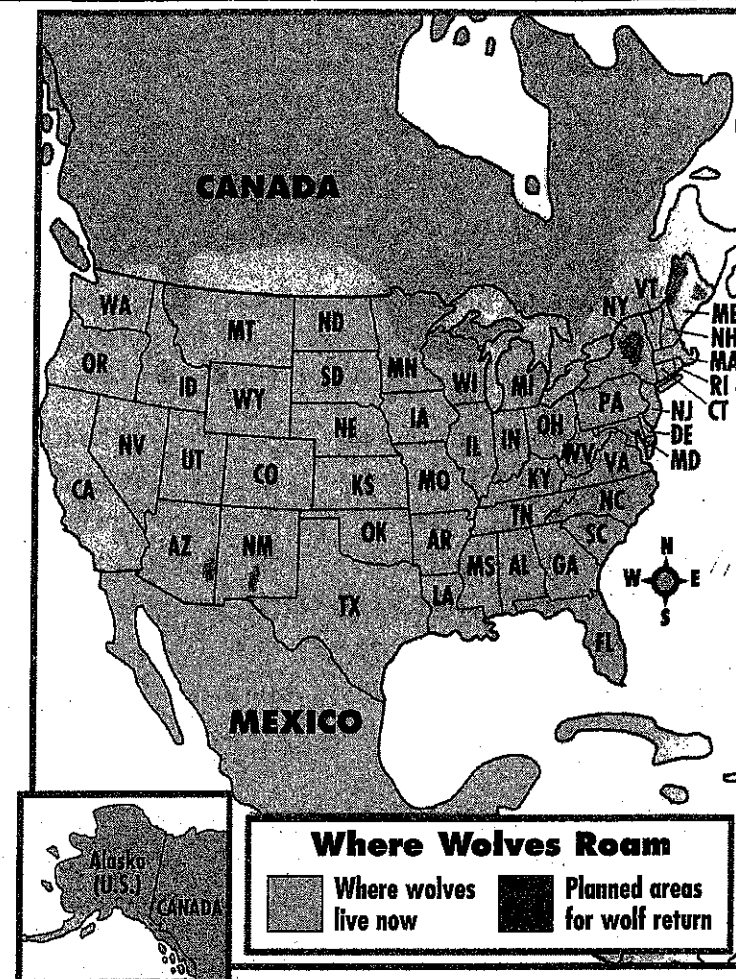
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rancher near Yellowstone National Park after a wolf killed two sheep. They also returned the wolf to Yellowstone.

The Balance of Nature

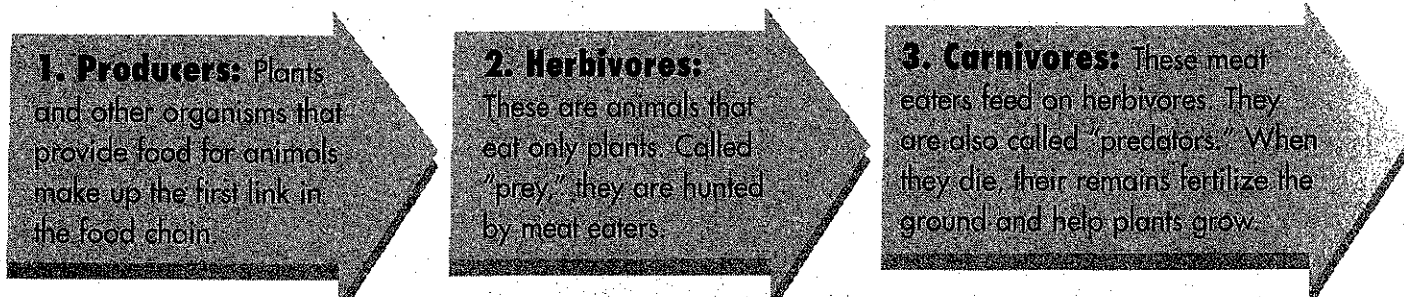
Animal activists point out that wolves are an important part of the **food chain** (see diagram, below). They hunt and eat large grazing animals. In the Adirondacks, deer and moose herds have grown so large that there is not enough food for them. Activists say wolves will prey on the sick weak animals. That will keep herds healthy and maintain the balance of the **ecosystem**.

It may be years before wolves are released in New York. However, wolves may be returned to New Mexico and Arizona far earlier. Animal activists hope wolves will become a familiar sight across the U.S. Until then, wolves will be common only in fairy tales.



How the Food Chain Balances Nature

Animals depend on plants and other animals for food. This feeding relationship is called a *food chain*. This diagram shows you how a food chain works.



Points of View About Releasing Wolves in the Wild

Use the graphic organizer below to compare and contrast the different points of view you read about in "Return of the Wolves."

Ranchers and Farmers

Activists