

Martin Davis
Rancher

Interviewer-John Howe

What was your reaction to the re-introduction of wolves to Yellowstone?

Martin Davis

We weren't real happy when we found out that they planned on re-introducing the wolves to Yellowstone. They were eradicated for one reason back when and that was that livestock and wolves don't mix, and so we tried, when I say we, the ranching community tried to curb the possibility of getting them re-introduced because we knew that if they did come back to Yellowstone that they would be outside the park and into our cattle as quickly as they did.

Interviewer-John Howe

Tell me what the affect of wolves has been on this valley.

Martin Davis

As the wolves became more populated in the park they started coming out of the park down here into this ranching community, and there has been depredation on cattle and sheep. This is really bad on the small herds of sheep in the valley, a lot of problems with the cattle raisers, not only in depredation on the cattle but for the weight loss and the added stress on the cattle. So, it's been a real hardship.

Interviewer-John Howe

Tell me about the public land just a little bit. Who owns the public land, and who should have a say in how they're run. What I'm really talking about is the locals, things that are made in local communities as opposed to say back in Washington D.C. Who should have that say in it-what kind of impact does it have on local people?

Martin Davis

The public land in the area's mostly all national forest service, with a little bit of state owned ground. There is some allotment grazing on the government land, however it's all locals that do the grazing on that government land, and whenever the cattle are taken off of a grazing it's a real detriment to the area. Because those cattle have to graze somewhere when the cattle leaves, so does the folks that raise them, and as that happens more subdivisions show up and less cattle are raised here in the valley.

Interviewer-John Howe

Who owns the public land and who should have the say? And this is the analogy that we were just talking about.

Martin Davis

The public land is mostly a forest service owned land. It's the locals that are running cattle, raising cattle, on that ground, and it seems as if we have no say on what happens to our cattle on these forest service lands. The decision is being made elsewhere, be it east

coast-Washington, or wherever, and it's just like the gators down in Florida. I know nothing about gators, and why should I tell Floridians what to do with their gators, and it's the same thing here. Why should someone out of our neck of the woods be telling us what we do with our country here?

Interviewer-John Howe

We're going to meet with Secretary Salazar as I was mentioning, what would you say to Secretary Salazar regarding wolves and grizzlies in this area, and the potential de-listing of these animals?

Martin Davis

If I was to meet with uh Secretary Salazar, one of the questions I would ask is, "Why don't we have more of the say of what happens in our country here"? And when I say our country, our state of Montana here, rather than people that live a thousand miles away have a say on what happens here, more of the say on what happens here in Montana than we do.

Interviewer-John Howe

Should wolves and grizzlies be on the endangered species act? Or should they be de-listed in your opinion?

Martin Davis

My opinion is that both grizzly bears and wolves are fully recovered. And they should be taken off the endangered species list. Those numbers of both wolves and grizzly bears, mostly wolves, those numbers need to be curbed. And people say, "Well when there's a hunting season they're going to kill them all". That can't happen, we have very small numbers of permits that are going to be allowed, and at the most it would be-well very few wolves would be killed with hunting seasons. We need to start to get the numbers of wolves lessened, to lighten up the load on the wild game, and the stockowners.

Interviewer-John Howe

Tell me about grizzly problems or is this community having problems with grizzly bears as well as wolves?

Martin Davis

As far as the grizzly bears we have very few problems. Once in a great while you hear of a grizzly bear in campsites, mostly in the backcountry, some elk hunters have been having problems with them. A few times you hear about some of the livestock owners having problems with grizzly bears, and sheep, and cattle, but not near as much as a problem as the wolves have been.

Interviewer-John Howe

Tell me about the challenges, in terms of the economy for ranchers.

Martin Davis

The way the economy is now any penny you can pinch, any penny you can make, it

affects that bottom line. And with diesel fuel the price it is, trying to get the hay put up for the cattle and horses, every penny that you can keep in your pocket is a plus. And when you've got predators out there taking that money out of your pocket it becomes a real problem, a real concern, and it does make selling out look more comfortable all the time.

Interviewer-John Howe

Tell me about the environmental community, how are they to work with generally?

Martin Davis

Most often the environmental community-the folks that voice their opinion more often than not feel that the wild animals should have reign over everything else. What I try to tell them is that we aren't just out there raising this livestock for our good, we're feeding this nation-this world, and the wildlife is not. We all want to see wildlife, of course, and we don't want to see anything extinct, but we're trying to make a living, and trying to feed this country.

Interviewer-John Howe

What would you like to see for the future in regard to wolves, what would you like to see happen?

Martin Davis

What I'd like to see happen to the wolves is to have them delisted and to be able to curb their numbers ever so slightly. If we can harvest a few wolves it'll make the remainder of the packs more scared of humans, they'll stay away more. And I think it'll be better for the wolves overall, and certainly for the stockowners. If we can curb those numbers slightly, and get the fear back in those wolves that man is the Supreme Being here.

Interviewer-John Howe

Tell me a little bit about the history of the ranch here, and then also what this land and lifestyle means to you.

Martin Davis

The ranch here we've owned for forty-five years. We actually ranched in Colorado before we moved here. My folks bought the ranch and my brother and I have been running the place ever since. I'm a fourth generation rancher, and it gets in your blood, I mean it's what you. We certainly wouldn't want to be doing anything else and we love the area. We'd like to stay here, but as things get tougher and tougher we don't know. Our real estate is worth a substantial amount, we don't even want to know how much just simply because we want to stay here, and so we hope we can still make a living here.

Interviewer-John Howe

We were talking about the elk herds and you've seen some changes with these elk herds. Tell me about the changes and why those have occurred.

Martin Davis

The elk herds that we do our hunting with have changed dramatically. Some places in the state, more elk are there, and I think a lot of that is due to the wolves pushing elk from one area to the next. The area that we hunt, or that we have to hunt, we've seen the population plummet. Early spring you see herds of cow elk, every one of them has a calf, and yet by September there's only two or three calves left in the herd. And that did not happen until wolves were re-introduced. And we've seen that population just plummet in that area there. And the elk population in Yellowstone Park also has just fallen way off and that's due to the wolf predation. Sure the grizzly bears kill some and the professionals try to tell us that it's a mostly the grizzly bears. I'm sorry but I do not believe that, it's the wolves that have really hammered on the elk population.