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Government Research to Kill Wolves

Hot on the tail of last month's *Wild Lands Advocate* article by Dick Dekker, "Alberta's War on Wolves, Then and Now," AWA has learned that government research in west-central Alberta will include the sterilization and killing of wolves.

On November 8, Alberta Fish and Wildlife met with local hunters and trappers in Rocky Mountain House to discuss the research program that is being carried out in cooperation with the University of Alberta. The project will involve trapping an existing "alpha pair" of wolves, sterilizing them, and releasing the pair back onto the landscape. All other members of the pack will be killed. The project is looked at by the provincial government as a possible way to increase ungulate populations, especially elk, which have been declining in the mountains for the past 10 years.

According to Fish and Wildlife, west-central Alberta boasts the highest density of wolves in North America, with 20 animals per 1,000 km². The area is also one of the most important elk wintering areas in the province. While wolf predation is a pressure on ungulate populations, it is only one of a number of factors, including habitat loss through expanding human access.

The government's willingness to kill wolves is in notable contrast to its failure to do anything to address the real issue of habitat destruction. Wolves have been killed in the past two winters in the Little Smoky area northwest of Hinton, nominally to protect the area's woodland caribou herd, described in the government's Caribou Recovery Plan as "at immediate risk of extirpation." The plan, however, clearly states that habitat damage is the principal issue affecting caribou numbers.

- *Chris Wearmouth and Nigel Douglas*

