

May 9th 2011, to B&C Club committee

Dear Colleagues,

My e-mails pertaining to hydatid disease in Idaho have been met with deafening silence, except from Finland where retired moose and wolf biologist Kaarlo Nygren wrote back in response to my suggestion that we are seeing at best the tip of the iceberg: *“Thank You, Val! The iceberg is there and Titanic is heading to it with people dancing on its decks”*. His words, not mine. But then Finland has had historically tragic experiences with wolves and hydatid disease. As I informed you, it was Fins that marshaled army helicopters and sub-machine gunners to deal with the spreaders of hydatid disease. It was Fins that translated Will Graves 2007 book *“Wolves in Russia. Anxiety through the Ages”* which I had edited and found a publisher for. Moreover, they upgraded the book with additional Russian material and published it again as a second edition. It was Fins that publicized my observations how wolves target alternative prey, humans included, which I first reported on in a Wildlife Society symposium in Madison on September 27th 2005, and which I published as Appendix B in Will Graves book. They labeled the stepwise progression from exploration to attack as *“Seven Steps to Heaven”*. Nice humor. Moreover, the same progression was discovered six years earlier in coyotes stalking children in urban parks by professors Rex Baker and Bob Timm. Fins are sensitized to wolves and hydatid disease and the heavy-handed machinations by the EU bureaucracy in Brussels to make Fins accept wolf-conservation-legislation built – alas - on false premises. I am well aware that this raised deep resentment in the country side, and may have been a factor in the surprising rise and recent electoral victory of the conservative, anti-EU party. My e-mail suggest similar sentiments in our west.

The introduction and spread of wolves in the United States will one day – not now – be considered a disaster in wildlife conservation with nothing to celebrate. We shall eventually learn what we have not learned from history, namely, that wolves and settled landscapes are not compatible. Yes we have a great cultural triumph in the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation for which our Club can take credit. However we also have suffered failures, like our inability to stop game ranching, and are now settle with CWD in our deer and elk populations, a disease feared, certainly by Canadian experts, because it has jumped species barriers, including in experiments, and which does convert - in vitro – healthy human prions into malignant ones. And then there is another failure as evidenced by the breeding for commercial consumption of “improved trophy deer”, a crippling wreckage which is, fortunately, unlikely to propagate in the wild state. Fortunately that we do not recognize such artificial cripples in our trophy judgment.

Here is the primary problem: **Wolves, probably well-infected with dog tape worm (*Echinococcus granulosus*) are hunting and killing elk and deer close to and with in hamlets and suburbs and defecating on lawns, driveways and school grounds in Idaho and Montana.**

Now, if nothing else but this were known, than it is an utterly unacceptable situation as these visiting wolves will almost certainly contaminate the hamlet, suburb or school ground with hydatid disease. Secondly, this sets up the beginning of habituation and the targeting of people by wolves, children being the most likely potential victims.

In short – if wolves visit residential areas, we have an intolerable breakdown of management at hand with very serious medical implication for people. This is not merely a breakdown in conventional wildlife management, it is a breakdown in governance.

However, we do know more than this! Apparently, a very brave and responsible citizen called a public

meeting to announce the existence of the disease, a first operation on a lady who had most of the liver removed due to multiple cysts at a cost of apparently \$63,000, as well as others with cysts in their liver. We shall find out more soon.

The wolf feces on lawns and driveways is likely to contain large amounts of tiny, microscopic eggs, hydatid eggs, which can be spread and enter homes carried on foot wear, carried by tires from the drive ways into the family garage, or carried by domestic dogs that roll on wolf feces into houses where petting the dog transfers the eggs to hands. Unwashed hands touching food, or kids chewing fingernails etc can carry the eggs into the mouth. Eggs mingling with house dust can also wind up inside persons, especially toddlers crawling on the floor and putting their hands into their mouths.

The pathway of hydatid eggs entering the house via ranch dogs feeding on infected deer and elk offal, developing adult tape worms in their gut and spreading infective feces, as I described earlier (Montana Legislature's Environmental Quality Council, on April 27th 2010), may or may not have happened. However, any dog be, it a ranch or a hunter's town dog rolling in wolf feces is a serious threat to the family.

I will not bore you with describing the progress of that disease. It's dreadful! Apparently some state biologists have been downplaying this disease. I ask you not to fall into that trap! Also, the cost of this disease, in your country will be born by the affected family, victims of the breakdown in governance that we are witness to.

The main reason that hydatid disease has not been prevalent to the north of Idaho in British Columbia is that trappers have continued to remove wolves at a fairly high rate, aided by predator control officers, and an open season for all hunters on wolves. There are some 900 registered trappers in BC and they hold contests as to who can kill the most wolves. The 2010 winner took first prize with 30! Second prize was responsible for 29!

Similarly in Alberta there is no limit on wolves for trappers and hunters – and wolves are still spreading causing consternation in the ranching community. However, we have no wolves hunting in suburbs, hamlets or cities – as hunters alone would quickly shoot any wolf bold or sick enough to show itself.

In my earlier presentations I have been diplomatic trying to point out that my US colleagues have not explored in the professional literature the precise conditions under which hydatid disease is most prevalent as well as highly dangerous. Reciting that the disease is rare among patients of big urban hospitals does not reflect on the prevalence of the disease!

I understand that Idaho has passed emergency legislation in the form of bill H343. It is time to use it. Similar legislation failed to pass in Montana. Secondly, to stop this wildlife management disaster and failure of governance the wolves have to come off the endangered species list, and there is legislation to that effect tied up in committee both in the congress and in the senate.

What can we do as a club? Our position has to be that, based on historical information, wolves do not belong into settled landscapes and legislation to that effect counters the public good. Secondly, we need to be adamant that wolves entering settlements need to be destroyed.

Sincerely, Val Geist

