

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

UM Graduate Student Research Conference (GradCon)

Apr 18th, 12:00 PM - 12:20 PM

Which wolf, which trap? Socially constructing wolves and trapping in western Montana

Andrew Myers

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/gsrc>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Myers, Andrew, "Which wolf, which trap? Socially constructing wolves and trapping in western Montana" (2015). *UM Graduate Student Research Conference (GradCon)*. 2.
<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/gsrc/2015/oralpres2c/2>

This Oral Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in UM Graduate Student Research Conference (GradCon) by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

Andrew Myers

Which wolf, which trap? Socially constructing wolves and trapping in western Montana

In 2011, after nearly forty years of federal protection, gray wolves were removed from the Endangered Species List in Montana and their management entrusted to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. For some, wolves are critical to ecosystem health and an essential part of nature, for others they are a symbol of government overreach threatening their livelihoods and cultural values. The implementation of annual trapping seasons as a method to reduce perceived negative impacts from a growing wolf population has further inflamed an already embroiled debate. The purpose of this research was to investigate various meanings of wolves and wolf trapping being constructed in western Montana. A discourse analysis of reader-contributed newspaper texts in Missoula and Hamilton was conducted. Data between 5/9/2012 and 2/8/2014 were gathered from letters to the editor, guest columns, and online comments from the *Missoulian* and the *Ravalli Republic* and imported into NVivo. Following Potter and Wetherell's (1987) guidelines to discourse analysis, these data were thematically coded and analyzed for patterns. Results reveal a significant range of themes across both study sites with the most prominent themes relating to ecological concerns and ungulates. Various meanings of wolves were identified such as the 'ecological wolf', the 'endangered wolf', the 'predatory wolf', and the 'cold blooded killer wolf', and various meanings of wolf trapping such as 'trapping as public hazard' and 'trapping as management tool'. While it is no surprise that people have different perceptions, these findings suggest that, beyond perceptions, people are constructing vastly different realities about wolves and wolf trapping in a manner that encumbers the possibility for productive dialogue. This highlights an imperative need to reframe the debate over wolf management not as a competition of opposing values, but rather as an exercise in communicating across cultures.