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Experiencing wolves in Yellowstone National Park: The wolf watching story

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EXPERIENCING WOLVES IN YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK: THE WOLF WATCHING STORY

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Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Recreation Management

School of Forestry
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December 2000

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In 1995 wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park. One unexpected outcome has been the visibility of the wolves and emergence of wolf watching as a major recreational activity. Thousands of people are now arranging their vacations and lives around the possibility of getting a glimpse of a “wild” wolf at Yellowstone National Park. This new phenomenon of wolf watching has emerged as an integral part of the Yellowstone experience. While much research was done about the impact of wolves on the ungulate, bear, coyote, and other animal populations, no studies have documented the impact of wolves on visitor experiences, wolf watchers themselves, and their implications to management. There is also limited information about how the wolf watching experience affects the values, attitudes and behaviors of the participants. Thus, exploring the visitor’s perceptions of wolves, how these perceptions are shaped, and how these issues influence social conflict over wolf reintroduction and management remains an important research issue.

This exploratory study attempts to identify and describe the range of experiences and meanings associated with this new phenomenon of wolf watching. Using a social constructivist approach, this study analyzes in-depth interviews with wolf watchers to explore (1) the public’s social constructions of wolves and how these constructions are influenced and shaped through interactions with wolves in various contexts; (2) the nature of the recreational experiences individuals seek with respect to wolves and; (3) how current social conflicts are affecting public perceptions; and, (4) how new opportunities to interact with reintroduced wolf populations affect people’s perceptions of wolves in the future. Interviews were analyzed by developing a system that identifies predominant themes through which interviews can be organized, interpreted and presented. The results discuss the dynamics of the wolf watching experience, the broader meanings of the Yellowstone wolves and how this experience is incorporated into the participant’s life and into the total Yellowstone National Park experience.
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CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND

Introduction

*Canis lupus*, the wolf; the words conjure vivid images. The persona of the wolf has metamorphosed with time. For the colonists of the New World the wolf represented the dark unknown of the wild lands, a force to be fought. Killing wolves was symbolic of lashing out at the wilderness (Lopez 1978). Oftentimes hatred of the wolf had root in religion, with the wolf as the Devil in disguise. Hostility continued through the era of Manifest Destiny, the westward expansion; the wolf became an unwanted competitor for ranchers' livestock and hunters' prey. The perception of the wolf as an enemy underlay the predator control programs that eliminated the wolf from ecosystems throughout the United States. Due to more recent cultural and environmental changes, however, public perception of wolves has changed. Studies done by Adolph Murie, Douglas Pimlott, and L. David Mech sparked people's interest in the wolf, an interest that turned into concern and compassion. And as understanding ecology has grown, the wolf has become recognized as an integral part of biodiversity and ecosystem integrity. Especially in relation to Yellowstone National Park, the wolf has been associated with restoration, the Endangered Species Act, and a public with a more enlightened view on natural resource issues.

History of Yellowstone National Park

Yellowstone National Park (YNP) was established in 1872 to protect its unusual and interesting geothermal features. Throughout its history, YNP has been an important symbol of America. Established as the first national park, Yellowstone has paved the way
for many management philosophies. YNP can also be viewed as a symbol of Americans' values with regard to the environment. When Yellowstone is viewed through time, distinct eras of management direction can be observed (Foresta 1984; Sellars 1997). Each of these eras reflects the social values placed on YNP at the time, the leadership of Yellowstone and the National Park Service, and the unique opportunities that present themselves in an area as distinct as YNP.

The establishment of YNP, although not exclusively for wildlife, benefited wildlife by preserving the habitat and eliminating hunting. This, however, did not save the wolves from persecution. Even with the establishment of YNP wolves were killed inside the confines of the Park until there were no wolves left. The Park itself had established a predatory control program set to eliminate the consumption of large game animals by predators. From 1908-1937 132 wolves were killed during the predator control program and by the late 1930's the wolf was gone from YNP.

In 1972 the first meeting to discuss wolf restoration in YNP took place. In 1980 a recovery plan for wolves in the Rocky Mountain Region of Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho was approved. In 1989 the USDI was required to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on YNP wolf restoration. The EIS was authorized in 1991 and completed in 1994. During 1994 wolves were trapped in Canada and readied for transport to YNP. On January 12, 1995, eight wolves arrived at YNP and on Jan. 20 six more wolves were brought in and held in acclimation pens. On March 21, 1995 the wolves are released from the acclimation pens. By the summer of 1999 there were 11 wolf packs in the YNP area and approximately 110 wolves roaming the greater Yellowstone region.
Need for Research

Viewing of wildlife, especially the watching of wolves, has caused increased use of the Lamar Valley area of Yellowstone National Park; this has several implications for park management and visitor experiences. While much research was done about the impact of wolves surrounding ungulate, bear, coyote, and other animal populations, very little is known about wolf watchers and their implications for the management of Yellowstone National Park. There is also limited information about how the wolf watching experience affects the values, attitudes and behaviors of participants. To better serve this visitor population and reduce their potential impacts, more needs to be known about them.

Up to this point the research issue has been presented in terms of the need to understand social conflict driven by different perceptions of wolves. Yet there is another important research question that can be viewed as a recreational issue. Reintroduction efforts, especially in Yellowstone National Park, provide opportunities for visitors to interact with wolves in a recreational context. Wolves appear to have replaced grizzly bears as the park's marquee animal and have provided a unique, and in some ways unexpected, recreational opportunity (Burns 1999). However, little is known about wolf watchers, how to manage this experience to provide quality recreational opportunities, or how these recreational opportunities influence visitor perceptions of the wolves.

Despite growing favorable perceptions of the wolf, anti-wolf sentiment still exists. This continued hostility is a result of a variety of factors including continued concerns about economic loss (Bath 1987), fear that diminished ungulate numbers may affect
hunting opportunities (an issue long evident in Alaska and now emerging with respect to reintroduced populations in Idaho), animosity toward a policy perceived to be driven by the federal government, and other reasons. Thus, although the public climate for wolf restoration is generally positive, strong public opposition to wolves remains in some subpopulations.

Ed Bangs, USFWS wolf coordinator says that "biology of wolves is not the issue, today or in past. The symbol of the wolf, good or bad, is what drives the controversy," (Burns 1999). The benefits of a positive perception toward wolves help to facilitate its return and "contribute indirectly toward long-term conservation of wild species and biodiversity in North America," (Fritts, Bangs, & Gore 1994). However it is not clear how current social conflicts are affecting public perceptions or how new opportunities to interact with reintroduced populations will affect people's perceptions of wolves in the future. Thus, exploring the public's perceptions of wolves, how these perceptions are shaped through interactions with wolves in various contexts, and how these issues influence social conflict over wolf reintroduction and management remains an important research issue.

Wolves provide an excellent opportunity for developing a research program exploring the social construction of wildlife. First, wolves are prominent members of both the ecological and the social landscape. Second, wolves currently occur in a variety regional social contexts: naturally occurring populations of gray wolves in Minnesota and Montana; reintroduced populations of gray wolves in central Idaho and the Yellowstone ecosystem; reintroduced populations of red wolves in Tennessee and the Carolinas; and current attempts to reintroduce the Mexican gray wolf in Arizona. Such variation in
contexts will facilitate research exploring the ecological, social, and experiential factors shaping social constructions of wildlife. Finally, recent social conflicts associated with reintroduction efforts (a senate subcommittee proposed adding a rider to the FY 2001 Interior Appropriations Bill that would direct the US Fish and Wildlife Service to automatically remove gray wolves entering Oregon from neighboring Idaho; the shooting deaths of five Mexican gray wolves in Arizona thought to be part of an intentional, systematic effort to undermine reintroduction efforts; a bill (HB 240) introduced in the New Hampshire state legislature that would prohibit reintroduction efforts in New Hampshire, as well as discourage reintroduction efforts elsewhere in the Northeast; the emergence of wolf watching as an important visitor experience in Yellowstone National Park) make the study of wolves in particular an important and timely issue.

This research project is intended to be the first stage in establishing a more extensive research program exploring these issues. Since wolf watching is a rather new phenomenon, this is an exploratory study attempting to identify and describe the range of experiences and meanings associated with wolf watching. For this research project, I have selected one study site to begin addressing these issues. Yellowstone National Park represents a logical choice. It currently provides a recreational opportunity with respect to wolves; thousands of people are arranging their vacations and lives around the possibility of getting a glimpse of a "wild" wolf at Yellowstone National Park. Although it was initially thought that wolves would remain hidden from the general park visitor, (Varley and Brewster 1992), they have not. Wolf sightings from the roads, especially on the NE entrance road through Lamar Valley, have been prevalent since the wolf reintroduction (USDI 1997). Additionally, there has been previous research on human perceptions of
wolves in the region using different approaches (e.g., Bath's (1987) attitude study) and different populations (e.g., Scarce's (1998) study of the social constructions of local landowners and residents); these provide a useful foundation for a broader understanding of the relevance and implications of the results from the present study.

This study has two broad goals: (1) to explore the public's social constructions of wolves and how these constructions are influenced and shaped through interactions with wolves in various contexts and (2) to explore the nature of recreational experiences individuals seek with respect to wolves. Four themes were explored that fall under these two broader goals:

1) Nature of the experience: What is the YNP experience? What is the wolf watching experience like? How do the two relate to each other?

2) Alternative ways of experiencing wolves: What is the nature of the experience of seeing wolves in captive situations versus in YNP? What is the nature of the experience of seeing wolves in books, posters, movies, television, etc?

3) Broader meanings of wolves: What do the wolves mean to the participant? How does the participant perceive the wolf?

4) Centrality to life: What is the centrality of the experience to the person's life?

These four themes led to even more specific questions that were asked for this research.

These questions really focused and guided the research:

1. What are the dynamics of the experience itself?

This question examines how the visitors try to experience wolves. Do they go into the backcountry to see wolves, or do they just pull over on the side of the road? The dynamics of the experience also encompass other components. How important is an actual sighting? Is it more important to see a pack versus just a lone wolf? Is hearing wolves howl or seeing their tracks important to the experience? Does just a glimpse of a wolf mean the same as observing behavior? Do observations of particular wolf behaviors affect the experience differently? By this we mean does seeing a wolf kill mean as much or less than seeing playful behavior? Another aspect is the social experience and the role of stories told by other visitors and how does this affect the experience?
2. Are there distinct classes of wolf watchers and what are their different experiences?

We want to identify the spectrum of wolf watchers and what their experiences are. How different are a first time wolf watcher's experiences from that of a highly involved, long-term wolf watcher? Do the different types of wolf watchers seek the same type of experiences? Are there stages of specialization in the evolution of this activity for some visitors?

3. What is the effect of context on the experience and social construction of wolves?

Wild versus tame is an important distinction in the social construction of animals (Arluke and Sanders 1996). Is seeing the wolves in a natural setting different from a zoo? Are the wolves seen as wild in some areas, but not in other areas? What is the contextual difference? An example of this type of discussion would be the elk in Mammoth Hot Springs in Yellowstone National Park. To some visitors the elk are still considered wild, while to others the elk have lost their sense of wildness. Is there such an occurrence with wolves?

4. To what degree are visitors' social constructions of wolves anthropomorphic in nature versus a more impersonal, ecologically grounded view?

In Yellowstone National Park, the park decided not to name the wolves because, "Assigning nicknames to wild animals reinforces our tendency to reduce the value of wildlife to merely how much they mean to us, rather than affirming the intrinsic value of wildlife and wild places," (Taber 1995). How successful has this been? Even without names, have visitors personalized the wolves in such a way that it has reduced the status of these wild animals? Do the pack names, identifying numbers, and published "family trees" serve the same role as names? Do visitors create their own names for the different wolves?

5. What is the background and history of the visitor and how does this affect the experience?

This question encompasses both the long and short term background. In the longterm: What in their past has shaped their perception and their relationship to the wolf? Did they grow up with a positive relationship towards the wolf, or did it evolve with time? In the short-term: How did the visitor prepare for the visit? Did the individual read books on wolves before visiting and somehow prepare for the trip? Do the visitors know the background of the wolves through their reading and, if so, how does this influence their experience?

6. What is the ripple effect of wolf watching?

For visitors who have watched wolves previously, is it possible to determine if the wolf watching experience has affected the visitor's daily life at home? Has the
wolf watching experience changed or supported their construction of the wolf? Has it increased their interest in wolf issues or wildlife issues in general? How have they related their wolf watching experience to others? Has it become a way of identifying themselves to others?

Such research should lead to several main outcomes. 1) It should develop a typology of wolf watchers with an indication of the importance of wolves to the visitors’ experience at YNP. It can also be useful in determining the visitors’ expectations and motivations. 2) It should create an understanding of the wolf watching experience itself. 3) It should create an understanding of the visitors’ social constructions of wolves. This understanding can aid in both identifying support for the wolf as well as better understanding the visitor for management implications. 4) It should, by discussing the context of the experiences, provide information about YNP’s role in reintroduction processes nationally and in broader environmental issues. The information provided can be used in identifying support for wolf issues within the park and on a larger scope. 5) It should, through better understanding of the visitor, improve management through cooperation, increasing support for management policies and by targeting communication. These five outcomes may help one understand the unique role that this research and YNP will play in the next era of America’s relationship with the natural environment.

Thesis Organization

The preceding research questions guided each component of this study. The first chapter lays out the foundation, which allows one to see how this wolf issue sits in a larger context and shows how the social construction of the wolf is influenced. With this
background set, one can see the need for social research on this wolf watching phenomenon in Yellowstone National Park.

Literature review, the second chapter, explores previous work that influenced this study. It looks at research done on the nature of the experience, specialization, and meaning and social construction. Each of these components was influenced by the guiding questions listed above.

The third chapter lays out the methodology of this study. The first section discusses the study site, the Lamar Valley in Yellowstone National Park. The second section details the qualitative research approach used to gather information. In the third part, I describe the sampling frame, clarify issues related to generalizing the results and layout when I sampled. Data collection, the fourth section, focuses on the role of the interview guide and the interview itself. The last section, data analysis, develops themes and discusses the nature of the knowledge generated and the criteria to be used to evaluate my study.

The fourth chapter is the results chapter that lays out the findings of this study. It organizes the findings under the four themes previously discussed: nature of the experience, alternative ways of experiencing wolves, broader meanings of wolves, and centrality to life. The chapter first discusses the dimensions that are important to the participants' YNP experience. It then focuses on the wolf watching experience and the different elements of that experience that are important to the participants. I then discuss how the participants distinguish the YNP wolf watching experience from other wolf experiences. Next, the broader meaning of wolves is explored through the discussion
with the wolf watchers. Finally, how central the wolf watching experience is to the participants' lives is explored.

The fifth chapter summarizes the findings and leads a discussion about the findings and how they relate back to the purpose of the study. This chapter also discusses what the contribution of the study is to the recreation and human dimensions of wildlife fields.

The final chapter explores the implications of the study. In other words, what are the management implications as well as future research questions that arise from this study will be discussed.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

As stated in the previous chapter, the research questions have very much guided this study. These questions can be seen in the four themes previously discussed — nature of the experience, alternative ways of experiencing wolves, broader meanings of wolves and the centrality of the experience to the participant’s life. It is correct to say that these four themes have also guided the discussion of the review of relevant studies and work done. However, because the wolf watching experience in YNP is still quite new and rather unexpected, I needed to review work done within a broader context than just wolf watching in YNP.

As you’ll read, I have laid out this chapter in a way that guides you through a discussion of relevant work under these broader themes. I start broadly by discussing the experience literature since the wolf watching phenomenon is an experience that fits into the broader spectrum of the nature of the total Yellowstone National Park experience. In this topic of experience, I briefly discuss some general experience research and then focus on wildlife viewing experiences. I then shift the discussion onto specialization and involvement. Finally, I discuss the shift in paradigms occurring in human dimensions of wildlife work. This discussion looks at how the approach I’m taking will be able to explore the broader meanings of wolves put forth by the wolf watchers.

Experience

The outdoor recreation experience literature is often grouped with broader leisure experience since the two are closely linked. Living through an event is an experience (Webster’s 1994). Rossman (1995) continues this idea by saying it requires that “one
participate in and interpret it” (p. 10). This indicates that it is not a passive act, but one that denotes complexity. A recreation experience is dynamic, changing over the course of the engagement (Hull, Stewart & Yi 1992). In previous work, Klausner (1967) discussed the dynamic nature of experience in a study of the parachuting experience, finding that the fear and enthusiasm levels changed throughout the experience. This dynamic nature of experience lends to its complexity (Hammit 1980; Ingham 1987; Mannell and Iso-Ahola 1987).

Part of the complexity of recreation experience is that it is multi-phasic. The nature of a multi-phasic recreation experience is important in reflection of the wolf watching experience; interviews indicate that the wolf watching experience has several phases. Clawson and Knetsch (1966) identified five phases of the recreation experience. These five basic phases are 1) anticipation, 2) travel to the site, 3) on-site experience, 4) return travel, and 5) recollection of the experience. This multi-phasic nature of recreation experiences is supported by empirical studies done by several researchers (e.g. More & Payne 1978; Hammitt 1980; Hull et al 1992; Stewart & Hull 1992; Stewart 1998; and McIntyre & Roggenbuck 1998). A recent study explored mood, satisfaction and landscape scenic beauty of hikers on a trail in the White River National Forest (Hull et al 1992). Hikers answered questions about these three dimensions at twelve points on their hike. Results indicate that there was a shift over time in their response indicating the dynamic nature of recreation experience.

Another way to envision the nature of the recreation experience is Coe’s (1985) elements to a memorable experience. Memorable, by Coe’s definition, means that it makes a lasting imprint on the long-term memory. Instead of breaking the activity into
phases as predominately done in recreation, Coe focuses on how to make the recollection of the experience long lasting. Coe lays out six elements that are involved in making a memorable experience. These elements are 1) anticipation-knowing that there is the possibility of encountering a wild animal, 2) lack of distraction, 3) novelty-the recreation experience is novel enough that habituation hasn’t deadened the senses, 4) fulfilled expectation, 5) emotional involvement, and 6) reinforcement-reliving the experience for others. The combination of these elements leaves a vivid multi-sensory impression on the participant.

The next section narrows the discussion of experience research, focusing on research done on the wildlife viewing experience.

Wildlife Viewing Experience Research

Many general studies have addressed the wildlife viewing experience (Shaw, Mangun & Lyons 1985; Hastings & Hammitt 1985; Duffus & Dearden 1990; Duffus & Wipond 1992; Manfredo & Larson 1993; and McCool 1996). This is because wildlife viewing is an important aspect of outdoor recreation in America. A 1988 USDI report showed that about 109.7 million of all adult Americans had actively participated in non-consumptive wildlife related activities such as feeding, observing nature, watching birds, and/or photographed wildlife during 1985. The same report showed that a total of 167.5 million Americans six years of age or older participated in one or more kinds of wildlife associated recreation for 1985. In 1982 the USDI reported that 17 percent (28.8 million) took one or more trips of greater than a mile from their homes for the primary purpose of non-consumptive wildlife appreciation. Clearly, wildlife viewing in general is valued
greatly in the United States. And as discussed later, the commitment level of the non-consumptive wildlife user can fall between the casual observer to avid enthusiast (Shaw 1987).

In addition to numerous studies on wildlife viewing, there have been numerous studies on wolves and wolf reintroductions (Varley & Brewster 1992; Mech 1970, 1991a, 1991b; Phillips 1996; and Tilt, Norris & Eno 1987). These studies discuss the impact of wolves on many things (elk, bison, coyotes), but leave out one fascinating aspect—the recreational aspect.

In the following paragraphs, I lay out five pertinent studies done on the wildlife viewing experience, ending on a study that is quite similar to mine in that it examines the wolf in a recreational context. As I explain these studies, a connection will be built between them and my own study on the wolf watching phenomenon. Although other wildlife viewing studies have been conducted, I think these give particular insights into wildlife viewing that can be applicable to wolf watching in YNP.

Why would people come to scan the open spaces and valleys for a brief glimpse of a wolf? Shaw (1987) discusses this question with a similar activity—whale watching. He believes that although the actual activity of looking out at the horizon is not intrinsically recreational, the excitement of participants is there and the sighting of a whale becomes the highlight of the trip. “Clearly, the essence of this recreational experience lies in the mind of the beholder rather than in any observable behavior. The demand for this form of recreation comes from people’s knowledge that whales are the largest mammals, that they are intelligent, and that their existence has been threatened by human exploitation and from the human interest in learning more about these creatures,”
The similarities between Shaw's research on whale watchers and wolf watching are evident. Wolf watching is in demand and it may stem from people's knowledge about wolf ecology, the demise of their existence in the west and the hopeful return of them to their native ranges, and from people's interest in learning more. It is interesting to note that other whale watching studies focus more on the economics of whale watching and the attitudes of participants rather than the experience itself. This is indicative of much of the research done on wildlife viewing.

Bruce Hastings and William Hammitt conducted a study addressing public preferences and perceptions toward wildlife viewing in 1985. The purpose of the study was to "determine the role that wildlife viewing plays in visitation of Cades Cove and the [Great Smokey Mountains National] Park, and to identify aspects of park management which could improve interpretation of wildlife" (p. 49). The expectation of seeing wildlife was a major factor of visiting Cades Cove for nearly three fourths (73.7%) of the respondents. "Seeing wildlife was also a significantly more important reason for visiting than any of the other five reasons listed--seeing historical features, for the drive, camping or hiking, listening to bird calls, by accident" (p. 50). Another interesting issue for management is that over half of the visitors (58.1%) left their vehicles specifically to observe wildlife and 46.2% admitted to approaching wildlife.

The implications of this and future research are far reaching. What would be the management implications for YNP, if similar results were found there? Most of the charismatic megafauna at YNP, the animals people would most approach, may feel threatened and defend themselves with life threatening consequences to those individuals. Not only should the research "promote formation of models which describe relationships
between expectations, numbers and types of wildlife seen, and trip satisfaction" (p. 55)
but it would also help with "future integration of visitor perception and existing scientific
knowledge of the on-site wildlife resource will help park managers develop better
education and resource management programs concerning wildlife viewing" (p. 55).

Manfredo and Larson (1993) developed a classification of different wildlife
viewing experiences. They classified respondents into four experience types -- high
involvement experience, creativity experience, and occasionalist experience --, based on
recreation involvement using the experience based framework. What was found was that
wildlife viewing preferences, activity preferences and informational preferences differed
among the four types. They also discovered the animals most important for viewing were
"eagles" and "rare and endangered species" (p. 231). Could this be the reason that people
flock down to YNP to watch wolves—because they’re an endangered species? Another
finding was that 90% of their sample was interested in taking a trip to view wildlife,
while only 60% were participating in wildlife viewing.

A similar study by Martin (1995) focused on the preferences for recreational
wildlife viewing experiences. He found that the scenery or landscape was the primary
attraction to Montana for those participants who were not visiting exclusively for
business, conventions, shopping, or passing through. For the high involvement
participants, viewing wildlife was the second highest attraction to Montana following
scenery. Only fifteen percent of the entire sample did not participate in wildlife viewing.
Lack of participation in wildlife viewing was highest among the low involvement group.
Another interesting result of this study was that regardless of the involvement level,
information on the best locations to view wildlife was the most desired type of

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information. What this study indicates to me is that wildlife viewing is an important component of American recreation; eighty-five percent of his sample participated in wildlife viewing. A management implication of this study is that the provision of information of where to look for specific wildlife species is important.

The last study to discuss is Wilson and Heberlein's (1996) study that brings the wolf and the tourist into a recreational context. They looked at wolf tourists as a subgroup of nonconsumptive wildlife users. The wolf tourists that they dealt with were those in Ely, Minnesota and at the International Wolf Center. The continuum that Wilson and Heberlein construct is based upon the underlying assumption that the opportunities for encounters with free ranging wild wolves on a predictable cycle is low due to the wolf's elusive nature. This underlying assumption, made in regards to wolf tourists in a recreational context, doesn't appear to be true for the recreational context in YNP. Perhaps, it is because of the setting, and thus the experience most often available in Minnesota is quite different from that in YNP. The setting in Minnesota is forest, which makes it harder to see wolves, whereas in Yellowstone there are wide open spaces for wolf watching.

The wolf tourism continuum that Wilson and Heberlein construct relates to the degree and control of human interaction with wolves. At one end is events that bring the wolf to the tourist in highly controlled situations, at the other end is where the tourist goes to the range of the wolf (Figure 1).
What is interesting about the continuum is the lack of the type of experience opportunity available at YNP. At Yellowstone, tourists aren’t allowed to howl for the wolves, nor do they field track for wolves and go to kill sites. At YNP, tourists have the ability to see free ranging wolves, in their wild habitat, albeit usually from quite a distance. I think that my results will create a different continuum on the wolf tourist, in specific the wolf watcher. This is because the opportunities for wolf watching experiences are quite different in YNP than in Ely, Minnesota.

The discussion now shifts from experience literature where I reviewed general experience studies and work focused on wildlife viewing experiences to a discussion on specialization.

**Specialization**

On my first exploratory trip to Yellowstone National Park, I noticed immediately that there were obvious differences among the wolf watchers. Some wolf watchers had
incredibly powerful (and expectedly expensive) scopes in which to watch the wolves, whereas others had binoculars of varying powers. There were even some wolf watchers that had no equipment other than their eyes. The more I went to YNP, the more I noticed differences and similarities among the wolf watchers and it is these observations that led me to explore specialization as an integral part of explaining the wolf watching phenomenon.

So what is specialization? Specialization research comes out of the psychology discipline and the work done by Little (1976). Little’s work focused on the specialization loop, which is composed of three elements: the cognitive system, the behavioral system, and the affective system. This idea is elaborated on later, when it is brought into recreation specialization conceptual models.

Hobson Bryan brought specialization into recreation research. His work builds the foundation for subsequent studies and theoretical discussions. Understanding his work helps to understand where specialization work started and is going. Bryan defines specialization as, “a continuum of behavior from the general to the particular, reflected by equipment and skills used in the sport and activity setting preferences” (1977, p. 75). He felt as though that one could use specialization to “infer the meaning and significance attached to the activity, leisure orientation in general, and the relationship of the sport to occupation and lifestyle” (1977, p.186). Bryan introduced this subject of specialization through research on trout fishing. What he did was identify four types of anglers on the specialization continuum based on frequency of participation, setting preferences, technique preferences, choice of equipment, importance of catch, social setting of the activity and preferences for resource management (Bryan 1977).
Bryan discovered four resulting propositions. They were 1) that anglers, over
time, tend to become more specialized, 2) that a leisure subculture with unique minority
recreationist values exists with the most specialized participants, 3) there is a shift on
what is important that occurs as one becomes more specialized, such as a shift from fish
consumption to preservation to an emphasis on the activity’s nature and setting, and 4)
there is a increase of dependency on resource types as specialization increases (Bryan
1977). The importance of these propositions is that they have become the basis for
further conceptual and empirical work on specialization.

This concept of specialization has since been applied to numerous studies with a
variety of methods. Wellman and others (1982) looked at norms of depreciative behavior
among canoeists, Williams and Huffman (1986) used specialization to explain recreation
choice, Kuentzel and McDonald (1992) explored river use specialization, while both
Hollenhorst (1987) and Merrill and Graefe (1997) discussed specialization in rock
climbers. Often specialization is used through a specialization index which is based
upon questions pertaining to usually three categories. These categories have generally
explored 1) investment into the activity, either through equipment or economic
commitment or both, 2) past and/or recent experiences, and 3) centrality to lifestyle.
Unfortunately, how these categories are measured, ie with what questions and or
measurements, is not consistent through studies dealing with specialization. It is also
important to note that not all specialization studies use these same categories. The lack of
consistent measures is often cited as a criticism to specialization studies, although it can
be argued as beneficial in trying to determine what works and doesn’t work.
Three studies that I think have merit to mention more in-depth are Donnelly, Vaske and Graefe (1986), Virden and Schreyer (1988) and Martin (1997). I think that these studies bring into the specialization dialogue useful concepts that can be used to look into this wolf-watching phenomenon. What all these studies on specialization indicate is that the concept of recreation specialization is a useful and practical tool for segmenting recreationists.

Interestingly, Donnelly, Vaske and Graefe (1986) applied this notion of specialization to compare individuals participating in different recreational activities. What they suggest is that there is a specialization hierarchy by which participants in different recreational activities or subactivities can be classified. How this is done is through specifying a degree of specialization, as well as a range of specialization. Degree of specialization pertains to the location of an individual on a specialization continuum, whereas the range refers to the length of that continuum. Donnelly and others hypothesized that the degree and range of specialization would be inversely related, but what they found in their study on boaters is that although the degree of specialization increases as one moves up the subactivities, that there was no difference found in the range of specialization. This area can be further explored in specialization research. This idea of a specialization hierarchy between different activities or subactivities is pertinent to wolf watching in that it can be umbrellaed under the broader activity of wildlife viewing. By using this concept, one could gain useful insight into the differences and similarities among different wildlife viewing groups, i.e. birdwatchers and wolf watchers. This could be especially valuable in areas, such as YNP, where there are many wildlife viewing opportunities and wildlife viewing specialists for different species. Being able to
compare different activities or subactivities may help with management issues pertaining to such activities.

As opposed to Donnelly and others applying specialization to participants in different recreational activities, Virden and Schreyer (1988) to one recreational group, hikers. Virden and Schreyer (1988) used several measures of experience, commitment, and centrality to lifestyle as an index to specialization on a study of hikers in three western wilderness areas. The results of the study indicate strong relationships between specialization and a series of physical, social, and managerial setting attributes for backcountry recreation opportunities.

Steve Martin (1997) used specialization to explain differences in setting preferences by wildlife viewers in Montana. In his study, the items used to measure specialization were 1) ten or more wildlife viewing trips in the previous year, 2) studied or made notes about the behavior, habitat, or other such aspects of the wildlife seen on past wildlife-viewing trips, 3) used specialized equipment on past wildlife-viewing trips, and 4) participated in an organized survey or count of wildlife in the past year. The results show significant differences between the three specialization groups (identified as novices, intermediates, and specialists) in their preferences for “types of wildlife to view, types of wildlife-viewing information desired, sources of information, setting attributes, and observed wildlife” (p. 13). However, the groups appeared to agree on the following three types of information that they would find most useful, 1) the best locations for wildlife viewing, 2) the types of wildlife that may be seen in that region, and 3) what the best times to view wildlife are.
Although much of the theoretical base for specialization was outlined by Bryan, it has expanded and been clarified through subsequent studies. An element of importance to the concept of specialization is the idea of social worlds. A social world can be defined as, “an internally recognizable constellation of actors, organizations, events and practices which have coalesced into a perceived sphere of interest and involvement for participants” (Unruh 1979). Manning (1999) describes these social worlds as, “reference groups of recreationists who share a common level of specialization and help to define the meanings, preferences, and norms of behaviors that are associated with such levels of specialization” (p. 230).

One can use social worlds to help categorize participants for conceptual purposes. An example of this is when Unruh (1979) developed a continuum of specialization that indicated changes in participants from one subworld type to another. Unruh developed four generalized subworlds of strangers, tourists, regulars, and insiders, based upon the participant’s proximity to the knowledge of the social world and its activities. The theoretical dimension by which the subworlds can be ordered along has these four characteristics: orientation, experiences, relationships, and commitment. Based upon how participants fit with these characteristics, they can be categorized into one of the four subworlds – strangers, tourists, regulars, or insiders.

Unruh’s typology was based upon orientation, experience, relationships, and commitment whereas most recreation specialization typology was based upon investment into the activity, either through equipment or economic commitment or both, past and/or recent experiences, and centrality to lifestyle. Because of Unruh’s typology basis and the work on social worlds Ditton and and others (1992) reconceptualized recreation.
specialization into “1) a process by which recreation social worlds and subworlds segment and intersect into new recreation subworlds, and 2) the subsequent ordered arrangement of these subworlds and their members along a continuum. At one end of the continuum is the least specialized subworld and its members, and at the other end of the continuum is the most specialized subworld and its members. Between these two extremes are any number of subworlds having intermediate levels of specialization” (p. 39).

At the same time as Ditton and others were reconceptualizing specialization by focusing on social worlds, McIntyre and Pigram were reintroducing Little’s idea of the specialization loop into recreation specialization research. The loop is comprised of three components: the cognitive system, the behavioral system, and the affective system. Much of the empirical and conceptual work in recreation specialization has focused on the behavioral and cognitive components of the loop. By putting the specialization process in a loop, the affective component is given the same importance that may give it more inclusion on research done.

As one can see from the diagram (Figure 2), each component refers to different aspects of specialization process. The behavioral component pertains to the frequency and intensity of the activity, the cognitive deals with the content and structure of the activity, and the affective system applies to the personal involvement with the activity.

Because it is a loop, the components are seen as mutually reinforcing. This is often seen as a critique of the model, because an underlying assumption is that the components are positively correlated, which in fact may not always be the case.
Figure 2: Components of the Specialization Loop (Little 1976, McIntyre & Pigram 1992)
However, even with this critique, the loop is important because it shows specialization as multidimensional. Some say that specialization may bind an individual to a single point along the continuum, when in fact that individual may shift depending on circumstances. Research also shows that another dimension should be added to specialization (Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, & Watson 1992; Mowen, Graefe & Virden 1998; Donnelly et al 1986). This dimensions is place attachment. This is because "place specialists", people that are attached to specific locations or similar types of areas, are emerging out of this research. This is especially true in wilderness research (Williams et al 1992).

A component of specialization that merits more discussion is the idea of personal identity. Bryan (2000) articulates that as a person moves toward the more specialized end of a continuum, that their identity becomes more defined in terms of that particular activity. In other words, as specialization increases, a participant’s identity becomes more entwined with the activity.

The identities that people have of themselves affects the way in which they judge their experiences and their reality. A discussion on personal identity and identity theory will strengthen the understanding of what the experience is and what it means to the participants. Through personal identities, people are able to predict and control the nature of social reality, which is necessary for survival (Swann, Griffen, Predmore, & Gaines 1987). An extension of this is that identities motivate "role performances because those role performances are meaningful" (Riley & Burke 1995, p. 62). Burke (1980) and Thoits (1991) discuss this idea through role identities. To them role identities are self-conceptions that people apply to themselves "as a consequence of the structural role
positions they occupy, and through a process of labeling or self-definition as a member of a particular social category” (Hogg, Terry & White 1995 p. 256).

Identities are not stagnant, but are reflexive (Burke 1980; Burke & Reitzes 1981; Swann 1987). In social interactions others respond to our role identities, thus forming a basis for us to develop a sense of self-meaning. The importance of identity in a discussion of wolf watching is that, “identity is the pivotal concept linking social structure with individual action; thus the prediction of behavior requires an analysis of the relationship between self and social structure” (Hogg et al 1995 p. 257). This is because the individual, the self, is an active creator of social behavior while society provides the roles that are the foundation for identity and self.

Identity theory is used to explain individuals’ role-related behaviors. Under identity theory, identity is seen as a control system composed of four parts: input, comparator, identity standard, and output. The input is what comes from the environment, generally consisting of self-relevant meanings. This, along with the self-defining meanings from the identity standard, is brought to the comparator. Within the comparator these two sets of meanings are compared, if they differ dissatisfaction may be felt. After the meanings are compared, the flow goes into the output where meaningful behavior occurs dependent upon the magnitude of the difference in the meanings. This output allows for the modification of the situation, thus creating new perceptions for the input (Riley & Burke 1995).

In discussing identity theory, it is important to acknowledge that the self should be recognized as multifaceted. There are many roles an individual may be perceived as at any one time. These multiple role identities are organized hierarchically in the, “self
concept with regard to the probability that they will for the basis for action” (Hogg et al 1995, p. 257). Callero (1985) expands this thought with the idea that validation of a person’s status as a role member is confirmed through satisfactory enactment of roles. This also reflects positively on self-evaluation.

The preceding discussion explored the dynamics of specialization and the importance of it. The following section will now explore the paradigm shift that has occurred in human dimensions of wildlife and how it relates to my study.

**Previous and Present Outlook on Human Dimensions of Wildlife**

This section sums up what the past outlook and what the present outlook is in regards to human dimensions of wildlife work. There seems to be a shift in the paradigms being used for human-wildlife interaction research. Discussing this topic helps to lay the foundation of why this study was done, and how it was done. Of course, the methods used in this study will be explicitly laid out in the next chapter.

In an attempt to define the nature and scope of wildlife management Patterson and others (1999) have laid out how a variety of definitions, generally identify two fundamental roles for the profession: (1) that of stewardship in which wildlife professionals attempt to maintain wildlife populations and ensure their capacity to produce future generations and (2) that of facilitators in which the goal is to provide opportunities for people to interact with wildlife in personally meaningful ways. As stewards wildlife managers are confronted and constrained by the public's beliefs about the place and role of animals in society, animal rights, humans' moral obligations to wildlife, etc. Social science plays an important role in addressing these issues. As
facilitators wildlife professionals clearly need social science to help provide an understanding of the types of experiences and interactions people seek with wildlife. Human dimensions in wildlife research began to develop in earnest the 1970's to help address these types of questions. Two different conceptual paradigms serve as the basis for most of the research exploring questions of this nature. The first has been referred to as the Goal-Directed Paradigm and the second as Social Constructionism.

Goal-Directed Paradigm

The Goal-Directed Paradigm has been the predominant conceptual framework employed in human dimensions research. Research has centered around the use and development of attitude and satisfaction models. Attitude models serve primarily as a basis for exploring research questions relevant to the stewardship role. Attitudes are broadly defined "... as a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object" (Lutz 1990, p. 317). This general definition indicates why human dimensions researchers have been so interested in the concept; attitudes are related to the way humans behave with respect to an issue and, just as importantly, they are learned and therefore may be influenced or changed to help promote desirable behavior. Several distinct approaches to studying attitudes exist, and within human dimensions research, two distinct approaches are apparent. The first approach is illustrated by research such as Kellert's (1980) typology of attitudes and Bath's (1987) study of attitudes toward wolves in Yellowstone. This research approach seeks to provide wildlife managers with a better understanding of how the public perceives wildlife species in general and how these perceptions differ among various
stakeholders. The intent of this approach to studying attitudes is descriptive (i.e., to describe types of attitudes and how they differ across individuals) rather than explanatory or predictive (i.e., to use attitudes as a basis for explaining or predicting behavior).

The second approach to studying attitudes is illustrated by Bright and Manfredo's (1996) study of attitudes toward wolf reintroduction in Colorado. This approach attempts to show how attitudes are related to behavior. The appeal of this approach is that, in addition to characterizing attitudes of various stakeholders, it provides a basis for understanding the extent to which these attitudes influence behavior, identifying the underlying beliefs that shape attitudes, and identifying ways to change or influence attitudes to help resolve conflicts regarding wildlife management issues.

Attitude-based research has provided important insights into differences among various stakeholder groups and the nature of beliefs that drive attitudes and behavior. For example, Bright and Manfredo (1996) found emotions and deeply held symbolic beliefs about the rights of wolves to exist were most important in explaining variation in attitudes while the more objective, factual type beliefs appear to be of little importance. However, this finding also represents the limitations of this approach with respect to conflict resolution. Broad scale public education and information campaigns are most effective at influencing or changing beliefs that deal with objective, factual knowledge. In contrast, deeply held symbolic beliefs are resistant to change (Bright and Manfredo 1996) and in such situations facts and knowledge, though relevant, do not directly resolve conflicts. Thus, while this approach may provide useful insights regarding what symbolic beliefs the public might respond to in information campaigns, it is not well suited for yielding insights into how to negotiate a resolution to problems where
fundamental symbolic beliefs are in conflict. A second limitation is that while this approach documents the relationship between attitudes and behaviors and the nature of beliefs that shape attitudes, it does not address the question of what sorts of experiences or interactions shape or form symbolic beliefs.

Satisfaction research stems from the same underlying theoretical framework in social psychology as attitude research. The primary difference is in the nature of the research questions being asked. Rather than exploring perceptions or attitudes toward wildlife, the focus is on recreation experiences. The underlying goals of satisfaction research are to develop an appropriate measure of quality in recreation experiences and to identify factors that influence quality. Hendee's (1974) paper on the multiple satisfactions associated with hunting marks the emergence of this perspective in wildlife research. First generation studies adopting this perspective sought to identify the desired outcomes or "multiple satisfactions" associated with wildlife recreation and to develop reliable satisfaction measures. Second generation studies sought to construct predictive models to determine the relationship between various setting (e.g., number of animals seen, hunter density) and psychological (e.g., expectations, motivations) characteristics and overall satisfaction. In human dimensions of wildlife, satisfaction research has emphasized hunting (Hammit, McDonald & Patterson 1990) and fishing (Graefe & Fedler 1986); however, a few studies on wildlife viewing also have been conducted (Dulin & Hammit 1990).

While satisfaction research has greatly enhanced our understanding of recreation experiences and continues to evolve in fruitful directions, it also has important limitations with respect to the research questions underlying this proposal. First, although this
approach defines recreation as an experience, rather than directly examining the nature of the experience, it explores expectations, goals, desired outcomes, motivations, and cognitive judgments about outcomes actually received (satisfaction) (Mannell & Iso-Ahola 1987; Williams 1989). Thus, while the satisfaction approach may tell us that people visit natural areas to enjoy wildlife, this approach does not explore in any real depth what it means to "enjoy wildlife" (i.e., the content of what is enjoyed, the process through which people attend to and perceive wildlife, or how these experiences shape perceptions of wildlife). Second, the concept of prior expectations is central to existing satisfaction models (Patterson & Williams in press) and therefore this framework provides an inappropriate foundation for experiences that are highly novel or unusual such as wolf watching. Finally, the satisfaction approach provides no real basis for exploring how recreational experiences shape or influence the symbolic meanings that ultimately underlie people's perceptions of wolves and drive responses to conflicts related to wolf reintroduction and management.

Social Constructivist Paradigm

While research reflecting the Goal-Directed Paradigm has dominated human dimensions in wildlife research, in the last decade research representing a Social Constructivist Paradigm has emerged. One of the key distinctions between Social Constructionism and the Goal-Directed Paradigm centers around how the nature of meaning is conceived. In the Goal-Directed Paradigm, meaning is understood in terms of information (in fact it is sometimes referred to as the Information Processing Paradigm) (McCracken 1987). The term information here is used to describe meaning that is largely
a property of the object. That is, it refers to the tangible, physical, and factual properties of objects. Informational qualities of an object are perceived similarly by different individuals. For example, the taxonomic system in biology (kingdom, phylum, class, etc.) represents an attempt to organize and describe tangible, physical characteristics of nature. In contrast, with social constructionism, meaning is viewed as being as much a quality of the perceiver as of the object itself. Wilderness represents a classic example of a phenomenon better understood as a social construct rather than information; there is no definitive biological or objective property that defines wilderness. Rather wilderness is a human construction with variable individual and cultural interpretations.

Animals represent an intermediate class of phenomena. They can be understood, studied, and described in terms of tangible, physical, and factual properties (e.g., wolves are carnivorous mammals in the canine family) such as those typically considered by wildlife biologists and managers. But they also take on important socially constructed meanings that extend beyond simple objective or physical properties. For example, grizzly bears may symbolize wilderness or the heavy-handed interference of a distant federal government. Wolves may represent a missing and integral part of the central Idaho ecosystem or an unwanted competitor for a limited elk herd. Bison may be thought of as a member of the biotic community, an object of human affection much like a cuddly pet (as attested to by those Yellowstone visitors who wish to have their picture taken on, beside, or petting them), or as livestock (as they are legally classified in Montana).

It is these constructed meanings that define the role of animals in our personal lives and our society and that ultimately define the political feasibility of preservation, restoration efforts, or animal damage control efforts. As noted above, attitude research
increasingly indicates that rather than objective, factual knowledge, different symbolic beliefs (constructed meanings) are the basis for conflicting viewpoints with respect to these types of issues (cf., Bright & Manfredo 1996; Patterson et al. 1997). Also, in the last 30 years there have been important social changes in North America including a shift in the nature of clientele (hunting continues to decline, wildlife viewing continues to increase) and the range of social constructions which wildlife agencies must deal with. Demographic trends suggest that the general public will be increasingly isolated from traditional uses of wildlife and the outdoors (DiCamillo 1995). As society becomes urbanized and removed from the natural world, the cultural meanings associated with wildlife become increasingly more diverse, defined more through self-identity and individual experiences (relationships with pets, scripted and often anthropomorphic portrayals of animals in the mass media, recreational experiences that often occur in highly artificial environments [zoos, Disney World]) rather than through a common institutional context according to a relatively standard and widespread role of animals in production systems (Sutherland & Nash 1994). Thus, exploring the "social" interactions and processes through which meaning is constructed represents one of the most significant research questions currently facing human dimensions of wildlife research.

As noted above, research exploring human perception and interaction with wildlife from a social constructivist perspective has only recently begun to emerge. Similar in intent to the first generation research under the Goal-Directed Paradigm, this research has focused primarily on mapping the social constructions themselves (cf., Dizard 1993; Scarce 1998; Wilson 1997). Second generation research focusing on the process of meaning construction and the nature of the social interactions that facilitate
such constructions with respect to animals is extremely limited (Arluke & Sanders 1996). However a small body of research with this focus has begun to appear. For example, Felt (1994) explored how differences in the nature of the relationship between commercial fishermen and salmon in different geographic locations of Newfoundland led to different social constructions. Similarly Phillips (1994) explored how the meaning of laboratory animals was socially constructed by scientists.

Felt's (1994) and Phillips' (1994) research explored how meaning is constructed for animals through social interactions in a professional context. However, as noted by Sutherland and Nash (1994) only a very small percentage of people are employed in professions involving animals. In contrast, large numbers of people primarily interact with animals in a recreational context. For example, 110 million adult Americans participated in nonconsumptive recreational wildlife-related activities in 1985 (USDI 1988) and zoos draw more people per year than do professional sporting events (Arluke & Sanders 1996). Thus, understanding the role of recreational interactions in shaping social constructions of wildlife is a significant, but undeveloped research question. The Social Constructivist Paradigm also provides an opportunity to bridge an important gap between the two fundamental roles of wildlife management (stewardship and experience facilitation). Whereas the Goal-Directed Paradigm treated these issues independently through the development of separate attitude and satisfaction models, approaching these issues from a social constructionist perspective provides a basis for exploring both the nature of recreational experiences and how these recreational experiences shape participants' symbolic beliefs about wildlife.
What this chapter has done is to discuss what relevant work has been done in this field. I’ve concluded with what I believe are some gaps in knowledge that I hope my study helps to fill. Starting with my next chapter, the methodology, you’ll be able to see how I’ve gone about trying to fill these knowledge gaps through my selection of my research approach and my data gathering and analysis process. With my results chapter, you will be able to see whether this study has contributed to the filling of some of the knowledge gaps.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

To understand fully the results of my study of the wolf-watching experience, one needs to understand how my information was obtained. In this section, the methodology used for this study is laid out. The first section discusses the study site, the Lamar Valley in Yellowstone National Park. The second part details the qualitative research approach used to gather information. In the third part, I describe the sampling frame, clarify issues related to generalizing the results and discuss when I sampled. I describe the data collection in section four. It is in this section that I discuss the use of an interview guide and the interview process. The last part, data analysis, discusses the nature of the knowledge generated and the criteria to be used to evaluate my study.

Study Site: Lamar Valley

To better understand the selection of the Lamar Valley as the study site, it helps to know what I did to reach that decision. The decision of using the Lamar Valley as the study site resulted from my experiences down there in exploratory visits. On my first trip to Yellowstone National Park for some exploratory research I arrived at the Mammoth entrance and was handed my permit and a copy Yellowstone Today, the official newspaper of Yellowstone National Park. I stopped at the visitor center to look through the paper and see what information it offered about the wolves of Yellowstone. There was a full page devoted to the wolves, with the suggestion that the best opportunities to see them were in the Lamar Valley.
I talked with the park ranger on duty at the visitor center and he agreed: the Lamar Valley is the best place to see wolves in Yellowstone National Park. Although wolf sightings have been confirmed in nearly every region of the Park, the main stage for wolf watching is there in the Lamar Valley.

Map 1: Yellowstone National Park (Yellowstone National Park 2000)
The Lamar Valley is in the northeastern region of Yellowstone National Park. Some consider the Lamar Valley to be the area from the Cooke City all the way to the Roosevelt-Tower turn-off, in other words, the entire road from the northeast entrance of the Park. Others describe the Lamar Valley as the area south of the road from the Lamar Valley Trailhead on the east to the Slough Creek Campground turn off on the west. For the purposes of this study, it is this latter description which sets the boundaries.

As I drove from the turn off at Roosevelt Lodge, the beauty of the scenery was breathtaking.*

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* To appreciate it fully, one needs to picture steam rising off the rivers in the early morning sun, colors dancing off Specimen Ridge at dusk.
At the Slough Creek Campground, I joined two of my committee members who had ventured down to Yellowstone National Park to help me select the best study site. All three of us had been to Yellowstone before and had seen people crowded into the pullouts in the Lamar Valley looking for wolves. This, the information in *Yellowstone Today*, and the suggestion made by the ranger, together pointed us to the Lamar Valley as the potential study site.

As one comes into the Lamar Valley from the east, the first part to be seen is an area where Soda Butte Creek is south of the road. The convergence of the Lamar River and Soda Butte Creek lies in the central area. The Lamar River lies south of the road for the last portion (see Map 2). There is a lack of tall vegetation for most of the Lamar Valley to the south, which lends great opportunity for viewing wildlife from the road, out beyond the rivers, to the start of the mountains in the distance. The following description reflects my interpretation of the study area and attempts to capture some of the area’s ephemeral qualities that are important components of the setting.

At the Lamar Valley Trailhead (LVTH) overlooking the Soda Butte Creek (viewing site 1), the valley opens up, full of grass and the silvery green color of sagebrush. At sunrise, the shadow from Druid Peak recedes; light dances onto the valley floor, painting it with yellow and pink hues. The floor of the valley slopes up in the distance full of dark coniferous trees, towards the rock outcrops of Mt. Norris. At sunset the rock glows red until it fades into the darkness. As one looks out over this valley, Druid Peak pokes out of an upslope of coniferous trees behind her/him.

West from the Lamar Valley Trail Head, Soda Butte Creek curves to meet the Lamar River. At the Lamar Valley Horse Trail Head (viewing site 2), a half mile from the
Lamar Valley Trail Head, the view of the valley floor is not so advantageous because one is no longer elevated. It is hilly to the north, with some aspen trees clumped together. To the northeast, coniferous trees start their rise to Druid Peak.

Soda Butte Creek runs farther west and at one point the road is between the creek and some hills. Here the valley seems to spread open with several branches of the creek meandering about. Small clumps of trees and vegetation create the image of a marsh-like environment. The road continues to the west, passing the convergence of Soda Butte Creek and the Lamar River. The valley spreads out, filled with sagebrush and grass. Impressive Specimen Ridge rises out of trees.

From the area near the Lamar Valley picnic area (viewing site 3), one can see the eroded banks of the Lamar River; the water is attractive to wildlife. Wolf-watchers hike up a hill north of the road for a better view of the valley – and of wolves playing. The vegetation has been degraded to the point that a wide circle is bare dirt and all the sagebrush has been trampled. There are a few trees on the valley floor, giving way to the rocky and tree-laden Specimen Ridge. All around is the fragrance of sagebrush and grass. To the west, on the hill we’re watching from, an enclosed area full of vegetation and aspen trees offers a glimpse of what the area might look like if it were not grazed by elk and bison. One often sees a bison herd on the valley floor.

West from viewing site 3 the valley continues to span out to the south with Specimen Ridge as the backdrop. To the north large hills cast their shadows on the road. Mostly treeless, these hills look barren; they are often dotted with foraging elk and bison.

Past the Yellowstone Institute, the Lamar River disappears from constant view, giving an occasional flash of sun on water. Specimen Ridge, closer now, seems to erupt
from below. Nearer Slough Creek, sagebrush grows - large bushes mark the landscape. Across from the Slough Creek turnoff there is a sagebrush meadow: the yellow-green grass contrasts with the silver-green velvet of the sagebrush. To the north, individual boulders and miscellaneous rock outcroppings guide the road.

Summer

During the summer of 1999 when this study was being done, the road through the northeast entrance of Yellowstone was under construction. Traffic was delayed up to thirty minutes; large, loud trucks loaded with asphalt were roaring through the best spots for wolf watching. In addition to the road, the Lamar Valley Trailhead and the Lamar Valley Horse Trailhead were also redone.

During the summer, there were three main spots, referred to as viewing sites 1, 2, and 3 previously, along the road for wolf watching. The location for wolf watching depended on the wolf pack’s movements. The pack most often seen in YNP is the Druid Pack, named after Druid Peak. The pack’s range is all along the Lamar Valley. In late spring the pups are born and kept in a den. The den for the Druid Pack has been north of the road near the Lamar Valley Trailhead. The dens are often reused year after year, which appears to be the case with the Druid Pack. The movement of the wolf pack is limited because they are fiercely protective of their den (Busch 1995). After the pups are about eight weeks old, they are moved to a rendezvous site that is often within a mile or so from the den site. For the Druid Pack, the rendezvous site was west of the den, south of the road and Lamar River near the Lamar Valley picnic area. The rendezvous site was
best seen from study site 3, where one could watch the pups roam and play in the open space that the Valley landscape provided.

In the early to mid-summer the best spot was the Lamar Valley Trailhead (viewing site 1) since the wolf den for the Druid pack was north of the road here. Although one could not see the den, adult wolves were observed out towards Soda Butte Creek, up the hill near the aspen on the northern side of the road. The Trailhead was a rather large pullout that could easily accommodate twenty to twenty-five vehicles side by side in a row along the its length. In addition, because of its width, the site could accommodate a row of vehicles parked parallel to the road, between the road and those vehicles parked sided by side.

After work on the pullout was completed, oftentimes on summer evenings there would be two rows of vehicles parked parallel, as many as 40 to 50 vehicles in the pullout. Previously it has been considerably smaller, both in length and width, holding only fifteen to seventeen vehicles side by side.

The second summer spot for study was the Lamar Valley Horse Trailhead (viewing site 2), a quarter mile west of the Lamar Valley Trailhead. During the time that the wolf pups were denned, the area north of the road was closed to people; in addition, stopping, walking, and parking on the stretch of road from the Lamar Valley Horse Trailhead to the main Lamar Valley Trailhead were all prohibited. This seasonal closure due to the den was communicated to visitors through sign postings in that area.

During August and September, the best place to watch wolves was on a hill north of the road approximately half a mile east of the Lamar Valley Picnic area (viewing site 3). There was no real pullout here until about the second week of August when the Park
Service put in two logs to keep vehicles from pulling too far off the road and to reduce damage to vegetation. Four or five small vehicles would fill this pullout. Wolf-watchers arriving late parked on the side of the road. People created multiple trails up to the top of the two plateaus that gave good views of the wolves out beyond the Lamar River.

The wolf watchers predominately used the lower plateau, although a fair number hiked up to the higher one. The vegetation was mostly sage; there was a fenced-off area to the west where aspen grew. By the last summer trip in early September, there was a wide circle of degradation on the lower plateau. The degradation on the higher plateau, although not visible from the road, was noticeable when up there. The degradation on the trails leading to the lower plateau and on the lower plateau itself was visible from the road.

Winter

In the winter viewing spots for wolf watching were much more transitory than during the summer. Best observations were around kill sites, a transient and unpredictable characteristic of the landscape. Viewing sites centering around kill sites lead to some predictability to viewing sites in the short term, but across the winter kills and therefore viewing sites shifted.

On my first winter trip people congregated at viewing site 4, just east of viewing site 3, where the road curves and comes quite close to Soda Butte Creek. Wolves had made a kill across the river, which was easily visible from the road here. With no pullout in this area, people parked along the road on the inside of the curve. Due to the snow cover, vehicles could not easily be pulled off the road and traffic was reduced to a single
lane. To complicate matters, people were spread out on the side of the road opposite the vehicles, requiring through traffic to maneuver between people and parked vehicles. A steep hill on the north side of the road afforded a good view of the valley, though snow was deep for hiking and very few people went up.

On my second winter trip to Yellowstone, people generally stayed near the Yellowstone Institute (viewing site 5), in an area which looks out over the Lamar River with Specimen Ridge in the background. Snow covered most everything you could see. There were a few pullouts available, yet people still parked on the road.

At one point, people saw wolves from the Slough Creek road (viewing site 6). The road to the campground is closed to vehicles in the winter, but open to winter non-motorized modes of travel. There is a small parking area available, at the beginning of the road, offering only six to eight spaces. Again vehicles were parked on the road. At this site wolf watchers hiked, through deep snow, up a small hill near the parking area. The view from here looks over part of the Yellowstone River Valley, which is more hilly and tree-laden.

Research Approach

When deciding on a research approach, I considered several things. I needed an approach that got to the heart of my research goals of 1) trying to explore the public's social construction of wolves and how these constructions are influenced and shaped through interactions with wolves in various contexts and 2) to explore the nature of recreational experiences individuals found with respect to wolves. In trying to attain my research goals, I wanted an approach that was open to novel, new, unexpected, and the
unanticipated themes and ideas that may emerge. I wanted an approach that would get to a deep understanding/thick description (rich in detail, meaning and context) of the wolf watching experience, one that would get it from the words of the participants. I wanted to be presented with a thick description of the wolf watching experience, “present in close detail the context and meanings of events and scenes that are relevant to those involved in them” (Johnson 1974, p. 27).

I concluded that a qualitative research approach best suited the questions that I wanted to explore and the components I took into consideration. Although there are several different qualitative research approaches, I used a combination of hermeneutics and grounded theory for the development and analysis of this study.

The qualitative approach encourages a comprehensiveness of perspectives to emerge. Through in-depth interviews, there is an ability to develop a fuller understanding of the wolf watching experience, the different dimensions of it, and the meanings of wolves. The goal of the qualitative approach is to gain an understanding of the holistic experience. With thick descriptions the context and meanings of experiences, events and scenes can be presented in detail by those involved in it (Geertz 1976). Through the method of in-depth interviews, one can attain this thick description. Melanie, who is explaining her first glimpse of a wolf, presents an example of a story rich in detail.

“When I first came out here, it was in August of ‘97 to work, and I didn’t know anything about Rick McIntyre [a wolf researcher] or any of that stuff. And one of my first nights off I just drove up the valley and here’s this big mob down by the buffalo range, and I stopped and they’re all, oh there’s this black wolf right over on this road you know? I was so excited, and sure enough in the scope you could just see this microscopic little black speck, and just as we got there, these hikers

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started heading back there, and the wolf just went blip over the ridge, and that was my first look.”

When you read this you get the feelings that Melanie is conveying through her words — the excitement of the crowd, her excitement of seeing a wolf for the first time. You get an understanding of the context and meaning of the experience to her.

An important aspect of the qualitative approach I used is the interview. My information and understanding of the wolf watching phenomenon comes from my interviews with wolf watchers. To better understand this approach, I am going to lay out the principles that I followed for my interviews. These principles are based upon Kvale’s (1983) twelve principles for conducting phenomenological/hermeneutic interviews. These principles build the foundation for the mode of understanding in my qualitative interviews.

I used the interviews as a way to explore the interviewee’s life world and his/her relation to it. Kvale states this as, “the purpose is to describe and understand the central themes the interviewee experiences and lives towards” (1983, pg. 174). The idea is that my interviews focus on the themes that are emerging from the interviewee’s experiences.

Being focused on certain themes is important. It allows me to guide the interviews through those themes without limiting or directing the specific opinions expressed by the interviewee. An example of this in my study is how I guide a person onto the theme of how they feel about wolves in YNP. The way I approached this was by asking, “how do you feel about having wolves in YNP.” Contrast this with the question, “isn’t it great having wolves here in YNP”. See how the second question guides an opinion, not a theme.
In addition, the interviews sought to find, understand, and describe the meaning of what was said. During the interview, I needed to be observant and interpret what was said and how it was said. By listening carefully and asking questions, I confirmed what was being said so more appropriate interpretations could be made.

Through these interviews, I was able to get a participant to describe his/her experiences and how he/she felt about the experience. In the results sections you'll be able to see the depth of descriptions that some people discussed. It is upon these descriptions that I made my interpretations. The descriptions sought were of specific situations, the wolf watching experience. By getting descriptions rich in detail of the specific situation of wolf watching, I am able to get at a meaning on another level than by posing a more generic situation.

An additional principle that I followed was the idea that the interviewee may change through the interview. This means that because of the discussion, the interviewee may see new connections and meanings to the experience that hadn't been realized before. In other words, the interviewee may change his/her descriptions and meanings during the course of the interview. As an interviewer, it is important for me to stay open to these changes and flesh them out by asking additional questions.

Again, the importance of noting these aspects is to give a better understanding what principles were underlying the interviewing process. By laying out these principles now, when you read about how the interviews were conducted you have an understanding of the underlying foundation of principles that guided the interviews to be that way.
Sampling Frame

Sampling can be described as the process of selecting observations (Babbie 1998). Sampling allows researchers to represent the population/s they are studying. The goal of sampling for this study can best be described as an attempt to identify and describe "representative types" of experiences and social constructions (Bellah, Madison, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton 1985) among visitors rather than to produce statistically generalizable results. In other words, the goal of sampling will not be to determine the extent to which different types of experiences and meanings are distributed across the population of visitors, but to identify and describe in rich detail the range of experiences and meanings associated with wolf watching.

To achieve a sample of “representative types” I used purposive, rather than random sampling. The goal of the purposive sample was to select a diverse sample representing an array of different experiences.

To help gather the diverse range of experiences, I first started using the degree of involvement in the activity (e.g., how central wolf watching is to the individual's lifestyle, how important it is to their park visit, the extent of psychological investment in the experience, frequency and history of participation, etc.) as a basis for stratifying and selecting the sample. I soon found that there was more to the selection of the sample than just involvement. I found myself seeking out individuals that had different perspectives on the wolves and why they came to the Lamar Valley to watch them as well as whether or not they had seen wolves before in the wild or not. For example, I chose to interview Tim because when he stopped at the pullout, I read his out of state license plate that said REWOLF. I also interviewed Tim's friend David, because unlike the other wolf
watchers that I interviewed, David was not that interested in wolf watching, but was there because it's what Tim wanted to do.

Another good example of how I chose interviewees is why I chose Nathan. Nathan was visiting YNP with a friend and they wanted to see wolves. The interest in Nathan was that he had been to YNP to see wolves numerous times before as a wildlife tour guide for an out of state company. I wanted to interview him to see what his perceptions of the experience were when leading a tour group and of his present experience. I felt that his insight would be different from other wolf watchers because of this commercial experience.

I chose to interview a couple because they had not yet seen the wolves in YNP, nor had they seen wolves in the wild anywhere else. But that was not the only reason why I interviewed them. They had also both been zookeepers and I was interested in their perspectives on what having the wolves in YNP meant to them.

There was not a single dimension, or predefined set of criteria that I used to identify possible participants. My decision was to choose participants based on the diversity of the sample. This was guided by emerging observations in the field and an understanding of my existing sample. I did not have a set of questions that I asked each one and then decided whether or not I should interview them. In conversations with them I was trying to get a feel for who these people were and why they were there for the wolves. I was also trying gauge whether the individual would be interested in being interviewed. Through these conversations I was trying to make sure that I was getting a diverse group of people. I feel as though each interview contributed something new to the study, whether it be new avenues/themes to develop, or additional support for already
discussed themes. Appendix B lists the interviewees, the dates interviewed, and the location of the interview. In addition, I have included a brief description of each interviewee to better show the diversity in the sample. It is important to note that the names used are pseudonyms in order to protect the identity of the participants.

Sample

My sample consists of 29 interviews done during two seasons, the summer and winter. The reason for such a size is twofold. First, one needs to keep in mind that I was trying to capture a range of interviewees. I feel that my sample size adequately captures a range of diverse wolf watchers. Second, my sample size of 29 is a balance between a sample size large enough to give insight and represent diversity while still being manageable. In other words, with a sample size of 29, I was able to give thorough attention to all the interviews while still capturing a range of diversity among the wolf watchers.

Obtaining interviews during both the summer and winter allowed me to explore any differences in the experiences that may arise due to seasonal variation. A majority of the interviews (21 out of 29) were completed during the summer season. The summer also allowed me to capture more diversity. This is also indicative of the larger number of wolf watchers during the summer. During the winter trips, I discovered that most of the visitors to the Lamar Valley were wildlife photographers. Three of the winter interviews were with professional wildlife photographers. The lower number of interviews conducted in the winter (8) are characteristic of this larger population of wildlife photographers. On the second trip, I was talking with more wildlife photographers than
other visitors. I found that in the winter there is less diversity among the people visiting the Lamar Valley in regards to this study.

When I Sampled

The summer season consisted of five trips to Yellowstone between July and September. Trips occurred over weekends, weekdays, and included two holiday weekends—July fourth, and Labor Day weekend. Dates, other than the holiday weekends, were selected at random by using a random numbers table. The random numbers were used to determine how many days would be between the last day of sampling for the previous trip and the first day of sampling for the preceding trip. This was done to get the range of experiences that might occur during those specific times, i.e. weekends, weekdays, and holidays.

The winter season consisted of two trips between January and February. Unlike the summer, both trips were over holiday weekends—President’s Day weekend (January 14-17, 2000) and Martin Luther King Jr. Day weekend (February 18-21). This was deliberate as to ensure that people would be down in Yellowstone National Park.

Data Collection

Interview Guide

Because the goal is to understand the nature and meaning of the experience from the respondents' personal perspective, interviews were open-ended and flexible rather than following a single standardized set of questions. However, an interview guide

* I think it is interesting to note, that during both seasons no one refused to be interviewed. I think people
(Charmaz, 1991; Kvale, 1983; Patterson and Williams, in prep) identifying themes to be addressed in the interview and a series of possible lead-in questions for each theme was developed to ensure that interviews were systematic and focused enough to cover relevant and comparable (across interviews) information (see Appendix A: Interview Guide). Several lead in questions were made for each theme in case the initial question was not understood by the respondent, or did not generate a discussion about the desired theme.

It is advantageous to prepare an interview guide for several reasons. First, it offers a way to begin the interviews and keep the interview focused. Second, it allows the participant to clarify what topics are relevant, while allowing the interviewer track which themes have been touched upon. Third, it allows for the interviewer to have some pre-planned questions for times of silence and to guide the discussion back onto relevant material (Patterson et al in prep).

The themes for the interview guide were determined through much thought and discussion of what the wolf watching experience is about. They also reflected the research questions that I was interested in exploring. After the first set of interviews, the interview guide was re-evaluated to see if the themes were relevant to what participants were discussing as major topics. This evaluation indicated that the themes I was trying to address were the themes emerging from the interviews, even if I did not direct the discussion to those topics.

Interviewer Role

really enjoyed talking about their experiences at YNP, especially wolf watching experiences.
Following the previous discussion on qualitative interviews, the role of the interviewer includes three functions: 1) to guide the respondent to themes, 2) to probe respondents for detail, to negotiate and understanding, and to clarify ambiguities and contradictions, and 3) provide comfort and freedom in responses. Since the amount of involvement by the participant varies, the amount of probing done by the researcher changes. What is nice about the qualitative approach method is that it “allows the researcher to adjust to the respondent while still covering the research concerns, areas, or questions” (Howe 1988, pg. 308).

Conducting the Interview

I would approach people at the sample sites and start talking with them. Through a short dialogue, I determined if they were someone who would fit my sampling scheme.* Again, keep in mind that I was trying to get representative types, ie different types of people. Oftentimes, I was approached by individuals asking about the wolves and if this was the place to be. Some of these inquiries also led to interviews provided that I felt that they represented another diverse perspective/experience.

Before conducting the interview, I introduced myself as a graduate student from the University of Montana and discussed the project with the participants, explaining the technique I was using (using an interview guide, but not having a standard question answer session). I also asked permission to tape record the interview so that it could be transcribed. The participants were told that they would be given pseudonyms to protect

* This goes back to the previous discussion on how I chose people to interview, based not only on involvement but other factors as well.
anonymity and that if they said anything that they wanted to strike, it would not be used in the research. This allowed the participants to be as open as possible in their interview.

The interview started with a broad open-ended question asking why they came to YNP. From here, the interview progressed based upon the interviewee’s responses. Subsequent questions probed further into the responses. The interview guide was used as a tracking device of what themes were discussed. It was also used for probing questions into themes not discussed in the participant’s responses. Because the interview was in part guided by the response given, the interview length was dependent on how much the interviewee had to say. Most interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, with a few interviews over an hour and a half, and one interview lasted approximately 15 minutes.

Although contacts were made in the field, not all interviews were conducted at the site (one can look at the table of interviews (Appendix B) to check the site of the interview). It should be noted that one participant was contacted in Gardiner during the winter interviews. I had been talking with her about being in YNP and she mentioned how much YNP meant to her and how she loves to go and watch the wolves. Since she fit a new representative type, I interviewed her.

Although several of the interviews were conducted on site, there are several reasons why not all were. A guiding principle that I used for interviewing was to carry out the interview at a time and location most convenient and accommodating to the participant. When there was wolf activity and people were watching, completing an interview appeared as though it would impact not only the participant’s experience, but other wolf watchers as well. Therefore, I would make contact with people during this time, but schedule the interview for a later time. However, some interviews were
conducted during wolf activity because the participant was willing to do it then. Some participants, when approached for an interview indicated that another time and location would be best for them. Consequently, some interviews were conducted in campsites, hotels, and restaurants during non-wolf watching times.

Completing the interviews this way also had another benefit. It allowed me to capture points along the continuum of the wolf watching activity experience. I interviewed individuals before the experience, during the experience, and after, which I believe leads to a better understanding of the complete experience. I think that the results show that these different times create different expectations and experiences.

Although most interviews were with one individual, several group interviews were attained. This was done with several couples that were sharing the experience and with groups of friends. I found that in these cases that the participants really developed a thick description of the experience because they had other participants in that experience to discuss it with.

All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Theme Development

In the approach to qualitative research, as used in my study, data analysis proceeds as a process of theme development. Theme development consists of two parts, the coding and the interpretation. The data that results from the in-depth interviews are stories of the wolf watching experience (I am using the phrase wolf watching experience in the broadest context so that it includes all that I'm attempting to research in this study.
It would include the social construction of the wolf by the participants, the centrality to life of the experience and what all this means to the participant). Open coding, the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data, allows for the naming and categorizing of phenomena through the close examination of the data, in this case the participants' words. Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe this as, breaking down interviews into discrete parts, closely examining the interviews, comparing them for similarities and differences, and asking questions about the phenomena as reflected in the data.

During the coding portion, the text is indexed by a numbering system. I used Atlas ti for this and coding purposes. What Atlas ti does is index each line (a line being a line of text, although it could be a sentence, in my study I used lines of text, not necessarily sentences) with a number so that when coded, those text lines will be put with the code given to it. In other words, the indexing creates a referencing system by which to retrieve text. It is through coding that one identifies and marks meaningful text units. These meaningful text units express a complete idea that can be considered on its own. These meaningful text units, which I refer to as meaning units, are generally sentences or groups of sentences. They, however, can be segments of sentences. Only the units that provided insight into the wolf watching experience were coded.

Coding is the process of labeling the meaning unit with a label that interprets the meaning unit. The codes for the meaning units for this study were mostly derived from the text. This means that the code is actually spoken by the participants. An example of this is when George is discussing his experience about a bus dropping of people to watch for wolves.
“The other thing, I think it kind of institutionalizes the experience. I mean, part of going to Yellowstone, I think, for lots of people is you see Old Faithful, and you go see the bears or the wolves. That's okay, I mean that enhances it. When you go to Yellowstone there's things that people do and I think that watching the wolf is now become part of that for lots and lots of people. That's good I think. It gives people an appreciation for something, different aspects of nature, different mammals. That's good.”

Because Sidney is discussing the institutionalization of the experience I coded this meaning unit as institutionalization. If I was unable to pull a word from the meaning unit to make a good code word, I chose a code word that was appropriate. Often, I found that a later interview would have a better word, so I would then go back and change the code word to that new word. Using code words that are pulled out of the text allows the analysis to stay grounded in the written word, to stay grounded in what the participants said.

The more interviews I coded, the more I saw themes developing. The themes are the start of my analysis of the meaning units. Themes are broad ideas that unify, or bring together common codes and their meanings. The meaning units are used to support the themes I saw developing. It is not just themes developing, but a holistic interpretation of the wolf watching experience emerges. By looking at the interrelationships of the themes, a more insightful interpretation originates.

Nature of the Knowledge Generated

The results of this study attempt to characterize the wolf watching phenomenon. In doing so, the study gives a range of the diversity of the wolf watching stories. The results give a better understanding about this new recreational opportunity available in YNP. In addition, the results discuss how the wolf watchers perceive the wolf.
The results of this study help tell the story of wolf watching. It pulls together common themes and helps to give a broader overview of the phenomenon of wolf watching. This study not only gets you to look at the wolf watching experience as a multidimensional occurrence, but it explores these different dimensions, giving you a better understanding of what’s going on. It does this by exploring the wolf watching phenomenon at a nomothetic (across individuals) level. The nomothetic analysis allows me to look across all the interviews and see a larger picture of themes and interconnections between those themes.

Evaluation Criteria

A discussion on the broader concept of what makes good science would be useful before discussing the criteria to evaluate this study. This is because the three characteristics of good science are pertinent to not only this study, but other studies as well. The three key characteristics that define good science are:

1) Is the work empirical? What is meant by this, especially in regards to my study, is that “researchers confront ideas based on the data produced by observations and the data provide a basis for supporting, refuting, or justifying a researcher’s interpretations” (Patterson et al in prep, p. 7).

2) Is the work subject to external criticism? In other words, can the reader make an independent assessment of the justifications of the researcher’s interpretations and conclusions drawn from the data?
3) Is it **rigorous and systematic**? What this means is that data is not selectively used to support a predetermined view, but the data instead is put through a rigorous and systematic process, which others can follow.

These characteristics lay the foundation on which my study has been done, and which the criteria for evaluating this research emerges from. To those new to qualitative research, identifying the criteria by which to evaluate my study can be difficult. This is because traditional concepts of evaluation criteria, such as reliability and validity are not appropriate. Instead, one should judge my study by three points: **persuasiveness**, **insightfulness**, and **practical utility**. These are best explained, I believe, by Patterson and others (in prep).

The idea of **persuasiveness** concerns itself with the notion of whether there is enough data for you, as the reader, to assess it and decide if it warrants the conclusions I made. In other words, have I provided enough data (excerpts) from which you can adequately assess my interpretation of the interviews? I think a component of this is letting the reader know how the excerpts were selected. For this study, I selected excerpts that show where the interpretation came from. An example of this is Tess's excerpt for the theme that the wolves bring back natural balance,

"I think it’s going to help with the balance of the animals. No doubt it’s hurt not having them. I’d rather see the over abundance of what they said, like on the elk, be handled or managed through the wolves being in here as opposed to any other type of reduction plan that they could come up with. And I think it’s helped on the buffalo too which really doesn’t have anything else that kind of goes for them. Even though I guess they don’t do much in direct kills on them, it’s just balanced things so much better."

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However, one may question if I selectively chose that excerpt because it does fit so well into my interpretation. To address this concern, I have included any contradictory excerpts where present. This helps to give a richer story, by having all the sides/views represented; and it ensures that I am rigorous and comprehensive, rather than cursory and selective in the use of data that serves as the basis for interpretation.

Since it would be lengthy to include all the excerpts that pertain to an issue, I chose the excerpts that best articulate the point. Further, where a range of responses were evident, I have included multiple excerpts intended to reflect the diversity apparent within a theme so you get a better understanding of what the wolf watchers are expressing.

The second criterion to evaluate my study is *insightfulness*. This pertains to the notion that through the excerpts, you as the evaluator can see a coherent pattern emerging. That the excerpts are not discrete pieces of information, but that they tie together. In essence, insightfulness should lead to a better understanding of the wolf watching phenomenon.

*Practical utility* is the last criterion that should be used to judge my work. This implies that the interpretation answers the questions motivating the research. When one looks at the questions I’m asking in this study, are my interpretations answering those?

You can utilize these criteria in the next chapter, where I discuss the results of my study. You will be able to determine for yourself whether this study is persuasive, insightful, and practical. What I hope is realized, is that through a qualitative approach and the use of in-depth interviews that an interesting and insightful story about the wolf watching experience emerges.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter gives the story of the wolf watching experience and what it means to the wolf watchers. You will hear their stories through their own words, allowing you to relive their excitement and anticipation for even the briefest glimpse of the elusive wolf and what this experience has meant to them. However, it is important to realize that the themes discussed are not a homogenous experience, but are different components of peoples' experiences. In other words, everyone does not have the same experience, nor do they value the same experience. This section tries to show the diversity in the experiences and the different themes that emerged from the interviews.

This chapter is laid out so that it follows the four main themes that have been prevalent throughout this thesis (nature of the experience, alternative ways of experiencing wolves, broader meanings of wolves, and centrality to life). Additionally, the subthemes that have emerged from the interviews are also discussed. Figure 3 displays the different dimensions (themes and subthemes) that have emerged from across the interviews, i.e. the sample. Whereas, any one individual may not necessarily experience all the dimensions, it is conceivable that a wolf watcher could. Furthermore, the dimensions are not necessarily hierarchical, but are all very much interconnecting and interacting. It is important to realize that interactions frequently occur between the dimensions, but how they interact depends on the individual.

The first section of the results will discuss the nature of the experience, both the Yellowstone National Park experience in general and the wolf watching experience in particular. The second section will discuss the alternative ways people can experience
wolves, in particular, how this compares to the YNP wolf watching experience. Next, the broader meanings of wolves are explored in the third section. It is in this section that the social constructions and perceptions that wolf watchers have about wolves are depicted. How central the wolf watching experience is to the wolf watcher’s life is the focus for the fourth section. In other words, how the experience has affected the participant’s life is discussed. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a discussion on where the wolf watchers see this experience leading to in a broader societal sense.

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Nature of the Experience

Yellowstone National Park is a grand and special place. There is much diversity in terms of scenery, geography, wildlife, and activities that one can do and see there. The nature of the YNP experience to the wolf watcher is one of many opportunities—there is much to see and do besides wolf watching. One thought that crosses wolf watchers’ minds is the breathtaking landscape of Yellowstone. Travis describes it this way,

“Well, of all the places I’ve visited throughout the world, Yellowstone seems to be one of the most breathtaking and any time you see it as it’s been preserved and natural kind of makes you think back to the days when the explorers came through and first walked upon it and to see buffalo like the explorers saw. A little untainted scenery.”

For others, it is not only the scenery, but a combination of all that Yellowstone has to offer that draws them there.

“Well, I think when we looked at it and we only knew a little about Yellowstone, it was really the diversity from Grand Canyon to Yellowstone to the prairies to the mountains, it was really trying to see in one area so many diverse types of places. The wildlife is particularly interesting. The Grand Canyon is one of our favorites, the hot springs, Mammoth, Old Faithful, all the touristy spots. And the hiking, we found out that there’s a lot of good hikes here…” (Henry)

Of course, one of the main draws to Yellowstone is the abundance and diversity of wildlife that is found in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Many of the participants talked about the wildlife they’d seen and how it adds to the experience. Maria discusses a time when she and some friends went out to look for wolves and started watching some other wildlife when no wolves could be found.

* The numbers are a cross referencing of the excerpts used in the results section. The numbers increase as one reads through the results. What this cross referencing allows is for discussions in other sections of the thesis about the excerpts without having to restate it.
“So we watched them [coyotes] and we thought, “well, okay, we’re not going to see wolves,” so we’ll just jump out with the scopes and just, you know, watch them. We got to right in front of the [Yellowstone Institute] and watched a pack of seven coyotes and their pack behaviors are kind of similar. And as we were watching them, we were all taking turns scanning up above them and it’s getting a little darker and all of a sudden, the coyotes started to howl. I thought, “that’s interesting.” Because a new one hadn’t joined the pack or anything. Then I looked up on a ridge behind them and I, again, had never seen a wolf in the wild so I’m like, “Jane, look up here, what is this, it looks bigger than a coyote.” And she puts her scope up there and, sure enough, just as she got focused on them, this whole pack emerged out of somewhere. It was probably the Druid pack at the time, there were seven of them. Yeah, it was because it was four blacks and three grays. And they came down this ravine and descended on the coyotes. That’s why the coyotes were howling and they took off, they spread out and one of the coyotes just didn’t take off quick enough and this pack got hold of it and killed it. We’re like, “Wow!” The interesting thing was that they didn’t eat it, they just killed it for territory, I suppose. So they took off and went back up the ravine and laid up on top of this ridge. And we watched them for quite a while. Some of them laid down and napped and the alpha male and female did some mating stuff and then in the meantime we’re watching to see what the coyotes are doing because these wolves are still close by. So they stayed scattered and watched the wolves. We realized that...we scanned the woods behind them and there was a kill behind them and we think that maybe the wolves killed the coyote because they were too close to one of their kills. But it was neat because a couple of eagles descended down on the coyote that was freshly killed and “Wild America!” It was great. It was very exciting. We watched them for at least an hour, maybe more, until it got so dark we couldn’t see anymore.”

Although it’s a long quote, I think it helps to demonstrate the types of wildlife experiences that people have in YNP and why wildlife is such a big draw. In how many other places can people see the interaction of wildlife that Maria saw—not many. It is not just the interactions between wildlife, but the diversity seen. Ted lists what he’s seen while he’s been working as a ranger at Yellowstone.

“I’ve seen grizzly bears, I’ve seen, of course, the elk, the bison, antelope, mule deer. Numerous song birds. I could name those, but it would take a long time. Raptors and I have seen one wolf, coyotes. Bighorn sheep, little marmots, ground squirrels.”

Despite the diversity and abundance of wildlife, there is caution by some wolf watchers, in particular Allen, that visitors shouldn’t get their hopes up to high in seeing all the wildlife that Yellowstone has to offer.
"These big areas like this are great areas for wildlife viewing. I know that in previous surveys done in Yellowstone Park, the number one attraction to Yellowstone Park has not been the geysers or the thermal areas, it's been the wildlife. That's what people, I think, are most interested in and so we have to make sure that their expectations of at least trying to see something are met and we have to caution them that it's very likely they won't see a wolf or a grizzly bear and if you do, feel very privileged and lucky... I think they expect to see the old paradigm of seeing black bears along the road. Yogi bear and Boo Boo, that's still kind of allowed and so the one time users, the real neophytes, they come here thinking they're going to see a lot of different animals without a lot of effort and they better be cautioned that when you see a grizzly bear or you see a wolf. I think that would be the case for many, many years to come. Elk, on the other hand, and bison, antelope are special to see in the park. I thought it was neat to see those antelope out here. Mule deer are very rare to see in the park. White tails are almost non-existent. They should be, people come here, white-tails are very common in most of the United States and people come here expecting to see white-tails. They have to be explained why white-tails aren't going to be here, this is just too much of a high mountain plateau and it's not an agricultural setting and white-tails don't have much of a home range...[C]aution them that some of these expectations might be really inflated when it comes to some of these more uncommon sightings of wolves and grizzlies."

Tom thinks, however, that there is a wider range of attitudes towards experiencing the wildlife of Yellowstone.

"I think you have again, a wide range of attitudes certainly, but I think the vast majority of people are just kind of out to enjoy, 'let's go to Yellowstone, I think there are wildlife there, let's go see animals there, yeah, cool, yippee. Look, the bison have stopped in the road, okay, we'll stop in the road and get out and take pictures of them.'"

Danny talks about how even with wildlife that could be seen back home, that it's still different seeing it in Yellowstone. He also comments on the need for precautions in an area where bears may lurk.

"It's like seeing all these -- well, it's different even with the deer here, you know. I mean, at home they're all used to gunshots. Here they're not afraid of anything. They've been walking right by our tent. But I was a little concerned about the bear, but mainly because of what people have said. I mean, you come out here and both of you have to be smart. You have to do with your food and everything. I wanted to see a bear and we've seen plenty. I think being here and seeing the precautions that they recommend, there's nothing to be afraid of at all, really, except stupidity."

Ray talks about how during every season of the year, there is something different to watch for and see.
“Every time of the year there’s different things happening. In the spring you have your babies dropping, so there’s a whole different set of things going on. In the fall you’ve got your ruts, so there’s different other things going on.”

Allen reveals similar sentiments through the discussion of what he’s seen on his trips to Yellowstone during the wintertime.

“This is a great place to come in the wintertime. When we come to Yellowstone in the winter, of course, you can’t travel much other than snowmobile, but from Gardiner to Cooke City, it’s really neat to see the big herds of elk and the coyotes and we witnessed an elk dying. I got a picture of ravens sitting on the head of an elk picking it’s eyes out while it’s still alive, but it was so far gone it couldn’t do anything about it. That’s gruesome, but it’s real.”

The nature of the Yellowstone National Park experience is not limited to the scenery, activities or wildlife that can be seen or done in the park. Matt, a ranger in the park, sees the Yellowstone experience in regards to the job opportunities it offers.

“It’s the first national park, this the national park destination for, I think it’s in the top three of national parks for visitation. The job opportunities out here are just immense because we have to do everything, medical, law enforcement, rescues.”

But the Park experience also encompasses a much larger and broader sentiment by the wolf watchers. It is more than a sum of its parts; it is a unique place, a place full of surprises, where you don’t know what you’ll see. It’s the idea that you’ll see something, but it’s unpredictable in the specifics; you just don’t know what you’re going to see or experience.

“What’s so neat about it is we can go down to Gardiner and decide to go west. Who knows what we’ll see? That’s what’s so neat about Yellowstone. It’s full of surprises. It’s full of surprises with the weather, it’s full of surprises with the wildlife, it’s full of surprises with the people. It’s just full of surprises. That’s what’s so neat about it.” (Allen)

Other wolf watchers relate a sentiment that they see an importance in setting aside areas such as YNP, even though these areas may not be as natural as other areas.
“I think it’s really great that they set these places aside where the animals obviously know they are protected so it’s working that way, but yet it might not be the purest of all things because they’ve become accustomed to the people standing along side the road photographing, but it’s as natural a state that you’re going to get them in and at least at night they can go wherever they want. They can walk all over those hills and they can walk out and get shot outside the park, it’s their choice.” (Peter)

“That’s something that has really changed, perspective on what it is. Since it was founded. I didn’t know a lot about Yellowstone. Of course, I’ve heard the word Yellowstone, but it never registered in my head very much. I think it’s a very important thing that’s trying to be done here that to some degree may not. There’s so many different aspects of what’s going on here and it’s changed through the years too. When the park was founded, it was for people. I suppose now it’s being geared more toward the preservation of natural systems and natural resources and so forth. To some degree it’s a big preservation site, even though they’re starting to start discovering there’s a lot of impacts from years ago. Even today, all the roads and all the so-called improvements they keep doing to the place and changing it, I think that it’s a very important place.” (Ted)

What really comes through in the interviews is that Yellowstone is unique. That it is not just one thing that people want to see or do, but the fact that there is all of this to do and see; it is the total package. It is a place where you can go be out in nature and that there’s “nothing like it in the world.” Brian discusses this sentiment and then later in his interview, he continues his thought.

“The park is a tremendous place. No place like it in the continental United States. Unique, probably in the world, in a lot of ways...Yellowstone is nothing but meadows and forests and rolling hills basically and you’ve got those all over the country so other than the geysers there’s not really a draw to me, other than the wildlife. That’s what makes Yellowstone Yellowstone. Originally it wasn’t founded like that. In 1872 it was the geyser basins and the hot water this and all that funky stuff, but in reality what they did was save the wildlife. That’s what made Yellowstone unique.” (Brian)

Both Mark and Scott discuss this sentiment simply.

“It’s the scenery and the wildlife and the experience.” (Mark)

“Being here, that’s - - there’s nothing like it in the world.” (Scott)
Nature of the Lamar Valley

The discussion encompassing the nature of the Yellowstone experience is indicative of the wolf watchers' sentiments toward the nature of the Lamar Valley experience. An exploration into the nature of the Lamar Valley experience is helpful in understanding the entire wolf watching experience because it is in the Lamar Valley that wolves are most often seen and watched. To better understand the wolf watching experience, one should understand the area in which it occurs. What emerges out of the interviews is that there is agreement that there are wonderful opportunities to view wildlife and scenery. But, there is differing attitudes towards the changes that may be occurring in the Lamar Valley due to the wolf watching opportunity.

When explaining what the Lamar Valley is like, many wolf watchers exclaim about the wildlife watching opportunities it provides. Nathan uses phrases such as, “no other place like here in the world,” and “it’s like, wow, it’s the ultimate wildlife experience,” when he tries to explain what it’s like to his friends.

“Well, people ask me, you know. They’re like, well, what, you know, what’s up there, you know, what’s it like? And I say, you know, it is incredible up there. There’s just no other place like here in the world that you can see this much wildlife and this much interaction and this much beauty really in one place. It's an amazing place. And it's not overcrowded like most other parts of the park are, so you can actually, you know, drive around here and not be crowded with, you know, kids and campers and RVs running all over the place. And, you know, to be able to sit here yesterday and see four bears over there and another bear over there, and then last night we went and saw another black bear over here, and all within like two hours. And even in Jackson where we do have bears and there's some wolf activity down there, you just can't see all that from one spot, and it's hard to explain to some people.

It's just like you have to see it to believe it, to be able to really get up there, especially in May when you can sit here and see a herd of 300 bison, a herd of 5,000 elk out there, and there’s a couple pronghorn herds, and there's bighorn sheep and mountain goats up on the rocks up here, and there's falcons and eagles and hawks flying all over the place, and the wolf pack comes flying across, and bears. And it's like, wow, it's the ultimate wildlife experience. It really is. And you can try to explain it but you can't really. You can't unless you see it for yourself what it's like.”
Jim relates his Lamar Valley experiences with the wildlife he's seen in the wintertime.

“Well, when we were up near the junction of the, of Soda Butte Creek in Lamar Valley, on several occasions there has been a kill in that area, especially either 2 or 3 years ago there was an elk which we think actually had fallen off the side of a mountain and died. For about three days all kinds of wildlife was on the carcass of it. While we were actually here to watch wolves and did see wolves on that occasion, nevertheless, on that particular carcass [it] was full of coyotes, ravens, eagles, there were sheep in the neighborhoods, there were buffalo in the neighborhood, there were elk in the neighborhood, and for the most of the time there were three otters playing on the creek. So I think everything was centered in right where Soda Butte Creek meets Lamar.”

An interesting aspect of the wildlife watching opportunities in the Lamar Valley is the comparisons that are made between it and the Serengeti. However, some wolf watchers, such as George, argue that this comparison may not necessarily be a good thing; this comparison threatens to change the Lamar Valley.

“Lamar is beautiful. It has scenic, it’s almost Serengeti like in it’s visual appeal when you’ve got these towering cottonwood trees and grazing elk and predators roaming the outer areas, but it’s not the scenery that you go to the Serengeti to see. I don’t think anybody comes to Yellowstone for the scenery, or very few people do.” (Brian)

“On of the things that has disturbed me is that over the last few years now, they’ve talked about, what is the phraseology, sometimes this is described as the Serengeti of North America. And that bothers me. I think that brings more casual folks here that just want to see the wolf. I think we run the risk then of changing the Lamar River Valley.” (George)

With a comment such as that, one wonders if the wolf watching opportunities in the Lamar River Valley may have an affect on the Lamar Valley experience. Through interviews with participants that have visited or worked in the park for numerous years, it became apparent that visitation has increased in this region of the park after the wolves were reintroduced in 1995. However, there is some dispute as to whether it impacts the Lamar Valley experience. Some wolf watchers comment on the crowding that is
occurring in the area, whereas others comment about the laid back atmosphere and the lack of people, especially in regards to how crowded other areas of the Park are. George talks about when he used to fish in the area and you could easily find yourself alone.

"I can remember we used to fish Slough Creek and we'd camp over there and then hike over the ridge and we'd be up in that meadow and there'd be just no one there. But that's a long time ago too. I remember fishing the Madison River and there'd be nobody on it. If I saw a fisherman, there was too many of us. You'd go find someplace by yourself but that's a different day."^21

Jim, who lives in a nearby town, has also seen an increase in the number of people that visit the Lamar Valley area.

"[I]t's definitely increased the number of people out here for sure. Of course, years ago, at the pass there was hardly anybody. I came out in '91 and even back then for the first three or four years I didn't see many people out here year round, especially in the winter. But since the wolves have been reintroduced, it's obviously brought a lot of tourists, you know. Some of these guide people come in and bring groups in and stuff like that and then just a lot of individuals and the same people keep coming back like in spring for the denning season and watchers and stuff. So it's definitely brought a significant increase in the number of people to the area."^22

Although, visitation has increased in that part of the park, some wolf watchers still feel as though there aren't a lot of people in the area.

"So we'll be back, because there's not a lot of people here. Again, it's a nice part of the Park, it's laid back. There's not a lot of traffic." (Allen)^23

"And I think we were also concerned would it be too touristy, would it be too crowded? It really hasn't been that bad. I mean, here we are in a beautiful spot...[I]t's not bad at all. There's plenty of room for everyone." (Katie)^24

So, what emerges from this discussion of the nature of the Lamar Valley experience is that it is an experience with much wildlife watching opportunities in an area with beautiful scenery. What emerges out of the excerpts is that the Lamar Valley experience is unique, different from the normal experiences of the interviewees. For some, the experience is sacred, and for others there is concern that the popularity of the

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Lamar Valley will lead to a profaned experience. The reason for this discussion is that it couches the wolf watching experience. The Lamar Valley is where the wolf watchers are talking about their experiences, where they are choosing to watch the wolves.

Nature of the Wolf Watching Experience

Part of the Total YNP Experience

Before discussing the different dimensions of the wolf watching experience, it is important to realize that the wolf watchers see wolf watching as just a part of the larger Yellowstone National Park experience. The wolf watchers express it in different ways, but the message is the same, that wolf watching is only one piece of the broader Yellowstone experience. Owen discusses how he hadn’t thought about wolf watching until he arrived at the Park.

“...You know as much as I have a poster on my wall at home, restore the wolves to Yellowstone National Park and I do a lot of outdoor stuff, I wasn’t even thinking of the wolves until I got here and then it’s like...because I haven’t been here in three years and the wolf...the reintroduction has taken place during the period for the most part and no, now that I’m here I’m obviously aware of it and I’d love to see one walking by. But I spent a lot of time up in Northern Canada in the Canadian Rockies and so I’ve seen wolves before and just to hear them, I don’t care if I don’t see them, just to hear them at night is real special. Now that I’m here it’s another piece of the puzzle but it wasn’t the focus of coming up.”

Henry explains how seeing a wolf is only part of the total Yellowstone experience, that even if you don’t see something, you still have the experience.

“...It’s the total with the wolf being such an isolated animal, or what we thought was isolated. That to see one really was the bonus along with the bear. Usually the bears have been sort of the same distance away as the wolves. We’ve seen only one close and quite a few within reasonable distance now. But it’s the whole experience. It’s the scenery and probably it’s not being mentioned at all. This is such beautiful scenery in the whole area...I think it is the whole experience. These things happen as they should. No time tables, no schedules. It’s not coming at 7:00 and we feed the wolves, coming at 9:00
and there would be a bear to be fed. This is how it is. You may see nothing, you accept
that.  

Ben shares a similar sentiment, in that he enjoys nature and the entire experience
that Yellowstone has to offer. It is not just the wolves, but the entire picture.

"I just like nature, I want to see grizzly bears, I want to see the mountain goat, but
I can’t come out here then, so it’s the wolves because I know I can see them here this
time of year, but the whole animal kingdom I just like to come out here and see...The
whole picture, yeah, the whole picture, the land, the animals, the people are friendly. I
like the people...You come out here in your own little world, there’s not any big
expectations of rubbing elbows with the hobnob or anybody for that matter, so I just like
the whole wide open as the last great place."  

I think Peter explains the underlying sentiment that brings the two experiences
together quite well. In his quote he discusses how the wolf watching experience and
Yellowstone experience go together, and that you can’t have one without the other. They
are interconnected.

"I think it all just comes together. You’re not going to find elk down in the
Mojave Desert. I mean, where I live it’s all gray and sand and you photograph
rattlesnakes or whatever down there, so it’s all tied together. The elk and moose and
deer, this kind of deer and big horn sheep and all that are all basically on the same kind of
terrain and it has it’s own beauty. So it’s just kind of all, you’re not going to go shoot
[with a camera] moose or elk and not have that kind of terrain so it’s just kind of, I guess
it all kind of goes together to me. You just basically can’t have one without the other."  

Since we have a better understanding of the idea that the wolf watching
experience is part of the total Yellowstone National Park experience, we can start to
explore the nature of the wolf watching experience. As Figure 3 illustrates, there are
several dimensions, each with several subthemes.

The first dimension to be discussed is the draw of wolf watching. What is it that
motivates people to go to YNP and watch wolves? How did they plan for it?

The second dimension to be discussed is the social aspect of wolf watching. This
dimension relates the social atmosphere that occurs in areas where people are wolf
watching. It is in this section that the friendliness and etiquette that permeates the wolf watching experience is discussed, as well as the different types of wolf watchers that there appear to be.

The next dimension addresses what type of experiences the wolf watchers value. How important is seeing a wolf? Also discussed whether there is a progression in the types of experiences people seek in regards to wolf watching.

Wolf visibility is the next dimension assessed. In this section, the idea of learning where to be and needing patience is discussed. Nonetheless, what I find more exciting is the discourse that emerges through the interviews about the conflicting topics of the chance and the consistency of seeing wolves.

The final dimension, which is closely connected with the previous one, is the dichotomy that exists within the experience of watching wolves in YNP. What will be explored is the notion of being able to see wolves ‘in their world’, and the underlying sentiment that the experience is becoming institutionalized, or rather ‘a good zoo’.

The Draw of Wolf Watching

As we learned earlier, for some visitors the wolf watching experience is interconnected with the entire Yellowstone experience. With that knowledge, one could narrowly surmise the motivation for a trip to Yellowstone (hey, let’s go see a wolf), but is it the same for wolf watching? What emanates from the interviews with the wolf watchers is that the motivation for wolf watching is as diverse as the people coming to see them. It’s a chance for them to learn new things, it’s the excitement of the unknown, and it’s a chance to be part of the lived experience. There is also the aspect of relatability
with the wolf. In other words, wolf watchers relate to and can identify with the wolves, often because of their similarity to dogs. One of the most prevalent reasons is to see a wolf in the wild.

--In the Wild

Allen discusses his motivation to go wolf watching along this thought as well as what finally got him in motion.

"I never have seen a wolf in the wild and we just wanted to come down here and enjoy the wolf experience and looking for a wolf. I think what really set me in motion to look for wolves was that movie, 'To call wolves' at the Imax theater in West Yellowstone that we saw earlier this summer."

Another thought that Allen touches on later in his interview is the idea that wolf watching is a new experience which allows him to learn new things.

"So what's neat about this whole thing for me is that it's a new experience and it's a new door that's opened for me now to learn about another species of wildlife that I really don't know much about."

Scott also echoes this sentiment in the following quote.

"I guess it's kind of - it's kind of the unknown, that you don't - not many - we don't know much about them, I think. The human - or just man doesn't know much about the wolf because it's so isolated and there's not much known. There's a lot more known now since the research has gone on. But back then it was just kind of brand new and it just kind of intrigued me."

Scott continues this idea with the integration of the anticipation that was building up to the reintroduction of the wolf into Yellowstone and how he felt about it.

"But when '95 came around and they actually released, it really just made me, you know, get a stronger sense of wanting to know more about it. It really attracted my attention even more so because I can remember -- I've been -- I think I've been here six other times when I was a kid and they always -- I remember like the very first two times they were always saying, well, we don't have the wolf here, they just have the bear. And I always remember them talking about it. And it's like, man, it'll never happen. And then when '95 came around I was just shocked. It was like, yes, finally, you know, it came around, you know."
Other wolf watchers became interested when the controversy started and the threat of the removal of the wolves brought them to the Park. Ben discusses his reason for coming to see the wolves this way.

"I got interested because I started subscribing to all kinds of magazines and they started sending me information on they were going to take the wolves out. So I became a member not even knowing what was going on before I even came out here. Then I started reading about it, seeing it on TV and I'm going there before they do take them out. Because [I wanted] to see them before they were going to take them out before I could even see them."\(^{33}\)

--Seeing Natural Behavior

Another draw to Yellowstone for wolf watching is the excitement of being able to see the wolves' natural behavior, to see them interact with the natural world. Bruce, a wolf researcher who has seen wolves and wolf behavior in many settings, describes the excitement and draw to wolf watching through the following story. It is the idea of actually being a "real eye witness" that makes it so exciting.

"Well, I wouldn't say that, there's a lot out there that I haven't seen, but that's the excitement of it. This thing this morning I was describing about the male coming in and making the pups wait and the pups bearing it. Those are all things that probably you could speculate and be somewhat accurate saying, 'Well a point in the development of the pups would likely be [an] adult coming in, making them wait, and then a pup figuring out that if it can't eat the meat at the moment, it could bury it and save it for later'. But to actually see things like that is really exciting, to be a real eye witness to it. So that's to me what makes things exciting."\(^{34}\)

--Dog Similarity

Another part of the draw of wolf watching is that wolf watchers can identify with wolves. Often this is done through the discussion of the similarity of wolves and dogs. Rose thinks that people relate to the wolf because it is related to the dog and dogs are such a big part of a lot of people's lives. That fact that wolves have similarities to dogs that other
large animals don’t, such as grizzly bears and mountain lions, allows people to relate to them better.

“As I mentioned before, to me there’s something unusual about the wolf as a larger predator in that they are related to dogs, or dogs are related to them and dogs are such a big part of a lot of people’s lives. I think people relate to the wolf in that it has some similarities, whereas some other larger animals like grizzly bears or cougars, alligators, they just, you just don’t relate to them.”

Two other wolf watchers also indicate that because of the dog similarity, they’re interested in wolves. Both have owned dogs and feel a connection and can identify with the wolves through their connection with their dogs.

“They remind me of my puppy dog. They’re just an overgrown dog, or the dog’s an overgrown wolf, I’m not quite sure how you want to put that, but you can really identify with them and have that bond just like you would with your own dog.” (Owen)

“I guess the main thing is that they, pre, that’s where dog[s] came from and I just love dogs and owning dogs. I wanted to learn more about how to train them and how to be with them and to try to more understand why they do what they do and how I interact with them. So that was my main purpose for getting into it. But then, you know, once you start really thinking about the fact that these things [wolves] are huge and they can be potentially dangerous and how strong they are and just the fact that they can survive in really extreme temperatures and that kind of thing. It’s fascinating to me. They’re wild animals, but they’ll pick up a stick and play with it, tease another one just like a dog will do with a toy.” (Maria)

Preparing for the Trip

Before coming to Yellowstone, many of the wolf watchers prepare for the trip by finding out about where to look for wolves and what’s been happening with them. They do this through a multitude of mediums including books, the internet and friends. Here are some of the ways that the wolf watchers prepared for the trip.

“We’ve done a lot more reading on them. We follow it on the internet, anything that comes on TV, of course, that talk about the reintroduction.” (Seth)
“[M]y friend who was out here in June sat down with me with a Yellowstone map and said, this is where you need to go, this section of road, and have a scope because they’re pretty far away from the road... I guess I felt reasonably confident and that was confirmed yesterday talking to the wolf researchers, that this was the part of the park to go to.” (Tracy) 

“I think it was on our first trip out here that we really started getting interested in it because we were reading a lot about Yellowstone, trying to figure out what we were going to do when we were here and I think that’s kind of how we got interested in it. We were making a trip out here and we wanted to know something about what we were coming to see.” (Mark) 

“I kind of just kind of studied. You know, I tried to do a little research like when was the best time to come out, when was the best place. But I need to read some more books definitely. I’d like to come back to the Institute and take a class maybe next year or something like that.” (Scott) 

These quotes indicate that wolf watchers prepare for the trip in a variety of ways. However, there are some similarities in the type of information that they gather, such as where to be and the best times to come. For many of them, learning more about the wolves and where to be is a continuous process. Scott, who was on his first trip to Yellowstone, comments that he wants to read more and maybe take a class at the Yellowstone Institute. Seth, a long time wolf watcher, relates in his quote that he keeps up with current information in a variety of ways—books, TV, and the internet. I think a discussion on this topic of trip planning can have implications to Park management in regards to marketing the wolf watching experience and making sure the information that people want is out there.

Social Dimensions

--Sense of Community/Friendliness

When one goes to Yellowstone for wolf watching, you quickly realize that wolf watching is a social event. The pullout areas with the best wolf watching opportunities are usually full of people, chattering, waiting and watching. In observations and through the
interviews, the enjoyment of wolf watching is in part due to the social atmosphere of it. The wolf watchers enjoy the camaraderie that comes with people enjoying and sharing in the same experience. They like the fact that they have other people that share in the same interest as them, and the large number of people do not seem to impact the experience. In fact, Larry describes this atmosphere as one of fun, exciting, and contagious.

“It’s definitely a lot of fun when there is a lot of people there. Something about the whole group getting to see what a lot of them really came here for, so I think it brings the excitement level up a little bit if it is a large group. I don’t think it really takes away or cheapens the vision or anything like that. It’s definitely fun to have your own personal experience sometimes, but I think the large groups are definitely fun. There’s just a lot of excitement in the air and a couple of people just arriving, ‘where are the wolves’. And someone helps them out and let’s them look through their scope or borrow their binoculars or something like that. So I think it’s fun to see people having fun in the park for sure. It’s contagious.”

Brian has a much simpler reason for liking a larger number of wolf watchers at the pullouts.

“Well, in the sense of the wolves, it’s a whole lot easier to watch them when someone else has found them first.”

However for others, the large number of people do have a diminishing effect on the experience. Owen explains that because of the large group, the experience has a less natural feel to it.

“It’s less of a natural feeling, this is with a hundred other people. It’s more of a contrived kind of existence. Here we were talking earlier today about how they’re going to pave this little pullout. To me, why don’t you just put up a big movie screen and every night at 8:00 show a picture of a wolf walking along. It kind of ruins it.”

One leitmotif that emerges from the interviews is the bond that develops between wolf watchers. What is interesting is that this bond forms with both people you expect to forge friendships with, as well as those that you will never see again. It is the wolf watching
experience that binds them together in that place and time. Travis recounts a previous visit
to Yellowstone and what the social atmosphere was like.

“When I was here last time we were wolf watching, of course they came right
after I pulled out, but it’s almost like when folks were watching the eclipse or when
people watch anything else, it’s almost like a bond to watching. When they saw the
space shuttle go up, it’s almost like they have a bond. And they talk about other wolf
sightings and they talk about shows they’ve heard or stories they’ve read or experiences
of their friends. So by the time people leave, this has become almost like a little social
interaction club here of people that were watching the wolves from the 21st of August or
whatever. That’s the group here. Although we’ll never see each other again, you always
think back, “well that one old lady wearing that black top, she saw a wolf five times. The
one old man there with the hat, he saw the mate. It’s pretty much a social climate.”

Seth and Tess have been coming to the Park numerous years and since the wolves
were reintroduced have become avid wolf watchers. They have met lots of new people
and the bond that they have with them is the wolf watching experience. It is interesting
to see also, how Tess connects this camaraderie with it being a new experience.

“Most of them are real friendly. They’re willing to share.” (Seth)

“Information and what they brought for equipment and it keeps you updated a
little bit. We’re acquainted with campground hosts. Several of the regulars that come,
some come every weekend, some are once a months, so we’ve got to meet a lot of
really nice people, some that we correspond at other times of the year with. All age
groups. But it’s a very common bond between us for sure. We follow it even on the
internet, there will be chat groups or something and somebody will have come through
and give a trip report. That’s just as interesting to read. We’ve met actually people that
we’ve read from the internet and then have met them out on the turnarounds and that’s
neat to do to put faces with names….But most are friendly and very willing to share their
stuff. I think wolf people kind of, because it was something new and a lot of us were
right here in the first spring and it’s a little maybe more camaraderie because of that.”
(Tess)

Tom makes a distinction between when to be quiet and more subdued and when
the atmosphere is much more social. And how friendships and bonds have been created
through these wolf watching experiences.

“Depends on the situation, on the one hand I can identify situations where
depending on the make up of the group, you’ve got people who are more intensely aware
of the need to be quiet and subdued in order to allow watchers to hear and listen and to
see ... enjoy their viewing uninterruptedly, hear any howling that might be taking place, things like that I see, that sort of subdued, communal watching of the wolves. But there are other times when people are just chatty, chatty, chatty, and it’s very social and pleasant, and heck, I’ve made tons of friends (laughing) being out here. My whole e-mail list now has got to be half people that I have met out here on the northeast entrance road watching wolves. The fact that people come back repeatedly throughout the summer and spend a weekend or a week at a time, and you’re seeing the same people again and again, you’re sharing an interest in wildlife, the love of wildlife, the passion for this species, for this project, the reintroduction project, for this place. I can’t help but be social, and it’s great fun, I mean I look forward to coming out here and seeing friends, and familiar faces, and having conversations with them and spending time with them. And I expect it’s the same for a lot of other people."

What is interesting is that the wolf watchers see this camaraderie occurring with the wolf watching experience more so than with other wildlife viewing opportunities. Rose shares her thoughts on how the wolves have created a sense of community that she has seen before in the Park.

“And I think a situation of animals and nature, that the wolves have helped create sort of a community among tourists that I never experienced in the 30 years we’ve been here. I mean, you look together at the water and bison. But there was a whole total sense yesterday morning that I never experienced before, which was really neat.”

A large part of what is creating this sense of community and camaraderie is the friendliness of the wolf watchers. The friendliness extends beyond simply telling you where the wolves are -- wolf watchers loan you binoculars to use, let you watch through their scopes, tell you stories of what they’ve seen. Mark and Heidi describe what people are like when a new person pulls in.

“Everyone’s really, really friendly. Everyone...usually when a new person pulls into the site, just like I did, I approached you and said, ‘hey, what’s going on?’ That’s definitely what people do and even when people are at the pull offs and staring at something, they are very friendly. Everyone’s very friendly here.” (Mark)

“You know, letting everyone look [through] the scope because...”(Heidi)

“A lot of people come out here who don’t have scopes or even binoculars. I couldn’t imagine coming to Yellowstone without binoculars. So we’re always saying, ‘here, take a look at our scope.’ But everyone’s very friendly.” (Mark)

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--Sharing

Sharing is a great part of the social, friendly atmosphere. When talking with other wolf watchers there is a great sharing of stories, entailing what they’ve each seen, where they’ve seen them and what it was like. There is also the exchange of information about the wolves—which wolves are with which pack, which have had pups, etc. Tim talks about the friendliness of other wolf watchers, especially in sharing information about where to see them and how often have they been seen.

“But everyone that you talk to who’s been observing wolves is more than eager to, you know, share whatever information they’ve gotten that day or on previous days to help you find them or see them. So, yeah, that’s a real friendly situation.”

Others talk about the thrill they get when they share the wolf watching experience with someone who has never seen a wolf before.

“Well, it’s fun for me to be able to show somebody such an endangered species and it’s a thrill for me to be able to show somebody for the first time what a wolf really looks like and see it and say, ‘wow, that thing’s huge! You know, look at the size of the ears and the size of the legs.” (Nathan)

Jason finds the sharing of information interesting especially since it is the opposite of what people do in other situations, such as fishing.

“They have been helpful. And, in fact, that’s -- that's even kind of interesting about [it]. Like they'll practically pull you over to look in their scopes, you know... So that's been really good. There does seem to be no real competition. Everybody's trying to share information, which is a little unusual. Like with fishing you do the opposite. No, I didn't catch anything today.”

Melanie continues this idea by talking about how wolf watchers compare notes on what they’ve all seen. You are not likely to have this occurrence when fishing!

“[Y]ou got to where you recognized the same faces and you know? And they say, ‘well, we saw number such and such yesterday morning and she was doing this.’ And they said, ‘oh yeah and we were half an hour later and they were over here and they were doing this.’ And everybody would kind of compare notes and, ‘hey, how are you? Did you see them this morning?’ And that kind of thing, and it was really nice.”
Other wolf watchers, such as Bruce, comment on the friendliness even when something exciting is occurring. Bruce also ties in the idea that people that share their scopes with others are give up part of their experience by letting others use their scopes.

"Well, likely it does seem that people like [Jack] are pretty willing to share their scope. Of course, it is asking a lot for someone to do that because that means that their whole purpose in coming here is to see the wolves as much as they can so they have to give it up. But let’s say that right at this moment, there’s not too much happening so this would be a less problematic moment to let someone look. In other cases, there could be something really dramatic happening so it can be awkward, especially when it’s kids that are kind of demanding to see it and parents asking if they can. They don’t always understand that there are times when there’s really important things happening and so, yes, I’ve been real impressed with how nice people like [Jack] would be in the sense of being willing to share."\(^{57}\)

However, there seems to be some question as to whether it’s as friendly during all the seasons as it seems to be during the summer.

"In the summer the people are usually pretty good. We definitely have a ton of people, but they are sort of, they are all excited about the same things so they are definitely, they’ll let you look through their spotting scope or they’ll share some information...In the spring and the fall it’s a little bit different. You sort of get groups of people who are trying to sort of, trying not to share what they are seeing with you. You’ll be driving down the road and all of a sudden everybody’s spotting scope turns 180 and they are pretending that they are looking at something on the other hill to sort of throw you off. While they are not trying to be too selfish maybe they are just trying to keep what they are seeing from running away." (Larry)\(^{58}\)

With a large group of people, a social and friendly atmosphere comes some noise.

"The biggest problem when people are out watching them is that all the noise and banging doors and talking and stuff like that. I’ve had real good luck even right along the road just sitting and waiting. But every time somebody comes along, as soon as they stop they’re out banging their doors and chewing the fat, talking to everybody and just making all kinds of noise. I can be like here and those people are down there and I can hear them talking for 200-300 yards away. So you know wolves or any kind of wildlife is going to hear. And I’ve seen this occur many times when they’re coming. I’ve had the Druid pups come in last spring up here above the parking lot and when they came in where there’s three or four of us around, we were filming them. And then they started heading over towards the other parking lot and there was all kinds of noise and that just spooked them right off because they just run up the hill and disappeared up over the ridge. But if they hadn’t made noise, they would’ve stayed out there even longer." (Lee)\(^{59}\)
--Etiquette

What this quote alludes to is that the wolf watchers should be a little more conscientious of others’ experiences and how they may impact them. How this fits into the larger theme of social dimensions is that I think it brings up the idea of wolf watching etiquette. Some of the manners that wolf watchers commented on included the lack of howling by visitors, people distancing themselves from the wolves, but yet not always allowing them to cross the road, and the element of self policing among themselves.

Nathan, a guide for a private wildlife watching company, talks about how he tries to not have his group impact others’ experiences.

"[Y]ou don’t want a whole bunch of people out there, you know, with soda cans, throwing them around and yelling and talking about, you know, the New York Nicks game and things like that right in front of you when you’ve been sitting there waiting for a wolf to walk by. So yeah, we definitely, definitely try to teach people about how to behave around not only the animals, but also other wildlife watchers as well, because this is the place where, you know, obviously there’s a lot of people that just come out for the wildlife only."^ 60

In many other natural areas where there are wolves, such as in Minnesota and Canada, there are often scheduled howlings where people can go out and howl for the wolves. However, Yellowstone doesn’t allow that in the Park. The fact that people still don’t try howling for the wolves amazes some of the wolf watchers, such as Melanie.

"Most of the time whenever I would see people out there, everybody just stands there with their scope set up and not howling, which amazes me. I thought sure they’d start howling just to try to get them to howl back and stuff."^ 61

Another point that has emerged in the discussions with wolf watchers over wolf watching etiquette is how watchers seem to distance themselves from the wolves more so than they do for other wildlife. Melanie talks of this difference in the following quote.
"I've been really impressed that even the times that we've seen one fairly close, never once have I seen somebody trying to take the tripod down and get really close. Like yesterday, when she was, when [wolf #] 105 was staying pretty much in that one area at the beginning and was just howling and howling, people stay back, and I, that amazes me. Because if it was a bull elk or a bison or anything else, there'd be somebody down there with a tripod in 5 minutes."^ ^

Other wolf watchers, such as Tom, may agree with the thought that they don't see such close proximity behavior with the wolves as with other wildlife. However, may question whether the distancing of the watcher and the wolf is more of an element of the setting and the wolf's behavior rather than of the wolf watchers good etiquette.

"It's not so much that you see people intent on going up to the wolves to try and pet them or get close to them, or feed them. But you do see people stopping in the road where it looks like the wolves are planning to cross the road, and obstructing their progress, obstructing the wolves' progress. You see them leave the road and go into the surrounding landscape to try and get that much closer to get a picture of wolves. Those sorts of disturbances you do see, and you see them a lot more in the spring and early summer when the wolves are here around the roads. Otherwise, in a situation like today where the wolves are way out there across the valley, you're not going to see a lot of people trying to cross the river and go hiking out there to get close. So, you've got to wonder if the river weren't there, and if they weren't so far away...mightn't they not do that? But I guess I don't see it to the same degree that you see it with elk and bison. Even with bears I guess, I don't see it as often. But again, I'm not certain that's so much because people's attitudes are different towards the wolves, as it's a function of the behavior of the wolves basically, avoiding us as much as possible, and not giving people the same sorts of opportunities to approach and get close and disturb them."^ ^

Tom also makes comparisons between those that know good wildlife watching etiquette and those that don't. He relates that most wolf watchers that have good etiquette were most likely on the receiving end of some not so great wildlife watching etiquette.

"Well on the one hand you've got the wolf watcher types who are aware of the situations, the driving and the stopping off at the road, and not stopping in the road. And have a certain ethic about wildlife watching, because they do it. And they themselves have been on the wrong side of a car with a big diesel engine coming up and stopping in front of you, and a rack going on when you're trying to hear wolves howl, or a big RV coming up and planting itself in the middle of the road and obstructing your view, or they've just discussed it because we do discuss all of these things when we're out wolf
watching and other such. So you have that ilk, that brand of people who are aware of all of those matters of ethics and consideration, courtesy, and there are others who don't, obviously."

Even though people generally stay a good distance away from the wolves when in the pullouts, there seems to be a problem arising from vehicles following wolves along the roadway, thereby not allowing the wolves to cross the road.

"The problem we had, why we had to close the road was when the wolves would hunt in the valley and they’d want to get back to their den, cars would actually follow them back and forth. There were people on the road still, so the wolf wouldn’t want to cross. And that was quite a problem because that would go on for awhile, they would just follow them back and forth." (Matt)

"[W]e watched where the Druids had been across the river by the footbridge and were trying to go back to the den site on the north side and having trouble because of the amount of traffic coming from each way. You would see it go up and somewhat try to approach the road and then retreat back in... On across the road and they’d be going down the valley and [the cars] keep going down the valley and not let them cross.” (Seth)

Another component of wolf watching etiquette that emerges out of the interviews is the idea that there is some self-policing occurring among the wolf watchers. What often happens is that if a person sees inappropriate behavior, such as howling or trying to get too close to a wolf, they will often go and talk with the offender and discuss the reasons why the person shouldn’t be doing that behavior. Bruce attributes this to a follow the leader type mentality and the group of watchers trying to follow the lead set by what there first.

"I think the advantage in relation to how it actually affects the wolves is that there's a self-policing element to it that is pretty different from what you see in the rest of the park where anything can happen including people running at bears with video cameras and other people following those people. There is sort of a follow the leader type mentality, in most of the park that’s a bad thing because when a new family pulls up, they see other visitors way to close to the animals and surrounding them and getting into a dangerous context and that seems to cause them to feel that they can do the same thing too. That there can’t be anything wrong with that. So this is kind of the opposite situation. Almost always the first people on the scene will watch in context and are going to be very well behaved and respectful and quiet and all those things. As other
newcomers arrive, they just naturally will fall into that pattern. Certainly let’s say if a new person showed up and there was a kid in the party and the kid started to try to howl at the wolves, I think very quickly at least one person would go down there and explain to the parents why the kid shouldn’t be doing that. If the crowd saw people wade the river to approach the wolves, they would yell at them. "67

Matt, a ranger has had to deal with visitors going into closure areas*, connects the self-policing to the pride that wolf watchers have.

"[B]ut the wolf watchers are great about that because they tell them, because they’re there all of the time and they take a lot of pride in that area and if they see them going off to the closure they’ll tell them."68

Bruce sees value in the wolf watchers self-policing as a way for the Park to utilize the wolf watchers to educate other visitors by explaining why certain behaviors are inappropriate.

"I think the main thing, though if we could find a way to do better would be in situations where a wolf is just trying to cross the road which means it’s near the road which means that people see the wolf and, of course, they naturally would want to stop and photograph it. So that’s probably the big thing. We’re trying to see if maybe we could come up with a system of having a few volunteers in the area on call that could help. It’s more a thing where if there’s someone there in person that can go up and explain to the people doing the inadvertently rude behavior, then generally you can successfully deal with it. You could try the route of having another handout that people would get at the entrance or having an article in the park paper, but I think the truth is people are inundated with so much of that stuff that it’s not going to really reach too many people. So, I’ve always had pretty good luck with personal contact because you can right there and then explain the problems being created for the wolf so everything can be in the context of it would be best if we could all back off so this other wolf can come back and nurse her pup and bring the meat to the pups. So, in the end, it would be more labor intensive but I think it would be successful."69

--Spectrum of Wolf Watchers

If the Park did go the route of using wolf watchers as volunteers that inform new watchers to the area about proper etiquette and general knowledge about the wolves, they’ll need to find volunteers that other wolf watchers will see as someone who knows
what’s going on, someone who is a serious wolf watcher. This would not be that difficult because wolf watchers already see that there is a spectrum of wolf watchers. In interviews it became apparent that wolf watchers see that there are some more serious wolf watchers that know what’s going on with the wolves, as well as those watchers that have a checklist mentality of, ‘okay, I’ve seen a wolf, let’s go to the next point of interest.’ Overall, wolf watchers see the group as a mix of people.

“There’s sort of a, it’s interesting to watch the different groups. There’s certainly lots of people who are super-excited and love to talk to other people who are excited about the same sort of things. Then there are some other people who, they are not doing research, but they sort of want to just keep the experience for themselves, which I guess is all right too.” (Larry)⁷⁰

“There’s more casual mixed with people who seem to have more of an in depth knowledge.” (George)⁷¹

Even with this mix of people, wolf watchers comment on being able to spot an ‘expert’ in the crowd. This does not necessarily mean that the ‘experts’ really know what they’re talking about.

“But you’d still see, there’s always an expert in the group that doesn’t know what the heck they’re talking about, you know? I think I told you one of the last times, well that time that they were chasing 42 up and down the road, and there was this guy out there, and he’s kind of prowling up and down the crowd, and he’s pontificating about all of this wolf knowledge that he has. And well, they’ve had 4 pups and there’s 2 grey and 1 black and this wolf did this, and this is the alpha and this is the omega, and oh then he was saying, he said something like the male head of the pack is the alpha, and the female head of the pack is the omega, and grey wolves are female and black wolves are male, and all of this kind of garbage. And I was just sitting there, and these people are just drinking it in.”⁷²

Other wolf watchers don’t take such a negative view on the subject.

“Sometimes it’s funny, you’ll get some experts out there who know exactly what the wolf is doing and, ‘well, number 63 is a little tired right now, but he’ll be getting up

* Closure areas are set up around denning sites so that people won’t go into that area and disturb the wolves.

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Nonetheless, what really emerges from the discussion of this mix of people is that wolf watchers generally group other watchers in one of two categories—the drive by, stop, take a look, get back in the car watchers and the more serious, knowledgeable watchers that invest more time in watching the wolves. Some of the ways that wolf watchers describe the stop and go wolf watchers get at the point that they don’t stay to really enjoy and appreciate the experience, that there is more of a checklist mentality.

"Certainly there are people who just happen to be driving through and see a crowd of cars and a crowd of people on the hillside and decide, 'mmm, something must be going on, let's stop and look.' And some of them are, well some of them just kind of come up and take a look at the wolves and say, 'oh, cool,' and then go back and drive on." (Tom)

"It kind of makes me mad to see people that are just kind of out here just for [a moment], you know, rather than, you know, some[one] who actually appreciates it. They have like a, they appreciate it like maybe just a like a quick appreciation, like just [a] moment, like an American way, kind of like it’s quick and fast and what do you call it? Just a quick soothing feeling, real quick, and then they’re done. And like, ‘oh, let’s go on to the next thing.’" (Scott)

"Well, I think the check off list is primarily for the first time Yellowstone people, real amateurs that just want to come here and enjoy Yellowstone as it exists. Some people almost think of it as a zoo. They come here to look at these animals and it’s just kind of a fun thing for families, I think." (Allen)

I think that the last quote (Allen’s) brings up several points about the stop and go wolf watchers besides the checklist mentality. He points out again that wolf watching is a part of the larger Yellowstone experience as well as that not everyone who watches wolves is there solely for that reason. I think this is an important point because it indicates that there is a range of experiences sought in regards to the wolf watching experience. Also, his comment about some people almost thinking of YNP as a zoo is a theme that will be seen throughout the results, especially when discussing other
dimensions of the wolf watching experience and the comparisons made between the YNP wolf watching experience and those found elsewhere, such as in zoos.

In comparison to the people that just seem to stop and then go, there are people that other wolf watchers see as coming out specifically for the wolves and seem to be more knowledgeable about them. Tom sees these people having a greater appreciation for nature.

"The ones who are coming out specifically for the wolves, specifically to watch wolves, are generally it seems to me, people who have an appreciation of nature and outdoors and wilderness. And I guess an abiding appreciation for wildlife as well. They seem to be very excited about the fact that the wolves are here again, and they seem to care pretty passionately about the wolves and their presence here."^77

George comments on the depth of knowledge that these more serious wolf watcher seem to possess. He also alludes to there being a variety of people there, that it’s not just all serious wolf watchers, or ‘groupies’.

"I think the difference of when I was here before is that there were more what I refer to as groupies. Well that’s not the right term, but there were people here who were really following what was going on and who had a pretty in depth knowledge of where the program was going and who the wolves were and now as I watch that group, there’s quite a diversity."^78

George also talked about the benefit of having a variety of people stopping by and wolf watching to the wolf restoration program. He sees that by having these more casual visitors seeing the wolves creates support for the program.

"Actually, it’s probably a good thing because I think if it had been only those who were intensely interest[ed] in the program here now, I think that the federal government might very well reverse this. I think it’s because we’re getting so many casual visits, casual is not fair, but people who come by to see a wolf and are pleased to see the wolf, I think its going to make it very difficult to turn this around. There was a woman yesterday, or the other day at the Lake Lodge, I was just eavesdropping, and she was telling about how she was prepared to picket against a program which would cause the reversal. I don’t know who she was but I, my sense was she was a park visitor and thinks it’s a great thing."^79
Other wolf watchers also talk about the benefits of the mix of people. However, whereas George talked about the benefit in a larger context, these next two quotes discuss the benefits in terms of helping out the more ‘casual, stop and go’ wolf watcher.

“I see a lot of them, they come pretty much on a daily basis, and they’ll be there in the morning and at night. They’re pretty avid wolf watchers. Yeah, they’re real friendly, which is good because it helps the new visitors to see the wolves. They’ll kind of help them out, show them where they are. I think it works out for the new visitors.” (Matt)⁸⁰

“They have quite a little clique going. You have your experienced wolf watchers who can tell a coyote from a wolf, and then you have your drive by wolf watchers who don’t know a coyote from a wolf. Some people are pretty snotty about it. They feel like they know a lot. Some people are really cool, ‘hey, look through my lens, look through my binoculars. There they are over there, this is where they’re going to go, this is what they do.’ And I think it’s good.” (Brian)⁸¹

An interesting element brought up in this discussion about the mix of people wolf watching, was that Allen commented that he saw more women wolf watching than men.

“Just like this morning, we were up there and you know it kind of struck me that there are quite a few women up there looking for wolves. There weren’t that many men and same thing yesterday. I saw maybe three times more women than men and I don’t know, this is a pretty small sample size, but maybe there’s something there where women are more interested in seeing a wolf. Maybe men are too macho to go up there and look for a wolf. They’d rather confront it face to face or something, but I don’t know.”⁸²

What I find so interesting in this comment, is that my observations don’t support this nor do the observations taken for a concurrent quantitative study*. In fact initial observation results indicate that all age groups (<10, 11-20, 21-40, 41-60, and > 60 years old), but <10 years old and 41-60 years old were relatively equal in the number of men and women. In the two unequal age groups, <10 and 41-60 years old, males actually dominated. What this indicates to me is that what things appear to be like for the wolf

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* The quantitative study involved surveying wolf watchers at random times during the same summer months of this study. In addition, observations were taken that counted the number of individuals,
watchers, may not necessarily be what’s occurring. However, since these results are for the entire summer, Allen may be indicating an occurrence that happened on that one trip.

Overall, how the wolf watchers describe the social dimension of the experience is with terms like friendly, sharing, and bonding. In addition, they talk of the etiquette that seems to be understood by most watchers and the self policing that occurs when inappropriate behavior is seen. The discussion over the mix of people wolf watching led into the descriptions of different groups of watchers that the interviewees identified, such as the stop and go, casual wolf watcher and the more serious groupie. This discussion on how wolf watchers see other wolf watchers helps to lay the foundation for the creation of a wolf watching typology that will be elaborated on in the last chapter.

Nature of the Wolf Watching Experience – Nature of the Interaction Valued

We now have a better understanding of why people come to Yellowstone to watch wolves and the different dimensions of the social dynamics of the experience. But what do the wolf watcher want to see? What kind of interaction with the wolves would they like? Melanie talks about an experience she had.

“And that summer was when Number 39 had come back to the pack, and so probably for the first month mostly we saw her and the pups, and one day I went out and there was nobody else around there, it was about 10 or 11 o’clock, and I think I was birdwatching, I wasn’t even expecting wolves, and I was down pretty close to where we were this morning and I see white running, and I look and there’s 39, and then I’d realize, oh, the whole pack, all 11 of them, they’re all strung out along the river bank there, and the adults are all just running, just this beautiful full out, like they had an appointment somewhere. And here are the pups back here, lollygagging around and they’re playing and chewing on things. The grandma would just sit there and patiently wait, and she’d just look at them and kind of look at the sky, and it was so humid. And then she’d wait until the pups caught up, and then they’d all take off running down the bank again. And recorded their ages, the length of time spent watching for wolves, and the type of group they were with (i.e. family, friends, commercial, etc.).
by this time the other adults are way down stream, and then pretty soon the pups would lag behind and be goofing around again, and she’d sit and she’d wait for them. And it was just incredible, and there was nobody else there but me. I just, it just does something to you inside, and when you hear them howl, it just goes right down your spine, I just love it.’”

— Playing

This experience hit upon many of the dynamics of the interaction that wolf watchers seek in regards to the wolves. Through the following discussion, you’ll discover that although people may have different preferences as to what they want to see, there are some reoccurring themes that emerge. These themes include wanting to see the wolves playing, such as Melanie just described and Tess will talk about, seeing interaction between wolves and other species which then leads into the desire to see a kill. Some other common themes include having an individualized experience, a backcountry experience, and a discussion on there being a progression in terms of the nature of the interaction valued. This progression discusses how at first wolf watchers just want to see a wolf, even if it’s for a brief moment, but then as they watch more and more, they become almost more selective in the nature of the interaction valued.

Melanie’s quote touched upon the desire to see the wolves playing, a sentiment also discussed by Tess.

“Yeah, all of a sudden out of the trees, here comes what, seven or eight of them? Just across the Lamar River. I thought [they were] Druids that year, the ones that we saw dancing up on the bench on Crystal Bench and it was the first year we were in and they – you saw them kind of running around and then one must have had, it looked like he had maybe a piece of hide or something, but he pranced with it. It was just like he was dancing out on the bench and we were all like, ‘look what we’re seeing!’ He’d toss it in the air and stand on his hind legs and jump and catch it, so we had our dancing wolf out there!”

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Interaction between Species

A common theme connecting many of the wolf watchers is that they value seeing interactions between the wolves and other species. Many of the experiences related to me talked about when they watched wolves interact with other species. There is a great draw to being able to see wolves interacting with other species, be it bison, elk, or bears, because there are such few places to see that interaction. It's just not really available in the settings that most people experience wolves, such as zoos or other captive settings. Tim discusses the interaction he saw occur between some wolves and grizzly bears. He then talks about the excitement involved in seeing the wolves working together and how it's different from seeing it on television.

"When we saw them take the grizzly cub two years ago, that was really interesting because we saw - I think it was the Rose Creek pack down by Slough Creek. They were harassing a female grizzly bear. I think there were like four of them in the pack and two or three of them were distracting the mother griz and then one or two of the grabbed the cub and ran off with it, which really amazed us that they would take on a grizzly bear sow with her cub. But they did and they killed the cub. We saw them walking off with it. And then we saw them taking elk calves right in Lamar Valley near the Institute. Pretty much we've just seen them walking along the benches along Slough Creek and Lamar on the other side of the bench. But, yeah, it's been really exciting. I look forward to seeing the wolves every time I come through here. ... Well, when they take the calves, that's interesting to see how they go after the elk calves. And I just enjoy seeing them interact with each other, I guess, and with other animals. We've seen lone wolves just walking benches and, you know, that's not a big deal. But when you see them actually stalking and working together to sneak up on a prey, that's - that's exciting. It's totally, you know, their behavior. It's not something made up for a TV special or something. It's like it's the real thing."

An experience that Larry relates is an interaction between some elk and wolves that he witnessed one winter. Although seeing the interaction was one of the coolest experiences he's had in the park, reading the quote, one gets the feel that the experience was highlighted because he was able to share the experience with a friend.
“The most exciting one. my buddy Jay and I were taking pictures of some elk last year. There were about 12, 15 bull elk, nice size, over towards the Childrens’ Fire Trail, just west of there there’s a little, I don’t know if it’s ranger cabin, it’s not really used as a ranger cabin, it’s not labeled as one but it seems to be a park cabin, there’s a little stable and a corral over there. So the elk were standing up on this ridge, it was about 4:00, 4:30, 5:00, starting to get dark, which it may have been a little earlier because I think it was December and we were tramping through the snow, we didn’t even have our snow shoes on. We just thought, “Oh, we’ll hop off and take some pictures of the elk.” And the elk were sort of in a single file line as they were doing all over place. In the distant hills you could see other lines of elk. They were all sort of migrating, so we walked around to the knoll that they were on and were watching them go through the valley and I didn’t even know the cabin was there at that time so we discovered the cabin and as they came over this one valley we started to hear some wolves and actually my buddy was about 100 yards behind me and so I to yell back to him, “There’s wolves.” This was one of the first times I had seen them that close and I believe it was the Leopold pack of about 13 or 14 of them and they singled out one of the bull elk, most of them took off and this other guy was sort of standing there in a little island of trees and so five of the group headed towards him and chased him off and then they ended up not killing him, but they definitely was a great chase scene and I think the most exciting thing about it was actually catching it on film for me, but I guess that probably also it was the coolest wolf-elk interaction stuff that I’ve seen and definitely be the highlight there. So then the pack, they sort of chased him out of their space is what it seemed like and then the five that had been chasing him sort of regrouped the rest of the pack. A couple others, there was a light and a dark wolf that in sort of a little ditch next to me and you could see one elk’s head just behind the knoll of the ditch that they were in and the two wolves I thought there might be another confrontation there and that was much closer, that was 40 feet from me, something like that, but the two wolves sort of group, just went through their ditch and then met up with the rest of the pack and that elk just sort of stayed there the whole time and then the group of about 13 wolves, they just sort of trotted off the valley. They weren’t hungry, they were just sort of defending their space, just sort of playing with the elk. But it was definitely the coolest thing that I’d ever seen. And my buddy was way back and since we were post holing by the time he got up there were all just clear across the field and he could hardly even see them, but for me it was quite enjoyable and I enjoyed sharing it with him all the way home about how he missed it, but that was definitely the coolest thing I’ve seen in the park.”

Seth also talks about watching the interaction between wolves and other species, in particular the bison. However, it’s not just the interaction that he seeks, but the amount of time that one can watch them. It is not just a fleeting glimpse, but that you can watch them for hours that he enjoys.

“One of the most interesting [experiences] I can think of was there was a herd of buffalo down here at Lamar and the wolves had circled around and how the buffalo
circled around the younger and then some of the bulls came out towards the front to face the wolves and the wolves made little charges at them. This was what, the second year they were here? Just the interaction between them. They never did anything, the wolves finally went back into the trees, but seeing that interaction and how the buffalo protected their young, circled them."

Later in the interview, Seth talks about being able to watch the wolves for a long period. This is rather characteristic of the other wolf watchers too. When you read their about their experiences you realize that their most memorable experiences are ones where they’ve watched the wolves for longer periods of time, where they were able to see more than a quick glimpse of the evasive creature.

"That was when they had denned on the north side of the road close to Little America, closer to the Little America area there was this nice big kind of square green patch that had this leaning tree off the side. Apparently they had their den pretty close to a log area that was right there close but when they brought the pups out, why, of course they came across this green square area and they took them up into the sage. They had them out, we probably had at least a good hour or more of watching them. That was particularly one that stands out."\

--Kills

Related to the idea of wanting to see an interaction between wolves and other species is the interest in seeing a kill by the wolves. To see a kill is to see nature in action, to see instincts taking control. What emerges out of the discussion on kills is that this is nature; watching wolves is seeing nature.

"Well, as bad as it sounds, I would like to see them make an actual kill. Just to have it on film of some sort, that’s nature at it’s finest right over there. That’s nature and instinct taking control over and doing [what] it was designed to do, so that’s what I’d like to do.” (Ben)\

Lee admits that kill scenes are not for everyone, but they don’t bother him. In fact, he finds them interesting to watch.

"It doesn’t bother me. Some people don’t like to see stuff like that. It’s pretty interesting. It can be kind of gross to see something like that. Usually you’re far enough away that you don’t really see the real close-up stuff unless you have real powerful
scopes and stuff where you can see. Some people just can’t handle watching something like that. You do hear the squeal and stuff like that. I’ve heard them fall down and the elk will squeal or something like that. It is kind of sad in a way, but it is nature anyway.”

Some wolf watchers, such as Seth and Tess commented that seeing a kill wasn’t necessarily what they wanted to see. However, even though they say this, some of their most memorable experiences were kill scenes, one with a bear and elk, and the other with wolves taking a young antelope. What this implies to me, is that even if people don’t necessarily want to see a kill, it makes for a memorable experience. It does so because it is seeing nature at a wild and powerful moment – the taking of a life.

“I suppose. I like to watch them. I don’t really care to see them do the kills, but I like to watch them. I do like to see them chase animals and stuff like that. As far as kills, no, not especially.” (Seth)

“I have to look away for a few seconds and say, ‘okay, this is okay, this is nature, this can happen.’” (Tess)

Yet, with this sentiment expressed, they both go on later in the interview and talk about exciting kills that they’ve seen and how interesting they were. In addition, these quotes reinforce the idea of being able to watch the wolves and other wildlife for long periods of time.

“We had a good bear, we call it the wild America moment, the last visit in, it had wandered down low in the Lamar Valley on the north side of the river and swam across the river, started up the back where the bench is and about halfway up startled an elk calf. Of course, instead of laying still, the elk got up and it went flying down the hill bank into the water and of course the grizzly was immediately right down the bank after it and the mother elk was of course immediately behind the grizzly bear. The bear caught the calf. Of course, it was spring and a lot of water and caught it about not very far into the water, but the calf had really made a gallant effort for a little thing. The bear then took it onto the island and even proceeded to eat it and laid down to where it was facing the road so through our scopes and binoculars, we had full face of the bear and the claws, so it was definitely our Wild America moment.” (Tess)

“Another incident of seeing the wolves interacting, a real good one was we were down here at the turn out by the bridge or the trailhead and the wolves had been seen to
the north coming across through there and we thought we’d sit there and watch for the wolves. We sat there most of the afternoon and all we had out there was an antelope and it had two young, I don’t know what they’re called, but two young. She had them hid out there in the sage in different places and she was over here grazing. Here come a wolf through. It was a gray one that came through first, walked clear by, went out to just about where the trailhead starts up and then it turned around and come back and went clear back the other way to where you couldn’t see it so it come by here twice, then here comes the black one and it come through and as it was going through, both of them came within yea far of this one and the black one hit right upon it and had it’s lunch of the young antelope calf. The wolf just clamped onto it and shook it up in the air and then of course here comes mom and the wolf just looked over at it, mom jumped back.” (Seth)

“That one was kind of tough because we had watched her with the twins all afternoon long and this was probably 7:00 or 8:00 at night and we saw her hide them and here comes the wolves and we thought, “oh no, he’s going to get one!” And they did.” (Tess)

“And there was another wolf that was up on the bank laying down by the rocks up there that was kind of watching all this go on too. Just an interesting afternoon.” (Seth)

--Individual Experience

So far, the nature of the interaction valued has dealt with wanting to see playfulness, interactions between species and kills as well as touch upon being able to see the wolves for more than just a glimpse. In addition to these scenarios, many wolf watchers expressed interest in having individualized and backcountry experiences with respect to the wolves. There is something different about seeing the wolves while alone or while in the backcountry than when parked in a pullout with fifty other people. Melanie had an experience that was made better because she was there alone.

“And some, a little bit that I recorded, one night one was up on the mountains there above the confluence and just howling and howling, just one. And I just turned the video camera on and sat it on the top of the car and left it for like an hour. You know, there was just this single mournful howl going on and on and on. And my mom said, ‘that gives me chills. How many of you were out there?’ And I said, ‘just me, because everybody else had left.’ And it was right after the last car left, and it was there was supposed to be a full moon that night or what, but it was a beautiful starry night and I just thought I was going to hang out there for awhile. And just as the last car left, the howling started. And so I just sat there all by myself, and it’s just a primitive response you have to give. If you had hackles they’d be raised, but it made it better because I was there all
by myself, and it’s like there’s not another soul on this planet, you know? You know, no lights, no nothing, just this black sky and all of these stars and the wolf howling on the mountain. And what more can you ask for?" 

George, in his quote, connects the individual experience to being the one that discovers the wolf. He also indicates that it really isn’t possible to have that individualized experience.

"Yeah, it would be nice if we could all have this kind of individualized, I discovered the Druid pack sort of experience, but that’s just not possible." 

--Backcountry Experience

Several wolf watchers tie the individual experience sought with the backcountry experience since the backcountry experience lends itself better to being out there alone, away from the crowds of the pullout.

"I think it’s more fun to see them when you’re off on your own. For one thing you have a better chance of observing them, you know, for a longer period of time with other people distracting you and traffic distracting you. It’s more of a natural experience when you’re out on a trail and not sitting along a road, you know, with trucks and cars going by watching these things.” (Tim) 

Lee discusses a backcountry experience he had while alone where he was able to film them for almost the entire day. He then relates why he enjoys going out alone versus watching from a pullout with others.

"It was in November, ’98 when I got them and I’ve seen them other times too but not...that was the best, most closest sighting that I’ve had of them as far as being able to film. They had a kill across the river and I went in about 6:30 in the morning, before it got light, and I was in there right at daylight and they were down around the kill sight over across the river and then they left and went up the ridge and I could see them all day long at different times, hanging around up on the ridge and stuff. So I knew they’d come back and I just wound up staying the whole day out there waiting. I’d say about 2:00, one of them came down to the kill and fed for a while and then left and then at different times I’d film as they’d come down and stuff but the whole pack started coming down about 4:00 and they came in and they messed around and fed on the kill for a bit and then they started working towards me, towards the creek and I was probably about, oh, I don’t know, 50 or 75 yards south of Slew Creek and they had this kill maybe several hundred yards north of the creek. The one black, I don’t know the numbers, which I can identify
those Druids pretty well, but the Rose, I’m not familiar with the different numbers, but one of the blacks came in and started working towards me and coming down towards the creek and then the others began to follow and before it ended I had the whole pack down by the river within about 50 yards. They were in the water and kind of drinking and stuff, just kind of walking around. Actually the one, the black, crossed the creek and came within about 20 or 30 yards of me. It was getting kind of dark and what I did, the rest of the pack began to cross and they started crossing the river and came on...they got to the other side of the river and I stood up and let them see me because I knew I had to be there because I had been there all day so they weren’t fearful of me or anything, but when I stood up then they turned and just went back across the creek and stood there and then I just left because it was getting kind of dark. If I hadn’t stood up, they would’ve all come right over within 20 or so yards from me. They were heading right in my direction is where they where coming...[Being alone] is so much better because you just don’t have all the noise and like I’m filming and I can pick up the sound. If there is a lot of noise around, banging doors or a car drives by, but I like to hike out if I know generally where they’re at. I’ll hike in the general area and just kind of hang out nearby but I don’t want to get real close to a carcass or right in line with it because they’re not going to come in.”

Seeing the wolves in a backcountry setting makes the experience much more wild and wolf watchers feel as though they are on more equal terms with the animal, that they area experiencing so much more. There is also a hint of pride in being able to see them in the backcountry, where it is much more difficult to watch them as well as the idea that even fewer people see them in that setting. This sentiment just reinforces the notion of wildness for the wolf watcher. However, as Tom points out, one needs the right equipment to be able to see them to make the experience even better.

“It feels a little wilder, and there’s a heightened sense of excitement about that. Because it, well it is just away from the road – seeing from the road and knowing that they’re out here in the wild is fine, and it’s lovely, and they are wild and that’s great. Seeing them from a trail, and that may be the first time that I’ve ever seen them, just from really hiking in somewhere a great distance. On a surface level it wasn’t as exciting, really. Because I couldn’t see them as well, I mean I wasn’t as, I was two miles away from them as opposed to one mile away. I didn’t have my spotting scope, I just had dinky binoculars. So the obvious apparent, watching their behavior and seeing what they’re doing and being thrilled that I can see this animal and identify it as a wolf and all that wasn’t there as much. But the idea that, WOW, seeing them kind of off way back in the wilderness where very few, if any people other than, well other than people who do the flyovers ever would see them. That’s even more exciting in a way.”

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“This experience [from the road] you really don’t have to work for. The other one, when you do the other one, when you backpack into an area and you’re looking for whatever, you experience a lot more. You experience the birds, you experience the sounds, you experience the smells, you experience the vulnerability of your own life. Here you do, I guess, if you’re worried about hitting a buffalo on the road as this trucker did* . You’re vulnerable here. But I just think when you walk into the mountains with a backpack and you’re gone for several days, you then all of a sudden become – you’re absorbed, you become part of it. Here you’re not really part of it like you are when you just walk into it and you’re a part of it 100%. Here you’re only a part of it 50% here.”

(Allen)

George comments on why seeing a wolf while out hiking is ‘perfect’.

“Well, you’re more on the terms I think of the animal. I think the way we ought to approach this park is on our two feet. So it’s just more, it puts us more on equal terms with the animal, and I think that’s good. I guess that’s kind of romanticized notion about what wild is.”

--Progression of Experience Sought

Although the topic has been the nature of the interaction valued, or in other words, what type of experience the wolf watchers would like in regards to the wolves, the truth of the matter is that wolf watchers would settle for much less than the perfect scenario. In discussions with the wolf watchers, it became apparent that there was a progression of experiences sought. Even if a wolf watcher new to this experience really wanted to see a kill, just seeing a wolf moving through the sage would be an incredible experience. What appears to happen is that the more the wolf watcher watches, the more they become selective in what they really would like to see. At first, a glimpse of a wolf would be phenomenal, and then a longer glimpse, then seeing wolves interact with each other and then interact with other species is desired. Allen remarks on how first he just

* Allen is referring to an accident that happened earlier that morning. A semi truck driver, that was driving through the park in the early morning, before it was light, hit a bison on the road. The driver was uninjured, but the bison was killed. The accident site was about 75-100 yards west of site 3, giving good viewing opportunities of the damaged vehicle and dead bison. The accident was the topic of discussion for the morning wolf watchers.
wants to see wolf, and then more and more wolves eventually, and then perhaps one day coming across a den during a hike.

"I haven’t seen the wolf yet, I’m going to come back here until I see a wolf and I’m going to come back here until I see maybe two or three wolves and I’ll come back here until I get about ten wolves under my belt. Then I might not come back as often....Right now I want to see the wolf, first things first. Then once I see a wolf, I’d like to see a wolf pack. Then I’d like to be hiking somewhere and come across a wolf den. Then I’d maybe even some day like to pet a wolf! I don’t think that’ll happen like I can with my big old lab. Look into their eyes and see that affection. So we’ll be back." 

Henry and Brian both relate similar sentiments, although their progressions have different ending scenarios.

"Seeing them is sort of the first goal, second goal is try to photograph or video. Now with some it’s been very easy. The bear was a major surprise. To be able to get within 10 yards of a black bear and photograph him and video him, at that distance. We can’t wait to get back to see it! But the wolves were the dream and the next part of the dream would be to see them a bit closer, probably again unlikely to be achieved, but who knows.” (Henry)

“I’ve seen them a lot. I see them literally everytime I come because I know where to look for them, like you do and other people do. It’s probably not as much of a thrill as it was three years ago, back when they were first introduced to see them because I’ve seen them a lot. But you know, then you just kind of hope that you see them closer or you hope that you see them in the hunting behavior or you hope that you see a pup, or you hope for that one chance in a million where you’ve got your 500 [lens] out and they trot right by and you get a whole roll in five seconds.” (Brian)

An interesting and subtle point that is seen in Brian’s quote is that the thrill is not as great as it was years ago when first seeing a wolf. Other wolf watchers, including George echo this sentiment.

“I guess sighting the wolves becomes much less important and now what I would rather do is spend more time just watching them. That requires more intense kind of experience and so this morning, like it was just to watch. So I think it’s different. Like I say, it’s almost anti-climatic. I’ve been here a lot of years we’ve look[ed] hard for grizzly bears and you’re just not as successful so when you do see one, I think it enhances the experience. It’s just different.” 

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I think that this sentiment is supportive of this idea of a progression being sought in terms of what people want to see and will be satisfied with seeing. It also indicates that the more people watch the wolves, the more particular they become in what they are satisfied in seeing. However, throughout the interviews there is an underlying sentiment that seems to contrast this particularity in desired occurrences. This underlying sentiment is that the actual sighting of a wolf is not as important as you might think, but it is the fact that the wolves are out there, and there is that possibility to see them that is desired.

--Importance of a Sighting

There's all this anticipation and excitement to see the wolves, and the watchers all have in mind what they would love to see, but when it comes right down to it - how important is the actual sighting of the wolf to the experience? One would imagine, such as I did, that seeing a wolf is the foundation for the wolf watching experience, but what is unveiled through the interviews is that it's not as important as I first thought. Although seeing a wolf would be the "icing on the cake, the cherry on top" (Renee), there seems to be an underlying sentiment of just hearing them howl, just knowing that the wolves are out there is satisfying enough.

One individual, Heather, does think the actual sighting is important because she is trying to study wolf behavior and that's difficult to do if you can't watch them.

"Well, since I'm studying wolf behavior, yes, I think it's important to me." 108

However, this idea of seeing the wolf really isn't indicative of the sentiment held by the other wolf watchers. Although some may feel some slight disappointment when they don't see a wolf, the experience itself is worthwhile.

"I think just because we haven't seen them we really want to see them and we keep looking, you know. I suppose I would be a little disappointed, but I can't be
disappointed for our experience here... And while you're out you see so many other creatures that it's still worthwhile.” (Katie)

Even if the wolf watchers aren't able to see the wolves, they have the possibility to hear their lonesome howl, and this alone is a special experience.

“But I spent a lot of time up in Northern Canada in the Canadian Rockies and so I've seen wolves before and just to hear them, I don't care if I don't see them, just to hear them at night is real special.” (Owen)

“If I could never see them, if I could hear them howl that would be almost good enough for me because you know you've got two different aspects here. Seeing them and then actually hearing them howl, that is a beautiful sound. It makes my skin crawl, but it is a beautiful [sound]. You can have the best surround sound system in the world and hear them on TV, it's still not going to match what you hear in real life. It just can't compare.” (Ben)

Although, Nathan continues this sentiment, he also really stresses that just being in the wolves' presence, even if you don't see or hear them, is part of the experience.

“It can be — I mean, it can be nothing. It can be just being in the presence of these wolves, can be just hearing the wolves sometimes, can be nothing at all. I mean, that can be almost as fun, just knowing that these wolves are somewhere around here. They’re not necessarily able to [be] see[n], but you know that they’re [there] — this is where they live and this [is] where they hang out and this is their established territory... It’s always — it’s always — you know, it’s always great. I mean, that’s what you strive for, you know. But you can’t always expect to get it every time. I mean, how many wolves are in this pack? Like eight now, not including the pups, I think it is, or seven. And it’s a huge area that they cover and, you know, it’s not easy to find them at all, even when you’ve got 50 pairs of eyes looking around in one spot for them, and it’s not easy. So, you know, if you see them that’s great, and we usually do. That’s fantastic. But if you don’t, at least you know we’re in their presence and at least you were able to see the places, you know, that they’ve been breeding and denning for the last two years. And that’s part of it.”

This notion of just being in the wolves’ presence is echoed through several of the interviews. Wolf watchers discussed this notion through terms such as just knowing that they’re out there is special, and that at least we’re attempting to see them. What really emerges from the wolf watchers is that being in the presence of wolves in Yellowstone is incredibly special, whether or not people see them.
"I like seeing them, I want to see them, it’s nice to know that they’re out there, and that’s the same with bears too. So yeah, it is nice to know that they’re out there. I mean you can hike a trail and you can see scat, sign, tracks. And there is something exciting about that, I mean suddenly, depending on the freshness of the drag, you’re suddenly thinking, ‘ooh, is that bear nearby? Is this wolf around here somewhere?’ With the bear I guess I’d almost expect to see it more than I’d expect to see a wolf, just out hiking around, but --. So yeah, there is something about just knowing they’re there.” (Tom)

“It was like one night last week I went up there and [a researcher] had her on the scanner, and we knew she was down there where we saw her yesterday, but she never came up, you couldn’t see her. When we stood up there for three hours and I didn’t even realize it, you know time just went so fast and even just knowing that she was down there and not being able to see her was still okay because she was there, and that was just special all by itself.” (Melanie)

Tim relates this feeling of just knowing that they’re there to the idea that it’s time that they were back in the Yellowstone ecosystem.

“Just to know that they’re still here and – it’s hard to describe. I don’t know. It’s like – you feel – I can’t describe it. It’s like you feel that – it’s a – it’s about time that they came back.”

Although it would be great to see a wolf, Renee sees the value in just trying to see one, and that it is the whole experience of being out there trying that matters.

“But even to know that the den is just right over there, the hill. That we’re close to the den, they’re up there. That in itself – I mean just the whole experience of being out here, you know. If we don’t see it, then we don’t see it. But at least we’re out attempting, and that’s all that matters.”

--Bonus to See Them

Closely related to this sentiment about just knowing that the wolves are out there is special, is the idea that it would be a bonus to see a wolf. Although the wolf watchers envisioned these great scenarios they would love to watch, such as a bison/wolf interaction, there was this sentiment that just seeing a wolf is a thrill in itself. Henry describes seeing the wolves as a dream come true. That if he caught only a glimpse of them, that would be incredible, because the sighting is a bonus. Even if you don’t see
something the scenery and the experience is enough. Henry also reiterates and connects the idea of the total experience of Yellowstone to how important the sighting of a wolf is and what a bonus it really is to see it. I think this really helps to reaffirm the interconnectedness of all these dimensions of the wolf watching experience.

"It was the dream part of the trip. We didn’t expect to see wolves. This was the dream part. We knew they were here but we were watching them and generally it looked as thought unless you went very much backpacking and very much overnight that you would be unlikely to see any. So this was the dream come true, if you like. We knew that we would see bison somewhere, you always see bison. And we did all of that and we saw moose. We’ve seen all the things we expected, perhaps to see one or two of...But the wolves were really the dream aspect. We didn’t know where exactly they would be, we didn’t expect them to be within a mile of where we’re standing now in full view. So yes, that was a dream come true. A glimpse would’ve done. A pair of ears running would’ve been enough....The sighting is always a bonus. If you don’t see an animal, the scenery is enough in itself. If you like the seeking of what’s there in itself is a good enough experience. So, yes, if we saw nothing, we’d be disappointed at seeing nothing, but we would still have plenty of memories to take back. We can spend three or four weeks in the Grand Canyon and see nothing more than a couple of chipmunks, but the experience is never gone. I think the wildlife is always the bonus. The wildlife isn’t just bison, elk, etc., there are the chipmunks and the squirrels and the Canada geese. They’re the things we see at home, the heron, but they’re still part of it. The major wildlife is bonus."[17]

Mark and Heidi discuss how seeing a wolf just makes the trip to Yellowstone all that much better. They also incorporate the idea that it’s a once in a lifetime experience to be able to see the wolves and even if you don’t see them, it’s fun to watch.

"It’s not so much important, it just makes the trip that much better." (Mark)[18]

"Right, we were talking on the way here, I said, ‘what are the chances we’re going to see wolves again? We’ve seen them once. That’s a once in a lifetime thing,’ and like Mark said, it’s just watching for them. The fun of it is just watching, taking the chance that you might see them. So even if we don’t see them, it’s not like we’ll be disappointed, but it’s just fun to watch." (Heidi)[19]

Seth states the matter quite simply.

"The wolves have been like gravy. They’re really really neat."[20]
--Expectations

We’ve heard about some their experiences, we’ve heard the discussion regarding the importance of seeing a wolf, we have a better understanding on how seeing a wolf is a bonus to the entire trip, but what about their expectations? Have their expectations been met, especially when the wolf watchers value these great interaction scenes between wolves and other species? What emerges from the interviews is that for the most part, wolf watchers have their expectations met or even exceeded. Even though they might value a certain interaction more, such as a kill, knowing that the chances to see such interactions occurring are slim as well as the underlying sentiments that just knowing that the wolves are there and that seeing one is a bonus, or the ‘icing on the cake’ creates the image that the wolf watchers’ expectations have been met.

Although most wolf watchers would say their expectations have been met or exceeded, Tom was a little disappointed in his first couple of experiences but yet, it was still exciting.

“It was exciting just from the fact that I was seeing them for the first time, yeah. But I think I’ve probably always wanted to see action. I’m trying to think back to the first time I did see wolves. The very first time I saw a wolf, [Bruce] took me out to the viewpoint to see the Leopold wolves, and they were a mile and a half or so away. And we did see four or so of the wolves of that pack. And they weren’t really doing anything, they were just moving from point A to point B, and back and forth, and they were very small, and they were hardly identifiable or recognizable as wolves. And it was kind of cool to say, ‘okay, yeah now I’ve seen a wolf.’ But I guess I didn’t really feel that much like I’d seen a wolf, because they were so far away, and they weren’t really doing anything. Then in ’97, the first wolf I saw here was no. 40, she was on a carcass and she was fairly close to the road. So that’s kind of what I think of as my first real sighting of a wolf in the wild, where I actually did see it as a wolf and identify it, and you know there was actually something disappointing about that too. Although it was neat to be watching her feeding on the carcass, I remember my first thought being, oh, she’s skinnier than I expected a wolf to be. I was expecting her to be a heft, husky animal, and she just wasn’t.”

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Another wolf watcher, Allen, relates the expectations visitors have to the old times of bears being fed at the dumps and people not needing any effort to see wildlife. He relates that sentiment such as this may inflate visitors’ expectations of their visit to YNP.

“I think they expect to see the old paradigm of seeing black bears along the road, Yogi bear and Boo Boo. That’s still kind of allowed and so the one time users, the real neophytes, they come here thinking they’re going to see a lot of different animals without a lot of effort and they better be cautioned that when you see a grizzly bear or you see a wolf. I think that would be the case for many, many years to come... Also caution them that some of these expectations might be really inflated when it comes to some of these more uncommon sightings of wolves and grizzlies. I don’t know how you get that across. That’s difficult to get that across to one-time users.”

But for most wolf watchers, their expectations were met or even exceeded. No matter how many times Travis visits, he enjoys it and he says he sees it all over again.

“Yeah, I’ve had really one and a half other experiences. I came down for three days about four years ago and then I came down for a day about two years ago. So every time I come it’s a little breathtaking, even when you see the same sights, it’s still, you forget just how grandeur they are. So when you come back and see them again it rejuvenates that thought.”

For Heidi, even though she just arrived to the Lamar Valley, says it already exceeds her expectations, and it always has.

“Well, we only got here this morning, so I don’t know, I could say it always exceeds our expectations because we do come out here, we always say we’re not going to be disappointed if we don’t see anything. We’ve already, we’ve watched a grizzly this morning, we saw the coyote, and that’s more than some people when come here, a lot of people. So, it exceeds our expectations. We’re never disappointed when we go home. And if we went home tomorrow we wouldn’t be disappointed.”

Others, such as Henry and Jane worried that because previous trips were so wonderful and successful in watching wildlife, that they may be disappointed on this trip. They soon found out that their worries were unfounded.

“I think probably more. We couldn’t believe how much after about three or four days we were enjoying it this time. We were worried that coming back it wouldn’t be as
good as the previous visit. It has exceeded that by a lot. Wouldn’t you agree [Jane]?”

(Henry)  

“Umm, Umm. Definitely yeah. We thought we might have been lucky last time and seen a lot and it would be disappointing if we didn’t see it this time, but I think we’ve seen more this time.” (Jane)  

One approach to expectations is to have no expectations. Ray believes that each experience is unique and that no expectations results in no disappointments.

“No expectations, no disappointments. So my experiences are always unique.”

This discussion on expectations and if they’re met connects closely to the previous discussions on the nature of the interaction valued and the importance of seeing a wolf to the experience. The fact that people desire certain interactions doesn’t diminish the experience like one would expect. Not even not seeing a wolf seriously diminishes the experience, because the wolf watching experience is more than just seeing a wolf. It encompasses the entire experience—the sights, the sounds, the social atmosphere, and to break it down to specifics such as seeing a wolf and what the wolf was doing, does not do the entire wolf watching experience justice. I think Ray brings this point out quite well when he says the following.

“No, not seeing a wolf doesn’t bother me, but then not seeing anything doesn’t bother me. I’m here for the experience of what happens while I’m here. Now I think the wolves are really an important part of the ecosystem and [to] my experience if I do happen to see a wolf, you know. I think just knowing that they’re there with this anticipation that maybe one will be close enough to get a photograph of or I’ll even see one far enough away to experience what that little bit of nature is happening. So I think that that makes it, you know, an exciting adventure, whether you see them or not, knowing that they’re there. It’s just like if you’re hiking in the woods and you know that you’re hiking in an area where there’s absolutely no bears and it’s not the same as if you’re hiking in an area where there are bears. Even if you don’t see one, you have this anticipation...It’s the anticipation of maybe coming across a bear and it’s either maybe you don’t want to see one or, gee, it would be great to see one. But the thrill is still within you as you’re hiking around.”
Wolf Visibility

A part of the wolf watching experience is seeing a wolf or being in the area where wolf watching opportunities are most available. This fact brings us to the discussion about wolf visibility. Emerging out of the interviews is a discussion that centers around the chance of seeing wolves and yet, according to some wolf watchers there’s a consistency in seeing wolves. But first a brief discussion on learning where to be and needing patience, two issues that wolf watchers need to master.

--Learning Where to Be

There are several different ways in which people learn about where’s the best place to watch wolves. As I described in the Methodology section, I discovered the Lamar Valley through the newspaper, Yellowstone Today, talking with a ranger at the visitor center and by going and seeing where the people where. Learning where to be is as varied among the wolf watchers as it was with me. Some wolf watchers learned about coming to the Lamar Valley from friends that had been here, others driving through stop and talk with other watchers or wolf researchers, and still others learn from studying up either through books or on the internet.

“Well, and also my friend who was out here in June sat down with me with a Yellowstone map and said, ‘this is where you need to go, this section of road, and have a scope because they’re pretty far away from the road. But we, you know, I guess I felt reasonably confident and that was confirmed yesterday talking with the wolf researchers, that this was the part of the park to go to.’ (Amanda)\textsuperscript{129}

“Oh yeah, because it helps you find out where they are for one thing, and how frequently they’re seeing them and when they’re seeing them so that you have a better chance of seeing them yourself, you know, as a result. That’s the first thing we do. When we pull off into one of these sites we always ask, you know, ‘have you seen anything today? Where have you seen them, what time did you see them?’ so that we can come back maybe on another day and try to see them for ourselves.” (Tim)\textsuperscript{130}
These first two quotes illuminate the fact that people learn where to be by talking with others, either friends back home, or other watchers in the area. This aspect of talking with other wolf watchers ties into the previous discussion on the social dimension of the wolf watching experience and how friendly people are. People are comfortable with pulling into a pullout full of people and asking questions. It indicates that they see other wolf watchers as sources of information, and this could prove to be beneficial to the Park if they so chose to utilize it. In other words, the Park could have some of the more serious and knowledgeable wolf watchers be sources of accurate information. This stressing of accurate is important because as we discussed previously, there is often an ‘expert’ in the crowd that may actually not know what is going on. In addition to talking with others, people learn where to go from studying up on the subject through books or the internet. Before Brian came to YNP he wanted an idea of where he should go and what to expect so he prepared before coming out.

“I kind of just kind of studied. You know, I tried to do a little research like when was the best time to come out, [where] was the best place. But I need to read some more books definitely.”

Still others find that the internet has been helpful in not only finding out where to be but, in keeping up with what’s happening with the wolves in Yellowstone.

“Yeah, I couldn’t say a majority, but a certain kind of people come out here. A lot of them, I think a lot of them find information on the internet and that gives them the direction of the Lamar Valley. And they’ll say, ‘when we were working on the computer we found this spot, where exactly are they?’ So I think it has a lot of publicity with people actually coming out here to this section of the park particularly, just to see the wolves.” (Matt)

“[W]e found quite a few sites on the internet including one called The Total Yellowstone by John Yule...That helped us a lot. We read that until almost when we left. It kept us up to date. We’ve also followed the controversies, lawsuits, etc. and we’ve basically been keeping Yellowstone in mind for nearly a year even down to reading local
newspaper cuttings and just knowing what’s been going on so the internet has been a big boon for us.” (Henry)

--Patience

In addition to learning where to be, discerning wolf visibility is dependent upon having patience. Unlike a zoo experience where a visitor needs little patience in seeing an animal, here a visitor needs to spend time watching for them, waiting for them to appear among the sage and grass. In interviews with wolf watchers, stressed is the need for patience as well as some luck and timing.

“Well, watching wolves takes patience and luck and timing. That’s all it is. Sometimes it’s a lot of luck, sometimes it’s a lot of patience, sometimes it’s all timing. It’s all, it’s the only three things you can hope for. And you can spend a week out here and never see a thing, whereas the guy two cars down saw three bears last night and four wolves this morning and he was in the same place you were. He just, it’s never, I mean, you can’t rely on anything out here at all. It’s such a huge, huge open space and not very many wolves and yet just have to get lucky, and hopefully you will. That’s all you can really hope for, I guess.” (Nathan)

“I brought a telescope, a spotting scope and I think the best chance to see a wolf is just to increase your time in the area is the best way to increase your chances.” (Travis)

These quotes help to illuminate the need for wolf watchers to have some patience and as well as some luck. Travis saying that you need to increase your time in the area indicates that you do need to spend some time out there, that you need to invest into the experience. It also relates to needing patience to spend that time out there, even if you don’t see a wolf.

--Chance to See Wolves

In this discussion on wolf visibility, I think it’s important to consider why people come to Yellowstone for wolf watching. Yellowstone National Park affords the chance, the opportunity to view wolves. However, inherent in this chance is the possibility of not seeing wolves, even if you’re looking in all the right places. As was discussed earlier, the
actual sighting of the wolf is important, but so is just the opportunity to see them, to experience what the Park has to offer. An underlying theme that seems to emerge out of some of the previous discussions on wolves is that there is this sense that you might not always be able to see the wolves, that they just won’t be visible. It is this anticipation of ‘are we going to see them or not’ that adds to the experience. The wolf watchers, such as Nathan, realize that you can’t expect to see wolves all the time.

“They’re not necessarily able to [be] see[n], but you know that they’re [there] – this is where they live and this [is] where they hang out and this is their established territory…It’s always – it’s always – you know, it’s always great. I mean, that’s what you strive for, you know. But you can’t always expect to get it every time. I mean, how many wolves are in this pack? Like eight now, not including the pups, I think it is, or seven. And it’s a huge area that they cover and, you know, it’s not easy to find them at all, even when you’ve got 50 pairs of eyes looking around in one spot for them, and it’s not easy.”

Mark, who relates it back to anticipation, echoes this sentiment.

“Yeah, definitely because there’s a far greater chance that you won’t see anything than there is that you will. That makes it so it’s that much more exciting when you do see them because you know that, we come out here kind of counting on not seeing anything and so when we do see something, it is very, very exciting.”

--Consistency

However, contrast to this idea of YNP affording just a chance to see wolves, some wolf watchers, even some of the wolf watchers that discuss there being a chance, view the wolf visibility as a consistency. Some even explain that you’ll have a ‘100%’ chance of seeing them if you go out enough. People visit the Lamar Valley because there is consistency in seeing wolves. People don’t go to other areas of the Park to watch for them because there aren’t consistent sighting of them elsewhere.

“But it’s like why we’ve not gone over to the Blacktail Plateau and looked for over there for instance. Cause this is the best spot so far that we know to look for wolves.” (George)

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Melanie relates a similar thought, although she ties the consistency of sightings to the caring and fascination of wolves.

"I think if they were just out here on Blacktail somewhere and nobody ever saw them, I don't think people would be as fascinated with them, I mean there's just something about any animal that people are fascinated with them. But, I don't think there would be this degree if people didn't feel like they had a shot of seeing them, you know? And I think, there wouldn't be this element of caring about them that you hear so much. It would be more of a, people might say, 'oh well I hear you have wolves here. Yeah, we have wolves.'"}

Melanie also discusses the consistency of wolf sightings in Yellowstone, in context of comparison to other places she would like to go and see wolves.

"I'd love to go to Isle Royale, I'd love to go to Alaska. I think the thing that makes this one so special here is that you can, I mean it's almost a sure bet. I guess I've just been really lucky that so many of the times that I've gone out, I've gotten to see at least one."}

Wolf watchers reflect on the consistency of the wolf visibility by describing it through phrases such as, 'would be so easy to see,' 'people are having just a fairly consistent experience,' and 'they've stayed so visible' to name a few.

"And it's been fantastic. I mean, no one ever really realized that these wolves would be so easy to see, I don't think for so long. And it's kind of nice to set up their territory right here by the highway. It's just been great." (Nathan)

George comments on the wolf visibility by saying 'it's still fairly easy' to see them, which makes seeing a wolf a little less important to him. He does comment that the consistency of sightings creates a fairly consistent experience for people.

"Now sighing a wolf right now becomes less important for me because we've, it's still fairly easy at the moment. Other parts of the park would not be so, and I think one of the virtues of the Druid Pack* is that so many people could see wolves fairly easily and I guess people are having just a fairly consistent experience with that pack."}

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* The Druid Pack/Druid Peak Pack is the pack of wolves that are the most visible. They are the ones most often seen in the Lamar Valley, although the Rose Creek Pack is also often seen.

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Melanie also comments on the visibility of the Druid Pack and comments that she’s surprised that with their visibility that it hasn’t seemed to impact their behavior.

"And with the Druids especially, that they’ve stayed so visible. That just amazes me. I can’t believe that they didn’t just take off, and some of them have, but why this particular pack has stayed so visible and close to the roads. It just fascinates me why they would even put up with all these idiot people in their cars. And yet, still seem to have a normal, normal pack life or whatever. And to be having what looks like great reproductive success with the pups and all that." \(^{143}\)

Larry comments that there’s predictability to seeing the wolves, but unlike George, he still finds it exciting to see them.

"But I guess just basically because the wolves present themselves so regularly. You’ve got a pretty good chance of seeing them on a daily basis if you actually put in your time on the park, especially in the Druid Pack or the Rose [Creek] Pack. So while there is a fair amount of predictability to them, there is still some sort of excitement every time I see them." \(^{144}\)

Brian in his interview remarks that watchers have 100% chance of seeing wolves if they put the time into it.

"Yellowstone is unique in that sense where they have places where literally you have 100% chance in a day or two of seeing a wolf." \(^{145}\)

It is interesting to view these reflections on the consistency of wolf sightings, especially in light of the previous discussions on needing patience and that there’s a great possibility that you won’t see wolves. It is not as though one group of wolf watchers is saying that there’s only a chance to see wolves and the other is saying that you can consistently see them. But it does seem to indicate that the wolf watchers’ experiences are influencing their thoughts on wolf visibility and this makes logical sense. If a person has only seen wolves once or twice they will think that there’s less consistency, then someone who has been there more often and have had more wolf sightings.
Dichotomy

--In Their World

A fascinating extension of this discussion of the chance and consistency of wolf sightings develops into a discourse over seeing the wolves 'in their world' and the institutionalization of the experience. Several of the wolf watchers talked about how seeing wolves in YNP allowed them the ability to see the wolves 'in their world', to be participants, not merely observers of a television show. Rose explains how watching it happen on TV or elsewhere is like being a spectator, but being here in Yellowstone allows you to be a participant in the experience.

"To me it's instead of being, what do they [call] it? Instead of being a participant. So many things in America are, what's the word you're always using, for watching sports? And everything is...Yeah, everything is spectator. And to me seeing a movie in a sense is being a spectator. But when you actually get into it you're a participant. So to me that's the difference."146

Henry discusses the issue in terms of wanting to see the animals in their natural habitat, to realize that this is their land.

"We want to see them in their natural habitat. We want to be able to know they are living their natural life and that you are the observer. This is their land and I think that's important for us."147

Renee who understands that there is educational value in zoos, but sees that setting as artificial, echoes a similar sentiment as Henry's. In Yellowstone, she can see wolves 'in their world.'

"[Y]ou know, it's neat to see a wolf or animals in a zoo just for educational purposes, but it's so artificial. And I think it's so important to come into their world and see them in their world, not our world."148

'Being a first hand witness' is how Will describes the experience. He compares it to watching it or being a part of it.
"That’s how I would compare it, watching it and being a part of, or just being a first hand witness, not watching someone, you know, made, you know, took two years to make, you know, a one hour show where they got the best. I mean this is, I guess this is in a way like what [research] is really like. You don’t always get, you don’t always have a sighting everyday. You don’t see the animals all the time. You don’t get the best shot or whatever."^149

Two wolf watchers discuss this issue with a different perspective. Both George and Ed see the roadside experience different from the backcountry experience and that the backcountry experience gets you even more into the wolves’ world. George describes the roadside experience as being a voyeur and Ed discusses it as the wolves are in your element when all the cars, scopes and people are alongside the road.

"It’s almost like being, you’re almost like a voyeur in a sense. You’re standing a long ways away using the scope on them...I don’t think that would be the same as being able to walk into a meadow and find wolves doing whatever they’re doing.” (George)^150

"Well, it’s different because, because he’s, they’re both in their element, but you’re in their element and in a sense when you see all those cars and all of those experts and all that, their recorders and everything and radios, it’s like they’re in your element kind of. You’re, you know, you’re on the edge of each other’s. But to see them back there, it’s – you’re all in their territory, so it felt different.” (Ed)^151

Yellowstone allows the wolf watchers to enter into the wolves’ world, where they can see the natural forces shape the wolves’ behavior. Although, George and Ed feel that a backcountry experience allows one to feel even more ‘in their world,’ the thought that YNP offers this experience opportunity is still there.

This opportunity of being ‘in their world’ is a major attraction for coming to YNP for wolf watching. As discussed previously, wolf watchers want to have a variety of interactions with wolves, such as seeing them play, seeing them interact with other species, and seeing them hunt and kill. The point though, is that all of these interactions that wolf watchers seek are couched within this opportunity of seeing the wolves ‘in their world’, in the natural environment.

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However, a discourse arises where wolf watchers dichotomize the experience into seeing the wolves 'in their world' as well as seeing and institutionalization of the experience. Whereas one might think seeing the wolves in a natural environment, with only a chance to see them, evoke a more wild and unstructured experience, results show that the contrast is true. Wolf watchers discuss the experience as becoming more institutionalized, in part because of the consistency of the sightings. The idea of the wolf watching experience as institutionalized is discussed two ways. The first is a discussion of the experience becoming an established practice, another checkoff point on a list of things to do in YNP. This then leads into the second discussion of the experience becoming more and more of an experience of an organization having a public character (an institution), such that it has been called a 'good zoo' by some wolf watchers. However, wolf watchers don't all see this as a negative point though. George, in his discussion of the institutionalization of the experience in the sense of it becoming an established practice, sees the value in it in that it gives more people an appreciation of nature.

"The other thing, I think it kind of institutionalizes the experience. I mean, part of going to Yellowstone, I think, for lots of people is you see Old Faithful, and you go see the bears or the wolves. That's okay, I mean that enhances it. When you go to Yellowstone there's things that people do and I think that watching the wolf is now become part of that for lots and lots of people. That's good I think. It gives people an appreciation for something, different aspects of nature, different mammals. That's good."

Heather feels that the reintroduction efforts have put the wolves in the spotlight, thus people want to see them as well as everything else that Yellowstone has to offer.

"I think it brought it more into the spotlight because before that a lot of people didn't even think about it. They didn't really realize the wolves used to be here and all
the efforts that went into getting in there got a lot of press and then once they’re here everybody hears about it and everybody thinks, ‘well, I’m in Yellowstone, there’s wolves here, I need to find a wolf’ because they want to see a everything that’s in the park.”

Owen refers to the animals in Yellowstone as being on show, where everybody is out looking for them. This sentiment helps to bridge together the two ways of discussing the institutional feel of the experience because it includes the idea of being on show as they would be in a zoo, but also incorporates the idea that everybody is looking for them, that it is an established practice. He relates this sentiment by comparing it to another experience that he has had.

“I camp in [Canada] all the time, I’m out constantly and it’s strange and somebody might help me with this, but there’s a different feeling about bear in Yellowstone and bear in the Canadian Rockies. Here they make such a big deal about it, all the warnings and that you’re constantly aware, where in the Canadian Rockies, yeah, there are bear and they tell you there are bear and they tell you to be smart and that’s the end of it. So they’re more part of the environment. Here the animals are kind of on show in a way, they’re just kind of – everybody’s out looking for them and it’s a different feeling than up north.”

The next three quotes relate to more of this idea of the animal being on show, that the Yellowstone experience is similar to that of a zoo. Henry compares the experience to that of a ‘good zoo’, but he sees value in that it is a place for people to learn.

“Yes, I think this is almost, I suppose it’s a cruel word, a good zoo. A good place where people could learn.”

David relates this sentiment of a zoo like experience not only to the wolf watching, but also to the wildlife in general, in part because of its close proximity.

“Down by Tower where the bison were right next to the road and the three elk were sitting by a little pool, a pond. But yesterday I was thinking how it was almost like a zoo though, they were so close. But that’s just kind of how it is.”
Although wolves in the Park are wilder than those found in captivity, Larry feels that the wolves aren't as wild as they could be and he equates this to Yellowstone being sort of like a zoo.

"While the wolves in the park are definitely wilder than the ones in the Discovery Center, I wouldn't equate them with true, wild wolves, say like in Canada or something like that. After being chased by helicopters and darted and collared and stuff, they are certainly not your average canine, but there is still some sort of wild freedom to them that makes it somewhat exciting. But I guess to get the true outdoor wildlife action Yellowstone is probably not the spot, but it's better than the local zoo. But in a way it is sort of like a zoo, the way I feel."

This discussion of the dichotomy of the experience -- the ability of seeing the wolves in a natural environment, and yet considering it a good zoo -- encompasses more. First, it's important to realize that it is some of the same people that express these ideas. However, there are some people that discuss only some of these ideas, but not others. This represents differences in the way that people experience the phenomenon.

Second, this discussion on the dichotomy is built upon the foundation set by the previous discussions -- the discussions on the nature of the Yellowstone National Park and Lamar Valley experiences, the discussions revolving around the social dimension of wolf watching, the discourse of the nature of the interaction valued and of course the talk over wolf visibility. This discussion over wolf visibility has apparent parallels to this dichotomy, for it is the chance to see wolves 'in their world' and the institutionalization of the experience is in part due to the consistency of sightings in the Lamar Valley. For if the wolves were as elusive as people thought they would be, I do not think this wolf watching phenomenon would be as big as it is.
**Alternative Ways of Experiencing Wolves**

A logical extension of this discussion continues into a discourse surrounding the alternative ways people experience wolves. Since few people have had the opportunity to see wolves in the wild, their experiences with them (wolves) has been limited to other mediums such as zoos, books, television, and movies. A discussion about these experiences is appropriate because it sets the framework for comparisons to occur between the wolf watching experience in YNP and those that occur elsewhere, such as those in zoos or enclosures and books and movies.

Thomas More (1977) described three major types of experiences. More's typology consisted of 1) direct natural experiences, 2) direct artificial experiences, and 3) vicarious experiences. Direct natural experiences are the experiences available by directly participating in a natural setting. Watching wolves in Yellowstone National Park would be this type of experience. His second type, direct artificial experiences, is in contrast to a natural setting. In other words, these experiences were in an artificial setting. One would receive this type of experience at a zoo or a captive wolf setting. The third type, vicarious experiences are those experiences that are indirect through media. In other words, the person did not actively participate in the experience but is getting it through another means, i.e. watching it on television or reading about it. Wolf watchers discussed these alternative ways of experiencing wolves in two ways.

The first way discusses how the other experience affected the wolf watching experience in Yellowstone. Often times reading about wolves or seeing shows on them added to the experience that they had in Yellowstone. It allowed them to gain some information on wolves in general, which then helped them to figure out what the wolves
were doing. Some other experiences, such as the IMAX movie that was being shown in West Yellowstone about wolves, really brought to light the controversy that has been surrounding the reintroduction efforts and wolf watchers commented on how that experience affected their wolf watching.

The other way that these other experiences were being addressed was through a comparison of the experiences. In other words, how the wolf watching experience in Yellowstone was different from seeing wolves in captive settings or in movies, television or books. What really comes through in this discussion is that these are all very different types of experiences, each with some value in and of itself. However, there seems to be the undertone that wolf watchers really don’t like to see wolves in captivity. With that said, let us explore what the wolf watchers had to say about alternative ways of experiencing wolves.

Affect on YNP Wolf Watching Experience

Several outside sources affected the wolf watchers’ experiences at Yellowstone. These sources, such as interpretive talks, the internet, books, television, and movies, had a positive affect on the experience. They helped to introduce the watchers to the wolf watching experience, they helped to guide the watchers to the right areas to be, but most of all, these sources gave some knowledge to the wolf watchers about the wolves. It is this knowledge that really seems to have made an impact on the experience because it allows the wolf watchers to understand what is going on with the wolves and what they’re doing.
Some wolf watchers learned about the reintroduction through interpretive talks done before the wolves were brought in or soon afterwards. These interpretive talks not only introduced some of the wolf watchers to the reintroduction efforts, but also introduced them to the controversy surrounding the issue. For George, the interpretive talk was the first time he had heard about the reintroduction plans. Because he learned about the reintroduction, he made plans to come back once the wolves were here.

"I think we saw a ranger presentation in Yosemite in about 1994 maybe, or maybe, yeah, 1994 because they talked about the wolf restoration program and they had a wolf pelt and I think that was the first time I ever heard about the restoration program. Then we came up in '96 specifically to see the wolves and that was our whole objective." 158

For Henry, the interpretive talk allowed him to learn about the controversy surrounding the reintroduction.

"Because we attended a couple of ranger talks, one at Old Faithful and we went on a general walk with a ranger and they were starting talking then about how they were being penned and how secretive the pens had to [be] because there was so much controversy about it which we felt was a shame." 159

The internet has proven useful for wolf watchers to keep up to date with what’s happening with the Yellowstone wolves. Several websites are quite useful to wolf watchers because they do talk about the Yellowstone wolves and the different packs. Henry likes the internet because it keeps him up to date on current issues.

"[W]e found quite a few sites on the internet including one called, The Total Yellowstone by John Yule...That helped us a lot. We read that until almost when we left. It kept us up to date. We’ve also followed the controversies, lawsuits, etc. and we’ve basically been keeping Yellowstone in mind for nearly a year even down to reading local newspaper cuttings and just knowing what’s been going on so the internet has been a big boon for us." 160

Using the internet helps keep Mark and Heidi current with the packs’ development and deaths of wolves. Not only that, but it’s a way for the two of them to
share with each other the wolf experience when one brings back print outs and they discuss what’s going on.

“I just think it was really neat to watch them develop and hear what happens to the packs and the deaths and their interaction with the people in the towns around here. I think it’s just really neat, especially since it’s so recent and something I can tell my children I remember when they first brought them into the park and we have pictures of it and blah, blah, blah. I just think it’s really neat.” (Mark)

“He likes to bring some of the print outs home from work, ‘look at this, you gotta read this!’ We have a bunch of them in the car.” (Heidi)

Nathan explains how the wildlife tour company he works for uses the internet for giving information on the wolves to their customers.

“But we get the internet wolf reports like Ralph Maughan and his report and there always some information about them over there. So we kind of throw in a few tidbits of information about them over there and tell people what they’re doing and kind of relate to them how these wolves are doing and how the more agriculture over there is kind of causing a lot of them to be killed off a little bit more often than they are over here because it’s mostly wilderness over here in the park stuff. So it’s kind of an interesting little throw in that you kind of relate to the people that, you know, these wolves are doing much better than most people ever thought they would.”

Although wolf watchers can learn about the Yellowstone wolves through books, television, and movies, often these sources educate them more on general wolf knowledge, such as behavior. These sources have also attributed to the wolf watching experience in Yellowstone, even if the knowledge learned was more general wolf information and not specifically Yellowstone wolf news. What is revealed through the excerpts is that these sources, as well as the previous ones discussed, enhance the wolf watching experience.

Books are an interesting source for experiencing wolves because, although there may be pictures, much of the experience is dependent upon the reader’s imagination. Even so, wolf watchers get a lot out of reading about wolves and this has a positive affect
on the wolf watching experience. For some books had led to the realization of how
difficult it was to reintroduce the wolves, for others it has educated them on wolf
behavior. For others, such as Rose, a lifelong interest in reading about wildlife and
wolves led to the thought of, 'let’s go see the wolves.’ What the next two excerpts show
is how books have affected the experience in the ways described above.

George discusses how books have enhanced his wolf watching experience by
bringing to light the difficulty involved with bringing the wolves back to Yellowstone.

"It enhances it for me because I’ve come to the realization how difficult it was to
re-establish the wolves here. I mean, this is, I’m even amazed that they were able to pull
it off. Incredible political pressure against them and we’ve gotten this mythology about
wolves that I think is a real obstacle. I’m always amazed when something like that can
happen against such powerful interests such as ranchers. I mean, look at how Babbitt
tried to reduce or increase their grazing fees and just reverse that almost immediately so
how, it enhances the experience I think for me."\(^{164}\)

Rose talks about how lifelong reading about animals, in particular wolves, got her
to think about coming out to Yellowstone to watch wolves.

"And I think from reading Never Cry Wolf and then seeing the movie, and then
wanting to adopt a wolf, and then reading about wolves as a child, you know – I read all
the Zane Gray books and anything I could about animals, the West, growing up in a
suburb of Chicago, hating it, wanting to be west my whole life. That just after raising our
four children and having them gone, it’s like I never had time to think about, you know,
I’m going to go to the park and see animals and enjoy them, like I think he [her husband]
has. So now that our children are grown we have this time. It just sounded like a
wonderful opportunity. I don’t know, I would have never thought of it, ‘let’s go see the
wolves.’"\(^{165}\)

However, perhaps books, and the other sources as well, play a part in having
expectations not be met. When Tom was discussing his disappointment about his first
couple of wolf sightings (excerpt 121) he talked about how he expected the wolf to be
bigger. This can be contributed, in part, to seeing pictures in books, which are often the
prime specimens in captive settings.

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“Pictures, that I had seen all of my life. Which are almost always probably taken in captive settings, where you’ve got a good healthy animal. And they probably pick the prime animal to be focusing on their photogenic efforts, etc.”

The point of discussing this is to show that perhaps, that some of these other ways of experiencing wolves may have a negative impact on the wolf watching experience. It is understandable that when at home visitors are bombarded with pictures of the best looking wolves in captivity, that they may expect the same of the wolves in Yellowstone without fully realizing it. In other words, perhaps these other sources do affect not only the experience, but also the expectations of what the wolves are too look like.

One of the most common ways for people to experience wolves, especially when at home is through the television. Television shows allow the wolf watchers to learn about wolf behavior, which then allows them to then interpret what’s occurring when watching the wolves in Yellowstone. Not only that, but the shows also get the people interested and excited about coming to Yellowstone to see the wolves with their own eyes.

Mark relates that television brings insight into the wolves’ behavior, which complements coming out and watching the wolves because then he knows what he’s looking at.

“It allows us to know more about them. Anytime something is on about the wolves we try to watch it just because it does allow us to have a little bit of insight into their behavior or, it does really, it’s a nice complement to coming out here and actually looking for them because you know something about what you’re looking for.”

This thought of learning from the television shows and applying that knowledge to the Yellowstone wolf watching experience is echoed in Heather’s discussion of the affect of television on the experience. She then compares the two experiences and sees the Yellowstone wolf watching experience as more ‘hands on.’
“I think watching that show is really interesting and it’s important if you want to understand what they’re doing because you learn a lot from watching them. But coming out here, you have to interpret things for yourself and so you’re forced to kind of pull up all the knowledge that you know and learn more stuff. And I think coming out and actually seeing them do it is a lot more hands on and it makes a lot more of an impression on you than shows do.”

Tess and Seth talked about how television shows make you wish you were in Yellowstone to see the wolves, but that they don’t show a person how much patience you need when watching wolves. Television shows present the wolves numerous times within a half an hour, whereas it may take a day of watching to see a wolf.

“Oh, well the TV shows makes you definitely wish you were here and there’s nothing like just being out in the valley hearing the sights and the sounds or no sounds, sometimes. Even the weather, the way the wind blows.” (Tess)

“TV shows don’t show you how much patience you need to be able to sit and watch an area to be able to see something. TV show, you sit there for a half hour and you see them several times in that half hour. You sit out here all day and may not see anything, or you may see eight of them.” (Seth)

However, Seth and Tess see value in the television shows because they help prepare a person for what to expect, but more than that, to realize that what goes on is a part of nature. Seth also comments on that by seeing it on TV and coming out to Yellowstone, one realizes how much work it was for the photographer of that TV show to get the footage shot.

“Yeah, but then you might see them chasing after the animals, you might even see them do a kill out here, depending on the time of year. So really it’s just part of nature. The TV shows do help prepare you a lot if you do see them take down an animal for a kill, realizing that is part of nature.” (Seth)

“And we do make reference while we’re watching them that that’s like behavior that we saw and it’s on TV, but here you’re actually in real life seeing it. Sometimes we have really good luck seeing good things, sometimes the wolf goes out and lays down and there he stays.” (Tess)

“Being out here in real life makes you appreciate being able to see it on TV and knowing how hard that photographer had to work to have gotten those pictures. He’s had to have worked hours to get that.” (Seth)
Although, Travis thinks that the Yellowstone experience is a more uplifting experience than TV, the television allows for an educational experience. He sees that seeing wolves on TV strengthens what he sees in Yellowstone and it allows him to get a more complete picture.

“Well, you certainly get a better view of it with the commentators or with experts’ opinions blended in, but seeing it from your living room and the comfort of your warm home with a Coke or beer in your hand it certainly different from going into the outdoors, smelling the air, feeling the wind, and seeing a wolf in its home, seeing a wolf dart in and out of the trees and see a wolf interact with its—I would think that would be a much more uplifting experience than sitting on your couch, although the educational aspects of the shows are important and are probably what’s helped this reintroduction and what’s helped any surviving species exist is those shows...I don’t think that I would have the opportunity to observe them long enough. I mean I would probably see a glimpse coming out of the trees. Now the interactions and the social, the different ways that they interact, they’re kind of embedded in my mind from the shows. So when they dart back in the woods, I’m imagining them going back up to their fellow pack members and licking and kissing...So anyway, it shoots back out, I see it visually again, darts back in the woods and again my imagination takes over. I imagine it going back there thinking about a kill, starting to orient themselves and working as a team, but I never see any of this. I’ll probably never see them do a kill or a take down. It’ll all be my imagination, but the visual glimpse will strengthen that imaginary view and put a little color to the whole picture for me.”

A movie on wolves, in particular the Idaho and Yellowstone wolves was showing in West Yellowstone at the IMAX theater. Several of the wolf watchers commented on seeing the movie and how it affected their experience. Although many discussed what they learned, for others it made them want to see the wolves in Yellowstone even more.

The two excerpts below best articulate the discussions surrounding the movie experience and how it affects the Yellowstone experience.

Allen points out that movies can show how the wolves move about throughout their lives, whereas zoos can’t. He also comments that seeing such a movie helps to prepare visitors for a trip to Yellowstone.
"You can't really portray that in a zoo, how those animals get along throughout the course of their life through the seasons and through the years. Movies can, although it's celluloid, it's not really there, it's still a good representation, a good facsimile of what's going on. It promotes, I think, it helps people prepare for a trip into a place like Yellowstone." 175

Henry discusses seeing the movie and finding value in it as an educational tool for understanding what wolves mean to the ecosystem, but also a motivator to come and see the wolves in Yellowstone. He relates a story told in the movie and ties it needing to educate children about as much of the world around them as possible. What is interesting is that he also talks about the only wolf films he's seen are pro wolf films. He attributes this to the fact that much of the argument against wolves takes place in political context. Henry also comments that the movie reinforces what he has seen out in the wild, which ties back to what some of the other wolf watchers have commented on.

"We were watching a film at the IMAX yesterday at [West] Yellowstone and here's a group of Nez Perce from north Idaho that they reintroduced wolves to the Indian reservation, the native reservation, but they were saying they just can't get invited into schools. So many local district education won't accept them in because it's against their principles. That seems a shame because if nothing else, even if you're not going to reintroduce them, people should know a balanced account of what wolves mean to any ecosystem. It's something I would teach as a teacher regardless of the district educational priority. I think children need to know as much about the world around them as possible, period....I think the film is a motivator to come and see the real thing basically and just reinforce what we already know or sometimes lead us to get into arguments about, 'no, this is not quite right, this is not a balanced film.' Generally, the films we have seen are probably pro wolves. We've not really seen the other side of the argument that seem to be mainly taking place in the world of politics so we are only really seeing the pro wolves films. For us they are reinforcing what we have already seen out here in the wild." 176

As discussed previously, wolf watchers see these other experiences with wolves in two ways, one being how these other experiences affect the Yellowstone wolf watching experience and the second way as a comparison between the experiences. They are not necessarily separate discussions as you could tell from some of the previous
excerpts that touched upon both (excerpts 169, 173, 174 and 175). This reconfirms the notion that what the wolf watchers discuss is interconnected in a myriad of ways.

Comparisons

Wolf watchers made comparisons between the Yellowstone wolf watching experience and those experiences with books, television, movies, and wolves in captive settings. What emerges out of the interviews is that these other experiences are ‘not as intense’, that there really is ‘no comparison’ because the experience in real life is ‘just unbelievable’. Because the wolf watchers focused mostly on comparisons with captive setting experiences, I’m going to briefly discuss their comparisons with book, television and movie experiences first. A more elaborate discussion on the comparisons between the Yellowstone wolf watching experience and experiences in captive settings will then follow.

When comparing the Yellowstone wolf watching experience to experiencing wolves through books, wolf watchers declare that there is no comparison. Although reading about wolves is educational, to fully understand the intense experience of seeing a wolf, you really need to be out there, seeing it for yourself. The next three quotes will show how the wolf watchers compare books to the real experience through sharing these sentiments.

“And if you want to see the wolves feeding on a carcass, that’s not the same unless, you know, you have to be there. It’s different than, it’s different than reading about it or seeing it somewhere else.” (Rose)

“It’s different. I guess it’s more intense, more of a one-on-one type situation. The only time I’ve seen them before was on television and of course I’ve read about them in books. Of course, none of that never goes far enough, and you can’t describe anything to that effect in words as opposed to seeing it. There’s no comparison there. If you see a
wolf, it’s hard to describe what it’s like to see it unless you actually see it yourself. It’s more intense.” (Ted)

“There’s no comparison. Reading is, of course, intellectual and only as good as your imagination. An example being I just saw the Grand Canyon for the first time and you can see videos of it and you can see pictures of it and it just doesn’t strike you like it does when you get out and you look down in it and across it, you know, 18 miles across and you’re just like totally in the experience. So reading about them is educational and interesting and fun, but not like having the experience. There’s just nothing like that.” (Maria)

What emerges out of these excerpts is that the book experience is no comparison for the lived experience, the experience of being out there and seeing the wolves firsthand. Maria’s comment captures well the sentiments expressed by many of the respondents when she says, “So reading about them is educational and interesting and fun, but not like having the experience” (excerpt 179). Wolf watchers find books fun and educational, but it doesn’t compare to the experience of being in the Lamar Valley waiting for a brief glimpse of the wolf.

The same can be said regarding the comparison of the television experience and that of the Yellowstone experience. Again, wolf watchers feel that there is no comparison to be made. In the discussion on the affect of television experience on the wolf watching experience, what emerges is that television is very educational and the wolf watchers enjoy it and learn from it. However, there was still a sense that the experience wasn’t the same as seeing them in Yellowstone. Travis talked about how being out in Yellowstone is a much more uplifting experience than sitting on your couch watching wolves on television (excerpt 174). Tess and Seth discussed how television helps prepare you to what you might see, but once in YNP, “you’re actually in real life seeing it,” (excerpts 171 & 172). The next two excerpts share this sentiment of there’s really no comparison between the Yellowstone experience and those on television—that
you can’t really believe it until you see it for yourself. In addition, Melanie brings up the thought that some of the shows on television are with wolves that are being raised in captivity.

“There’s no comparison. I can see them on TV all day long, hear them howl on TV all day long, there’s no comparison to being out here and just hearing, wide open space, there is no comparison.” (Ben)

“Oh, well it would be like reading about Yellowstone and seeing it for real, you know? It’s almost, you can’t really believe it until you see it for yourself and everything. Because you wonder, so many of the things that you see on TV and stuff are wolves that somebody is raising in captivity.” (Melanie)

There is a definite theme emerging out of the comparisons made between book, television and Yellowstone experiences. The theme emerging is that there really is not a comparison, because the Yellowstone experience is a lived experience, an experience in which the wolf watcher is a participant, not a spectator on a couch drinking soda. This sentiment is also echoed in the comparison made between the YNP experience and that in movies. Ray articulates the sentiment best in his excerpt that follows. The excerpt is in two parts, the first has him discussing an earlier Yellowstone experience and the second is where he talks about the movie experience. The major point to focus on is that the Yellowstone experience allows you to experience in real life, to be able to see the entire drama unfold, whereas in movies you are show only little bits and pieces. It is also interesting to note that Ray touches upon the use of a scope and how that separates you a little from being in the experience, however, it still a much more real experience than that found in movies.

“The other sighting I saw last year was a herd of elk and wolves got up from their nap and started chasing the elk and split them up into about four different little smaller groups until they ended up getting an elk. It was amazing how fast all the wolves hit the kill, just went for it, dust flying and just, it’s pretty interesting to watch that instead of just watching a movie of it. To experience it in real life is just unbelievable. Pretty
cool....It’s sure a lot more real, you know. With the wolves, you’re usually looking through a scope so your still separated by some other form besides your own eyes, but it’s still a much more real experience than just seeing something put together. Because when you’re seeing something in a movie, it’s always little cuts of parts of the action, but here you’re watching the whole thing develop, how it started, how it ended. Other wildlife experiences where you’re right there and the wildlife is, you don’t need a spotting scope or binoculars or anything, it’s pretty amazing because then you do feel kind of part of the experience.”

Wolf watchers also compared captive wolf experiences to the Yellowstone experience in a myriad of ways. Although many wolf watchers see an educational value in captive wolves, such as those in zoos, there was the sentiment that the experience, again, doesn’t compare to the Yellowstone wolf watching experience. The wolf watchers discussed how in Yellowstone, a visitor is able to see wild wolf behavior, that in Yellowstone, one can really see the life cycle of the wolf. Heather discusses how wolves in Yellowstone have more freedom which allows them to act more like wolves.

“The wolves just have more freedom and I think they act more like wolves, obviously. With the zoos you can tell usually that they’re bored and they don’t have a normal structure to their lives and stuff like that and it’s just really interesting and important for people to see them out in the wild doing, chasing antelope, playing around and stuff like that.”

Allen ties seeing wolves in zoos to a moral issue, but more important than that is that zoos don’t allow a life cycle to occur. He relates to the zoo as being a prison where wolves can’t get along in their life cycle the way they would be able to in a natural area.

“I just get kind of—I think it’s a moral issue and I know that animals have a fair amount of intelligence and I think they are sensitive and I think that they’re fairly emotional, most at least, and I think it’s almost like a prison. It’s a nice prison for them and they live longer, but are they happier? Some of them don’t know the difference. But genetically they do, down deep they do. So I have a problem with those. There are some zoos, that I’ve seen, I’m sure there are others in the world that are fantastic when it comes to trying to emulate some sort of natural setting or habitat, but it doesn’t have, it still doesn’t complete the life cycle for the animal, like the four distinct seasons in Montana. How can you do that in a zoo? How can you bring an elk to a zoo in Phoenix, Arizona and have it represent its life cycle although elk do well in places where there aren’t the four seasons. But let’s take a bighorn sheep, for example, not the desert bighorn, but the
Rocky Mountain bighorn. You can’t really portray that in a zoo, how those animals get along throughout the course of their life through the seasons and through the years. Melanie also makes comparisons between the YNP experience and those in captive settings based upon the wolves’ behavior. She compares the YNP experience to that of a wolf park in Indiana. Although she thinks it’s neat to hear the wolves and to see them, she relates it to seeing them in a zoo, which she describes as, ‘it was just miserable.’ Another point in her excerpt is that you don’t get to see the wolves act as they would in a wild environment because they are fed. The interactions occurring in the Wolf Park are contrived, not real. The wolves in Yellowstone are coping with whatever comes.

“And there’s a place in Lafayette, Indiana called Wolf Park, and you can go there on like Friday nights for the wolf howl and they have the crowd howl and the wolves start howling. And they’re raised in a, it’s a pretty good sized enclosure, but they feed them like roadkill deer and stuff. And they take the pups away when they’re like tiny, and raise them with humans so that they can study them, and I think, how can you study a wolf pack’s behavior when they’ve been raised with people? It was neat to see them, and to hear the howling and everything. But it was just, it was like seeing them in the zoo, it was just miserable. And they had a bison herd there, and on like Saturday afternoons they would have a wolf/bison interaction. And they would take people out in like the beds of pick-ups, and we never went to that, because I just thought, no. And they said the wolves would stalk the bison and get around them, and the bison would kind of herd together and defend themselves, but since the wolves were all fed, they never killed the bison. They just watched them chase them around. What’s the point, you know? I mean this is supposed to be an officially studied thing, I mean this is in conjunction with Purdue University or something. I don’t know, it was just too weird, and then to see them out here. And like that guy earlier was thinking, ‘well, that’s not a wild wolf pack, you know.’ And I think, ‘okay, walk out there and see how close they let you get, you know.’ I just, they just, just because they stay visible for god knows whatever reason, they’re doing everything that wild wolf ought to do, I mean aside from the fact that they’ve been collared, they haven’t been fed or vetted or anything, you know they’re just out there coping with whatever comes.”

Allen used the term a prison as a way to describe a captive setting, and Henry does also. He describes it as the wolves are trying to act as naturally as they can in a
limited space while being fed. You just don't see the interaction that you do in the Yellowstone experience in zoos.

“...and that's the big difference here. What you're seeing is real interaction. The bison have got to interact the way they have for millions of years with the grizzly, with the wolf, with the elk, and each one of them has got their part to play. In the zoo they don't interact at all. In fact, there's usually great big fence between them to stop them from interacting.”

An extension of this discussion of a zoo/captive setting being a prison is the notion that for a wolf to be a wolf it needs to be in its habitat. Allen articulates that you need the animal and the habitat to make them whole. What zoos do is separate the animal from their habitat.

“...That to me is a quasi-zoo. Some of these places where you see these animals that I know have their home ranges are hundreds of miles and their home range is only 500 square feet. I think it’s a profit thing. It’s profitability. It really isn’t educational. You take an animal away from its habitat, it’s no longer the animal. The animal and the habitat have to be together to make them whole. You can’t separate the animal from its habitat and zoos separate animals from their habitat.”

This relates back to his comment about how zoos don’t/can’t complete the wolf’s life cycle. Part of the life cycle is the habitat in which the animal resides. Allen comments that he likes Sea World because it’s right on the ocean. However, this contrasts his feelings for captive wolves near wild areas. Having captive wolves near open and wild areas, such as the Grizzly Discovery Center, which has wolves, really bothers Allen. This is because so nearby in Yellowstone, someone could see the wolves free and wild in their natural surroundings. Seeing them in captivity falls way short of the Yellowstone experience.
“No, I won’t go in the Grizzly Discovery Center. I just won’t do it and won’t go in there to see a grizzly or a wolf. I can go to the Salt Lake zoo to see that. Salt Lake City, Seattle, or Spokane. That’s a zoo. That is no the Yellowstone experience. I have a problem with the Grizzly Discovery Center other than the Imax. I really think that’s a neat thing, but I have a problem with keeping these animals in captivity right next to a huge, beautiful place called Yellowstone Park where you can go out and see them there. I think it’s really robbing the people of the whole experience. I think it’s short sighted and it’s really, like I said, it’s just robbing them of the experience. You can seeing a wolf there or the grizzly there, it falls way, way short of seeing it free and in the wild.”

Another element that differentiates the YNP experience from one in a captive setting is that of challenge. Mark and Heidi talk about how there’s no challenge to seeing a wolf in a zoo.

“Here they’re free, running wild.” (Mark)

“Same with all of the animals. You can go in a zoo and see them anywhere and it’s not challenge to walk up and see them in a cage. There’s nothing to it.” (Heidi)

I think Doug touches upon an even bigger element that separates the experiences - wildness. Wolf watchers really discern a difference between wolves in Yellowstone as being wild and free whereas captive settings ‘break part of the spirit.’ What emerges out of the interviews is that wolf watchers don’t see the wolves as wild in captive settings, they aren’t free, wild, doing their own thing. Being caged or fenced in appears to take the wilderness aspect away, although Tom seems to believe that wildness is something innate in the animal. But because of the artificial setting, behavior is artificial.

“I think it is something innate in the animal itself to an extent. You would have an animal in a captive setting like in the Seattle Zoo or at Wolf Haven in Tenino, or out here in West Yellowstone at the Grizzly Discovery Center. They may not be tame animals in the sense that people have domesticated them, so the are wild to some extent, they would probably run from humans. They would probably do a lot of the wild things they normally do. Maybe it’s a matter of degree of wildness in the animal. Because they are being fed in those situations, they are not out hunting on their own, they are not traveling 20, 40 miles a day. Their pack behavior is somewhat artificial because of the artificial setting in which they live. Here, pretty much every dimension, if not every dimension of their social structure, their individual behaviors. Everything they do is wild, yes, this area is wild too, there are no fences. Although even there, there is a matter of degree. I mean, you have the road right down below, so it’s not completely a wild
area, but it’s a lot closer. And at this point in our human history on the planet, it’s perhaps about as close as one can get to complete true wilderness for the area. And as far as the animals are concerned, I think the wildness in the animal has to do with them being out there hunting on their own, being responsible for bringing down their own food. Establishing their own packs, meeting up with one another and creating whatever social bonds they do have. Establishing dominance, subordinate patterns as they do. Those things are a lot more natural out here in this setting than they would be in a captive setting.”

Ted shares a similar sentiment. He sees that the setting is important in differentiating between the experiences, but he also sees that it’s the same animal to some degree in both settings. However, being in captivity can definitely break the spirit of the animal, thus making it definitely a different animal.

“The setting would probably be more, I been to like back home there are a few places where they have black bears and stuff and there’s still that intensity sometimes in their eyes even though they’re captive. It’s still the same animal to some degree. If they get out they’d really want to. Of course, some of them if they did get out, they’d be pretty much dead because they couldn’t survive once they got out. I think it’s the setting more than just being a difference in the animals. It’s a little bit of both, I guess. You cage something up for five or six years would definitely break part of the spirit as opposed it’s out in the wild, especially if it was born there and raised there and just running free out there. It’s definitely a different animal. A little bit of both. I’d say more just a setting, people are capitalizing on people’s ignorance and the ability to take animals and put them behind a cage.”

A wolf watcher, Brian, who is a wildlife photographer also feels that wolves in enclosures aren’t wild. He wouldn’t pay to rent a wolf for pictures because it just isn’t wild. He relates the wildness back to the environment/setting. You don’t see the wolves behaving as a wild wolf would. He finds that part of the experience of seeing the wolves is them being wild and seeing them in the Park.

“Well, sure, any animal that you see in a zoo isn’t a wild animal. I don’t feel any great thrill seeing an animal in a zoo or even in Wolf Haven where they’ve got enclosures...[F]at as anything because of the chicken they feed it or whatever. It’s just not wild. It doesn’t have that sense of wild. I personally have never photographed tame animals. I’ve never paid to photograph animals. I’ve never gone up and rented animals in none of the published pictures I have are tame animals, and you know, it’s a good way to make money. Pay your $300 to the Triple D and go photograph their wolf for three
hours. But the pictures would mean nothing to me... Because they are not wild. You
don’t know whether they are truly acting in a wild like way by watching them react to an
enclosed environment. You know, there’s no wolf in the world that’s going to stand
there 25 feet away, and hide itself behind a thin aspen tree while you shoot half it’s face
for a poster that’s going to hand in every park in the country, which is that they have right
now. It’s just not going to happen. That’s not a true shot....So those things aren’t
necessarily what you are going to see wild wolf doing, so they mean nothing to me. They
really do, personally. They might symbolize something to other people. The great
poster, that might symbolize the great wolves in Yellowstone, if it’s a Wolf Haven wolf,
but to me it doesn’t because it’s not a Yellowstone wolf, or it’s not an Alaskan wolf. And
I’ve seen very very few good pictures of wild wolves running basically away. And that’s
great. If you got a great running picture of a wolf I’d be like, ‘make a poster of that,’
rather than line the wolves up and just shoot them until you’re tired and your money runs
out. So sure, the experience of them being wild is invaluable to me in the experience of
coming to the park.”

Brian brings together the notion of wildness and being in the Park. I think this is
important because in the Park experience anything can happen. Bruce expands on that
idea. He differentiates the experiences by saying that in YNP anything can happen. That
while watching wolves you may get to see a grizzly or mountain lion.

“Of course for me, it would be far more exciting. Because really literally
anything could happen out here. In ten minutes a grizzly could show up, a mountain lion,
anything could happen. So it’s worth the wait through the times when there isn’t much.
An extra dimension for people like the three of us is that we hopefully will continue to
see these things year after year. A good example of that would be this small black pup
that probably is going to have a real interesting story. That could easily be, in a couple of
years she’ll have her own pack and be an alpha female and we can talk about how small
she was when she started out and how pitiful she looked and then gradually saw her
develop into a real dominant pup and continue on from that. So it’s much more exciting
to be able to come back time after time and maybe just see one particular ones.”

He extends this idea of anything can happen to being able to follow certain
wolves’ lives. Anything can happen to a wolf during it’s life cycle and to be able to
watch it get older and develop is very fascinating. Although one can see an animal grow
in zoos and follow its life cycle, it doesn’t have the natural elements impacting it as the
wolves in Yellowstone do.
Although the wolf watchers differentiate between the YNP experience and captive setting experiences, it’s important not to overlook that they see some value in captive setting experiences. Seeing wolves, or any species, in captivity may not make for a great experience, but the fact that the zoos are trying to keep a species from disappearing is what is important.

“Well, it’s a little sad but it’s good to know that the species isn’t extinct. I saw the Lobo wolf in Arizona. It’s extinct now in the United States close to and they’re talking reintroduction program down there. But I saw that in a cage and just to know that Lobo wasn’t completely off the earth was kind of good to know. I think everybody is at a loss when the species disappears altogether.” (Travis)

“I don’t spend much time thinking about zoos and such things. I guess I would be silly not to recognize that zoos have a place in life, especially with the attempt to perpetuate almost extinct populations of various species, so I think there’s a lull. But if all a zoo did was look after extinct species, I’m not sure that the public would [be] very interested in it, so I’m saying that there is a room for that kind of facility. But having a bunch of animals or fish or birds in cages does not turn me on and my visits to zoos are fairly infrequent.” (Jim)

Wolf watchers also compared the Yellowstone experience to other wolf experiences in natural settings. What emerged out of the interviews is that the Yellowstone experience is better for several reasons. Bruce, a researcher, discusses that the sightings of wolves are so much better than in other areas. Yellowstone allows one to see behavior that isn’t often times seen in the wild. He also sees merit in the Yellowstone experience because of the history of wolves there, that they were killed off, but are now back. Others, such as Tim, relate that the fact that the sightings are in Yellowstone, with the Park as the scenery makes it better. Still others, like Danny, like the naturalness of the Yellowstone experience as well as the independence of it, that you can do you own thing, that you’re not part of a tour group.

“[T]he first thing that comes to mind is for a number of reasons, you can just see much more behavior with the wolves. In Denali, an average sighting would be seeing
one wolf maybe for two minutes three miles away walking over a ridge and going out of sight. That certainly was exciting at the time but the wolf didn’t really do anything. The average sighting here, these wolves are doing something that may well be real significant behavior that possibly is never really seen or documented by. In Glacier, as you may know, that’s mostly forested, so a typical sighting there is that you’re driving on a road and a wolf runs out in front of you and then it disappears into the woods. It’s still real exciting, but once again, nothing really significant. From a scientific research point of view, that’s why this is so far and away better. Then there’s the historic dimension that we know from the Park Service records. It was this very valley and surrounding ridges where the original wolves lived and were killed off by the government. So to have these wolves here right now, 70 plus years later living out their lives right here in front of humans is a pretty significant thing.” (Bruce)

“I like to see wolves anywhere. Yellowstone is nicer because of the, you know, the habitat. It’s just, it’s so scenic itself. But the wolves, just, they add to it. And I don’t care where they are, whether it’s in the UP [Upper Peninsula, Michigan] or walking along a road by, on a freeway. That doesn’t matter. I just enjoy seeing them, but especially here because this is like their natural habitat, you know. This is where they should be.” (Tim)

“Well, this is, I prefer this because it’s more natural. I don’t find the game reserves in east Africa natural because, first of all, you have to kind of go with a guide and you have to be driven to specific areas, and here I’m on my own, going out and trying to see. In east Africa it’s just a big business now, even in the immense game reserves there. It’s not the same. This seems more natural to me.” (Danny)

Although the wolf watchers make comparisons among the Yellowstone experience and other wolf experiences, what really emerges out of the interviews is that these are different experiences. That each experience can’t be the same, that each is going to be different. Ray captures this point best in the following quote.

“So, and the experience can’t ever be the same. The experience is going to be different, it’s not necessarily going to be bad all the time. Like when you go to a zoo, I’m sure there’s a millions of children that will never see animals in the wild that they’ll see at the zoo and get that experience and hopefully come away with a feeling that they should be preserved and protected and what not. But it’s a totally different experience than you have in the wild. And then Yellowstone is different than you’d have in a forest where, national forest or other areas where there’s hunting going on. You never get that close interaction or reaction seeing an animal relatively close to you that doesn’t care that you’re there, you know. Get a couple hundred yards from an elk in hunting territory and he’s gone, you know...[B]ut here they walk up to you and kick the door on your car and stuff like that.”

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Another important point that emerges out of the interviews is that the Yellowstone experience is different because it is a lived experience. It is your own experience, you’re the one seeing the wolves directly yourself. This notion has been threaded through many of the excerpts throughout the thesis. Bruce in an earlier excerpt comments about being, “a real eye witness to it,” (excerpt 34). Other wolf watchers, especially in discussion the nature of the interaction valued have echoed similar thoughts. People talked about being a participant, being a part of the experience, and being a part of ‘Wild America,’ (excerpts 3, 93, 146, 147, 148, & 149). When comparing experiences, part of what makes Yellowstone so special is that the wolf watchers get to be a part of the experience, the full experience of the wolves, the Park, of nature. You can’t get that from books, televisions, movies, or captive settings.

“The other sighting I saw last year was a herd of elk and wolves got up from their nap and started chasing the elk and split them up into about four different little smaller groups until they ended up getting an elk. It was amazing how fast all the wolves hit the kill, just went for it, dust flying and just, it’s pretty interesting to watch that instead of just watching a movie of it. To experience it in real life is just unbelievable. Pretty cool.” (Ray)

“Because it’s your experience coming out here, it’s not a vicarious experience. It’s great, those are wonderful educational tools and they’re tremendous in their own right, but it’s part of your life, it’s part of your experience as you go through this world. When you’re the one seeing them directly yourself.” (Tom)

This lived experience sets the Yellowstone experience apart from the rest.

**Broader Meanings of Wolves**

This section explores the wolf watchers social constructions of wolves and how these constructions are influenced and shaped through the Yellowstone experience. It is important to reiterate that in social constructionism, meaning is as much a quality of the perceiver as the object itself. Wilderness represents a classic example of a phenomenon
better understood as a social construct rather than as information; there is no definitive biological or objective property that defines wilderness. Rather wilderness is a human construction with variable individual and cultural interpretations.

Animals represent an intermediate class of phenomena. They can be understood in scientific terms, but they also take on important socially constructed meanings that extend beyond simple objective or physical properties. These constructed meanings define the role of animals in our personal lives and our society. As society is farther removed from the natural world, the cultural meanings associated with wildlife become increasingly more diverse, defined more through self-identity and individual experiences rather than through a common institutional context according to a relatively standard and widespread role of animals in production systems (Sutherland and Nash, 1994).

One contribution to the social construction of wildlife is the naming of such. By the use of proper names, such as Bambi and Dumbo, we socially construct individuals and create a narrative account of the meaning of their lives (Phillips 1994). YNP did not to assign names to the wolves because this would reduce them to how much they mean to us, instead of affirming the intrinsic value of the wolf and wild places (Taber 1996). There was also the concern that if the wolves were named, the park would run the risk of a "favorite" wolf having to be destroyed or come to an unpleasant end (Taber 1996). In other words, by not naming the wolves, the Park was hoping not to encourage the continued anthropomorphizing and creation of social biographies of wildlife, in particular of the wolves. Thus YNP identifies the wolves through numbers and the territory in which they settle. By using impersonal numbers, the Park Service is attempting to avoid reducing the status of the wolves to pets that need to be cared for and are expected to
behave. In other words, naming the wolves would be inconsistent with the posting of large signs warning, “Wildlife are dangerous – do not approach”.

This effort, however, has not stopped the public from creating social biographies of the wolves. When wolf #9, which had been more prolific in repopulating Yellowstone than any other female, was ejected from the Rose Creek Pack, by her daughter, #18, it was thought she would die alone. This story made many of the Yellowstone-area newspapers. Readers responded to the reports with emails and letters. Perhaps, they suggested, the Park could take care of her so she can live out her days without the fear of falling as prey or starving to death. The public felt involved with this wolf’s life and wanted her taken care of as she had done her duty to repopulate the park. This anthropomorphizing is what the Park had been trying to avoid by not naming the wolves.

Not only has wolf #9’s life been played out in the newspapers, but so has the story of the Druid Peak Pack. Just recently, Michael Milstein of Lee Montana Newspapers, described the recent occurrences of this pack as, “A natural drama unfolding among the wolves in the northeast corner of Yellowstone National Park during the last month contains all the elements of even the most sensational soap opera. There’s a tyrannical matriarch, adultery, child-snatching, revenge, a coup d’etat – even murder.” This comparison of wolf packs to soap operas continues the blurring of the line between biology and the imagination.

My research allowed me to explore whether wolf watchers were creating social constructions of the wolves similar to these playing out in the newspapers. In talking with the wolf watchers the social constructions they were creating about the wolves emerged. Although several people expressed knowledge about individual wolves, more
generally what emerged from the interviews is that the wolf watchers socially construct
the wolves as a whole rather than individuals. What I found is that the wolf watchers
socially construct, or see broader meanings in wolves in three ways: they create a
mythical concept, they see wolves in terms of human systems and they understand the
wolves within the notion of natural balance/biology.

The mythical concept of wolves conveys a social construction that is not based in
facts, but is more fanciful. It can best be defined as imaginary, fictitious, or not based on
facts or scientific accounts. This includes the anthropomorphizing of the wolves. Seeing
wolves in terms of human systems reveals wolves are socially constructed through the
interactions between humans and wolves. The third way that wolf watchers socially
construct the wolves is through the notion of natural balance; that bringing the wolves
back to Yellowstone balances out the ecosystem. It is important to realize that these three
social constructions are not necessarily separated from each other, but instead they
enhance one another, helping to create a fuller, more intricate social construction of the
wolf (Figure 4).

Mythical

As discussed previously, the mythical concept conveys a social
construction that is not based in facts, but is more fanciful. This broad concept of
mythical can be broken down into several subthemes including such things as wildness,
family structure, beauty, predator, rarity, and uniqueness. This section will explore the
mythical social constructions that the wolf watchers have created regarding the wolves.
Social Construction/Broader Meanings
Of
Wolves

Figure 4: Social Construction of Wolves by YNP Wolf Watchers

--Wildness

The public has often perceived wolves as symbols of wildness and wilderness. This notion is reflected by the wolf watchers, especially in the sense of bringing back the wolves makes the Park wilder. Owen believes that part of what is special about seeing wolves is the feeling of wilderness.

"[T]he feeling of wilderness, it's the feeling of man not being the top predator....It really is nice to have these top carnivores in the area."  

Others, such as George connect this feeling of wildness to the elusiveness of the wolf and that it enhances the mystique of it.

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“Thirty years ago, everybody saw a black bear cause they were the road bears, right. And then that’s gone away and probably those, I suspect not because now when people see a bear it’s a better experience, I sense for the people. And maybe that’s the case with the wolf. You don’t see one, maybe it enhances the mystique and the image and it all part of that wildness notion, and maybe that’s okay.”

Brian discusses the wolves as making the Park a wilder place, which makes it more unique.

“The other of course is just seeing them. It makes the Park a wilder place and it makes the Park more unique and it adds a touch of wildness to a [photo] shoot up here in the Park.”

--Family Structure

Others talked about the subtheme of family structure and how it helps to construct what the wolf means to them. Although, scientifically wolf pack structure is often part of wolves’ lives, wolf watchers tend to idealize the pack structure into a supreme family unit that is elevated above or compared to our own family structure. It is this idealization of the pack structure and use of human characteristics that centers this subtheme of family structure under the broader mythical concept.

Travis thinks the social aspects of the wolf are quite close to our own social associations, so much so that he puts the wolf family structure as a ‘civilized wildlife.’

“The social aspects of the animal that are not too far off from a human race - they’re out in the woods, they depend on each other, everybody’s got a job, they raise their children, they teach their children, their pups, they teach them as they grow up. They have one sort of president ... the whole wolf social interactions really kind of put it as a figure to me as I guess a civilized wildlife, if you can call it that.”

Rose relates a similar sentiment about their family life structure. She discusses how the wolves do better at commitments and relationships than people, seeming to elevate the family pack structure above our own family units. Rose also seems to look
up to the sense of community that is found in wolf packs, a sense of community that she feels we have lost in America.

"I just, from wanting to adopt one years ago and then reading about them and studying about them, I was real fascinated by their family life structure, of aunts and uncles that never mate, but their job is babysitting. And like we said earlier, they do better than people, you know, at commitments and just their relationships and their enjoyment. The whole community, I love that community feeling that I feel like we’ve lost, especially in America."

Seth anthropomorphizes the family pack structure into the idea that wolf packs have family values.

"When you think of wild animals, that is one of the first ones that would come to mind and their family relationship, how they work with their pups and the pack stays together as it does. Family values, I suppose! Even in the animal world."

--Rarity

Another subtheme of this mythical view of wolves is the rarity of seeing them. As discussed previously in the discussion about the chance to see wolves, wolves, being the elusive creatures they are, are not often visible in the wild. It is this elusiveness and rarity of seeing them that adds to the awe and mystique of the wolf. Scott associates this notion to the sense of the unknown.

"I guess it’s kind of, it’s kind of the unknown, that you don’t, not many, we don’t know much about the, I don’t think. The human, or just man doesn’t know much about the wolf because it’s so isolated and there not much known, there’s a lot more known now since the research has gone on. But back then it was just kind of brand new and it just kind of intrigued me."

Other wolf watchers, such as Owen, discuss how the rarity makes the wolf just a little more special.

"I hate to say bears are a dime a dozen, but you do see bears, wolves are not really part of the ecosystem down here where bears, especially in Colorado, the black bears are all over the place. So bear is just a bear, where a wolf is something a little bit special."
Encompassing much of this discussion of the mythical constructions, such as wildness, family structure, and rarity, is this notion of mystique or romantic feel about the wolves. Many of the wolf watchers touched upon this romanticization of the wolves and the allure of the wolf mystique. George sees something romantic about a wolf howl, while others are attracted to the mysterious aspect of the wolf. Still other wolf watchers connect the mystique to the wolf’s behavior as well as to the transformation of wolves from myths and legends to reality.

“There’s something romantic about the wolf when you hear its howl. . . . There’s kind of a romanticization of the wolf.” (George)211

“I’ve always loved the wolf and it’s probably because everybody hated them so much and it’s finally starting to turn around. They’re just so interesting and they’re kind of like dogs, but they’re different at the same time. . . . It’s probably just because they’re so mysterious, kind of, they’re the wolf.” (Heather)212

“They showed the female and the pups and how she was carrying them and protecting them and everything and so I think that my want or my need of watching wolves is a longing to understand them more and feel more comfortable around what they represent because there’s so much myth around the wolf, it’s a vicious, intentionally mean scary animal and I don’t think it is at all. And their eyes, you see pictures of their eyes and you see the one thing about a dog, is it’s a dog. It’s genuine all the time. There’s no airs about them and I think that wolves are the same way, there is no airs, of course, about a lot of these wild animals. I just like their social system and all the mystique about them.” (Allen)213

“I guess the mystique of it. They’ve gone from being wolves with legends that rip people apart at the sight of them. They’re not, it’s amazing how they can go from being that way in myth and legend or whatever to in reality they are just an animal trying to come out. They don’t kill people. They kill animals to eat. Same thing with a grizzly bears, it’s got the mystique about it.” (Ben)214

An addition to this mystique, the wolf watchers construct the wolf as a beautiful creature. Ed through telling of an experience where he saw a wolf, describes the wolf as a beautiful animal.
"And I had a one, ten second peek through somebody’s good scope and there he
was, a nice looking gray wolf, very agitated, probably only ten feet from here...Full of
angst about this situation. And, but he was just amazing in the deep dusk. Just a
beautiful animal."215

Mark and Katie both describe the wolf simply as beautiful.

"You mean the wolf itself? It’s just a beautiful creature." (Heidi)216

"Well, I think [of the wolf] just as another beautiful, natural specimen." (Katie)217

--Predators

An interesting connection is made by the wolf watchers that ties together this idea
of mystique to wolves being predators. In the discourse of the nature of the interaction
valued, wolf watchers discussed how they love to see interaction between wolves and
other species, especially kills. Wolves as predators draw people. Just previously, Owen
(excerpt 203) ties together having the top predator to balancing out the ecosystem. But
there is something more than just biologically being a predator that emerges out of the
interviews. Wolf watchers socially construct the wolves as predators, but infused in that
is a construction that is more than just biological, it contains nuances of mystique. A
good example of this is Ben’s excerpt (214) where he’s talking about the mystique of the
wolf. Shortly after this, he later goes on to say that the mystique is in being a predator.

"But I guess that mystique is in being a predator."218

Another wolf watcher, Katie, puts it more simply by connecting being a predator
to being wild, untouchable and powerful.

"I think of them as wild, as untouchable, like they can just, I don’t know,
powerful." (Katie)

"Predators."(Will)

"Yeah." (Katie)219

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This discussion about the mythical social constructions that wolf watchers create about wolves is to show that it's occurring. Wolf watchers do perceive wolves in ways other than as the physical and biological specimen it is. They see it attached to wildness and wilderness, to a supreme family structure and to even mystique and mystery. However as you'll soon see, is that these are not the only constructions that wolf watchers have of the wolves.

In addition, many wolf watchers do create life histories on the wolves using their numbers. Numbers have replaced the use of names, but social biographies are still created by some wolf watchers. You may have noticed already how some wolf watchers discuss certain wolves or packs. Melanie, in the following excerpt, discusses wolf number 39 and how she followed this wolf's life.

"And that summer when Number 39 had come back to the pack, and so probably for the first month mostly we saw her and the pups, and one day I went out and there was nobody else around there, it was about 10 or 11 o'clock, and I think I was birdwatching. I wasn't even expecting wolves and I was pretty close to where we were this morning [Site 3], and I see white running and I look and there's 39, and then I'd realize, oh, the whole pack, all 11 of them, they're all strung out along the river bank there, and the adults are all just running, just this beautiful full out, like they had an appointment somewhere. And here are the pups back here, lollygagging around and they're playing and chewing on things. The grandma would just sit there and patiently wait, and she'd just look at them and kind of look at the sky, and it was so humid. And then she'd wait until the pups caught up, and then they'd all take off running down the bank again. And by this time the other adults are way downstream, and then pretty soon the pups would lag behind and be goofing around again, and she'd sit there and she'd wait for them. And it was just incredible, and there was nobody else there but me...And then a year ago last winter, I was taking the Cody paper and there was an article about her being shot, and I cried and I cried, because it was [so] personal. And I thought at the time, I thought this is ridiculous, but it was just the whole story about her and everything was just so fascinating.\textsuperscript{220}

Heather, another wolf watcher, comments on being able to get to know the different wolves.
...just kind of tell them about where I was and how I was able to come up here everyday and see them and really got to learn about their social structure and actually got to know different wolves and stuff like that...\textsuperscript{221}

Other wolf watchers, such as Lee discuss how they know certain packs. Lee, in his previous excerpt, excerpt #100, discussed how he could identify the Druid Pack well, but not so much the Rose Creek Pack. What these excerpts indicate is that, yes, some wolf watchers do construct social biographies of the wolves even without the use of names.

Human System

Another way that the wolf watchers socially construct the wolf is through human systems, or how humans interact with them. This social construction pertains to how people perceive the interaction between people and wolves. I think David’s quote about how we can live together, both man and wolf gets to this point.

“I think they [wolves] should be allowed to live there [in areas other than YNP] and survive, prosper basically. You know, if they do have problems with some then those might have to be eliminated or moved. But I think, you know, we can live together, both man and wolves.”\textsuperscript{222}

This sentiment is also echoed in Alison’s discussion about balancing out the needs of people and of the wolves. The point is that she would hope that there could be some kind of coexistence.

“I mean, I don’t think you can go overboard in either direction. So I think, yes, it’s absolutely the right thing here. There it’s not necessarily wrong, but there’s going to have to be some balance and people got to live somewhere and people got to make a living and wolves got to live exactly. Wolves got to live somewhere too. So you would hope that there would be some kind of coexistence.”\textsuperscript{223}

--Restoration/Reintroduction

This discussion about coexistence leads into the larger discussion of wolves in the sense of restoration and reintroduction. This is a topic that will be touched upon in the
natural balance construction in terms of returning YNP back to what it was, that wolves had a right to be here and that reintroducing them was rectifying a mistake. This discussion is brought up there because the wolf watchers have connected it with naturally balancing out and completing the ecosystem. However, in addition to seeing it connected to this natural balance notion, wolf watchers also tie it to a larger sense based more on human concerns as well as those of nature. In other words, wolf watchers perceive this wolf reintroduction as almost a symbol for reintroductions/restorations. It gives encouragement for doing reintroductions and restorations in other places for wolves as well as for other creatures. Heather talks about this notion as well as how the YNP reintroduction sets some kind of plan and makes things, such as other reintroductions, more possible.

"I think it’s really affected me in that I’ve known about the plans to reintroduce the wolves basically since it first started and I’ve been trying to keep up with it and trying to help with it and it’s really encouraging to see that it actually worked and that people are actually interested and that it’s gotten as big and as popular and as important as it is. It’s just really encouraging and gives a lot of hope for other places and different animals and stuff like that...Because in Colorado I know they’re working on trying to get the wolves reintroduced there and I know they’re looking at lot of what’s happened in Yellowstone and trying to work from how they dealt with ranchers and how they did the plans and where they got the wolves and all this different stuff. I think since it’s been so successful that it really is really important to look at it and decide what was done right and what was done wrong and I think it does set some kind of plan and make things more possible."^{224}

Other wolf watchers discuss similar sentiments. Both Travis and Jim perceive this as a way for the public to be more receptive towards other similar reintroduction/restoration programs.

"Yeah, and I think once this goes over well for a while longer, the public will be a little more receptive letting the wolf branch out from here, like the projects they’re thinking in Idaho and Colorado." (Travis)^{225}
"It’s my understanding of the wolf was always in Yellowstone and was more or less purposely eliminated from Yellowstone and I, while it’s not the best of all worlds, it’s the most practical alternative is to reintroduce what was here and that same line of reasoning of course may apply to other creatures which I think have also been basically extinguished in Yellowstone and other areas in the northwest United States for that matter.” (Jim)

These quotes hint at and the following quotes will articulate more fully that wolf watchers perceive the wolves in YNP, the whole wolf reintroduction as a model to be followed for other places and programs. Bruce discusses how others are studying the techniques and methods so they can learn from the success of Yellowstone. He also talks about how having four and a half year track of results helps to validate the icon/model it’s become.

"First of all just the techniques and methods. For example, Japanese people can come over and study how we did it and would probably use the same methods primarily because it worked so well here. So that’s certainly important. The other issue which is perhaps more important is now we have nearly four and a half year track record of results of how well thing have worked and before this project was done there would be some validity to people questioning, government biologists who were saying this is what we think would be the best way of doing it and this is what we think would be the impact on livestock and other things, so now we know.”

Other wolf watchers, such as Scott and Brian discuss this perception of the wolves and the reintroduction as setting a foundation for the way things should be and opening the floodgates for other kinds of reintroductions.

"I think it’s, I think it’s a great thing. I think it’s kind of like we’re watching history in the making and it’s, things are kind of changing for the better. And I think the wolf project is just an awesome project in the whole country because it’s just kind of like Yellowstone is setting a foundation for the way things should be.” (Scott)

"The condor reintroduction in southern Utah and northern Arizona, the lynx reintroduction in Colorado, the wolf reintroduction in Arizona, all those things are coming because of this I think. It’s opened the floodgates for that kind of reintroduction, but they are being reintroduced in areas that aren’t being used.” (Brian)
Not only do the wolf watchers perceive the wolves as iconic in terms of reintroduction efforts, but they also see them as educational tools. They see the wolves as educational tools for learning about ecology, about wildlife, and about the history of the wolves.

“So I see this as a real important educational tool for people to understand overall ecological relationships including people’s relationship…” (Allen)

“And so personally for me a wolf has been a lot of, an educational tool for me, just to be able to teach people about how these wolves used to be, how they were exterminated, how they have now come back very well. So it’s kind of been a personal satisfaction to me to be able to be here when it’s all happening and being able to educate a lot of people about the whole process of what’s happened to them before and what’s happening to them now.” (Nathan)

Other wolf watchers talk about the wolves as tools for dispelling the myths and legends that surround them. Travis even connects this back to the public being receptive to other reintroductions.

“I think people are just being exposed more to about what they’re really like. Like there [are] the myths about them being maneaters and all that came from Europe, back when we came across the ocean, are starting to die out and people are watching them more and doing stuff like this so they’re getting to see that they’re really just animals out there doing their thing and that they’re really interesting.” (Heather)

“I like that because this is one way that the public can see that this isn’t the big bad boogey monster that they’ve always grown up to believe. They can see that this is certainly less threatening than a bear, certainly less threatening than a mountain lion. It’s a wolf and it looks like the dark dog down the street. So, yeah, I think this is really nice because you don’t need to spend weeks and months and days to prepare to see a glimpse of a wolf. You can come out here and it’s almost like TV in the comfort of your own car. You can see a wolf…I think once this goes over well for a while longer, the public will be a little more receptive to letting the wolf branch out from here, like the projects they’re thinking in Idaho and Colorado.” (Travis)
Henry extends this discussion about wolves as an educational tool for dispelling myths into the need for more education in school districts, into a discussion about children needing to learn about as much of the world as possible.

"In America, I think this should be used and used often to try to educate especially from grade 8 or 9 down that wolves are important, that they are not killers. I think it’s been reported that they have never killed a human being despite all the great rumors. I think more people could get out and get that message across. We were watching a film at the Imax yesterday at Yellowstone and here’s a group of Nez Perce from North Idaho that they introduced wolves to the Indian reservation, the native reservation, but they were saying they just can’t get invited into schools. So many local district education won’t accept them in because it’s against their principles. That seems a shame because if nothing else, even if you’re not going to reintroduce them, people should know a balanced account of what wolves mean to any ecosystem. It’s something I would teach as a teacher regardless of the district educational priority. I think children need to know as much about the world around them as possible period."^ ^ ^

In addition to being perceived as an educational tool for dispelling myths, the wolf is identified as a tool for appreciating and respecting nature.

"Just the value of maybe respecting nature.” (Ben)^^

"I didn’t come into it with preconceived notions of wolves being savage killers and nasty animals. I came into it pretty much predisposed to their being just animals and doing their own thing the way all animals do. So it’s the change I suppose has just been a deepening of an appreciation for the species rather than a conversion type experience where I went from thinking of them as evil critters to well, these aren’t so bad.” (Tom)^

--Political

Twined into this idea of wolves being part of a larger human system is the notion of wolves as pawns in a political war.

"I think it’s incredible, the power that has been exhibited through this. You got the park service who eradicated them and the park service has brought them back just like that in a couple of years. ... The wolves, from what I understood were slowly coming back of their own accord. There’s a good chance that it would’ve taken it a lot longer for it to happen, but eventually they would’ve started to regain their population levels. When we reintroduced them, we created some conflicts there due to some of the concessions that we did as far as bringing them back. Like the ones that were re-introduced were placed on the threatened list, the ones that were coming back naturally were still on the endangered list and that’s what this lawsuit ended up being that judge ordered the
removal of them because they actually threatened the ones that come back on their own.
The politics of the whole thing, this whole job is a lot of politics. That's, I guess, one
thing that makes it kind of frustrating sometimes. I think, I'm not trying to completely
say bringing the wolves back was a bad idea, but I think that most people were just
chomping to get their names on there and say that's my picture there and that's me and so
forth.” (Ted)237

George highlights a more optimistic perception of the wolves of Yellowstone. He
is amazed that it could be done with the amount of political pressure there was.

“I've come to the realization how difficult it was to re-establish the wolves here. I
mean, this is, I'm even amazed that they were able to pull it off. Incredible political pressure
against them and we've gotten this mythology about wolves that I think is a real obstacle.
I'm always amazed when something like that can happen against such powerful interests
such as ranchers. I mean, look at how Babbitt tried to reduce or increase their grazing fees
and just reverse that almost immediately so how, it enhances the experience I think for
me.”238

Jason also has an optimistic viewpoint in that he sees the lawsuit polarizing the issue
which in the long run will help the wolves.

“Well, you know, in an odd way I think this whole lawsuit by the cattle -- or
Cattlemen's Association, or whoever it was, Ranchers' Association, will -- might help --
actually help wolves in the long run by polarizing the issue. Maybe it's naive, but I have to
think that the majority, maybe even the vast majority of people in the United States would
rather see wolves in Yellowstone. So I think politically it would be -- if the decision goes
wrong, you know, against the wolves, I think politically the decision to get rid of them isn't
feasible, you know. I just think there's too many people out there that would raise too much
of a ruckus over it. So in a way that might help, you know -- whether the decision goes for
them or against them, I think at least it'll resolve the issue and I just don't see -- you know,
like I say, politically I just don't see how they'd get rid of them.”239

This notion of wolves as political pawns relates to other social constructions such as
wildness, beauty and economics. Because social constructionism is as much a quality of the
person as the object itself, the construction of the wolf as a political pawn is dependent upon
the perceiver and his/her agenda.

“I think that you have a lot of different groups and they all have their own agenda
and some people, maybe they look at the wolf as a symbol of America, like the original
untouched wilderness, and so it's a beautiful thing for it to be back. And then other people

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are saying, 'well this is our economy, this is our livelihood, and this is my land. If they stray over here I have every right to shoot it.'" (Katie)

--Economics

Entangled also in this perception of wolves as political pawns is the notion of economics and how it plays into the politics. Tied to this notion of economics is the economics from the rancher’s perspective as well as from an ecotourism boom. Wolf watchers realize that ranchers are concerned for their livelihood, but at the same time see the money that is funneling into the Park and nearby towns for all the visitors. Some of the wolf watchers comment on the economic value in terms of the payoffs to ranchers for livestock killings by wolves (George 238) and for wolves to be accepted this wolf compensation program needs to continue.

"I guess, my sense is the surrounding communities are going to come around eventually. I mean, if I understand correctly, there was a lot of opposition to park initially and over time the communities have come to understand that it’s and economic value to have it and I think ultimately that’s going to be the case. And if I understand it correctly, the payoffs for the ranchers have been, I mean that program about paying for damage for livestock is a good program. I think ultimately, it’s going to come to be accepted. I bet you a cookie we get, I mean wolves are going to move around Selway-Bitterroot experience think we’re going to get many more wolves than we have traditionally had. I think this may have an impact of allowing people to accept that as they move more widely."

Others comment on the economic benefits for the surrounding communities. Even though Lee understands where the ranchers are coming from, he sees that the wolves have been beneficial for business in Cooke City.

"[W]ell, around Cooke City there’s a lot of people that don’t like them. I think it’s quite a few of the locals for some reason they just have anti attitude towards the wolves. But I don’t know, the ranching element obviously I can see their viewpoints, you know their livelihood and stuff, but I think it’s blown out of proportion and stuff like that more than anything. But there is a lot of people, for some reason, just have this old mythology type things, I guess, that they’re a threat and of course the hunting elements, the outfitters, they think it’s cutting into the elk hunting. I don’t know what the statistics are and stuff like that but I do know there’s a lot of opposition in Cooke City to wolves
and stuff like, I don’t think it’s justified or anything. Basically, as far as economically wise, I’d say the wolf reintroduction has probably been beneficial for business in Cooke City because you do get these groups, they come into restaurants and stuff, so it’s definitely had a positive effect on that.” (Lee)242

Larry echoes this benefit, albeit more briefly.

“It certainly boosts economy and there is more action going on in Cooke City and Silvergate and on the Lamar Valley and this end of the Park, which is sometimes good, sometimes not so good.”^243

Seth sees the wolves playing a role in the economics in a broader arena. He sees that there’s income to be made off of wolves across the whole United States through wolf merchandise.

“Not only that, the wolves have definitely brought in more income for a lot of the stores, not just around here, but all over the country because you see wolf t-shirts and stuff that you didn’t used to have all over. Now you can go to cities one or two hundred miles away and more than that and still find wolf t-shirts and sweatshirts. So it’s made an impact throughout the whole United States actually.”^244

Natural Balance

Even with these mythical and human system constructions of the wolves, visitors still see wolves in relationship to a natural balance, in a biological sense. There is a lot of sentiment by the wolf watchers, that bringing the wolves back to YNP, is creating a more natural, ecologically balanced ecosystem.

Owen has a strong viewpoint on the question of what wolves mean to the park.

“You could answer that from an economic sense, you can answer it from a biologic sense, you can answer it from a wilderness sense. I think the most important is from the biology of it and we’re trying to bring back a natural ecosystem.”^245

Tess shares a similar sentiment, reiterating that the wolves help to balance things out. She thinks the wolves can help with the balance of animals. She would rather see the over population of elk managed through wolves versus other management actions.

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"I think it's going to help with the balance of the animals. No doubt it's hurt not having them. I'd rather see the over abundance of what they said, like on the elk, be handled or managed through the wolves being in here as opposed to any other type of reduction plan that they would come up with. And I think it's helped on the buffalo too which really doesn't have anything else that kind of goes for them. Even though I guess they don't do much in direct kill on them, it's just balanced things so much better."

Tom believes the decision to restore the wolf to Yellowstone was somehow unusual for us.

"From an ethical perspective, from a social perspective, I just don't see us as a people doing the right thing, a lot. Usually decisions are made based on money, what's going to give me the biggest, immediate financial gain? And this is one of the few times it seems to me, people somehow came together and made a decision to restore an ecosystem, to restore a natural process that is valuable I believe, but wasn't necessarily an economically rewarding decision right off the bat. And there's something about that really impresses me and touches me."247

Natural balance is what the Park represents, so bringing the wolves back helps to accomplish that.

"I think it just represents just a kind of a, I don't know, a natural balance of nature. Well, obviously humans are a part of nature, but we tend to imbalance a lot of things and you know, which we think is for our own goods. But obviously those things aren't necessarily the way we plan them to be sometimes too many deer, too many elk, and too many moose out there. So it's kind of a good thing that you see going back to its natural balance. It's kind of what the park represents." (Nathan)248

--Complete the Ecosystem

A thought similar to this notion of natural balance is that bringing back the wolves completes the Yellowstone ecosystem. Several wolf watchers commented that having another top predator to help thin the populations of prey species helps to complete the ecosystem. George ties this completeness back to natural balance, and although he doesn't necessarily believe in the notion that nature balances out, he thinks bringing the wolves back help to create a more complete ecosystem.
“Well, it seems to me, one of the ways it, I think it provides a greater degree of natural balance here, but I don’t really believe in that notion that nature balances and it doesn’t change over time, but it seems like it clearly upsets things here by taking the wolves out and so I think it essentially makes this more of a complete better than balanced ecosystem.”

Travis discusses that the wolves bring back a piece that was once ‘erased.’ He thinks that without the wolf, ‘the number one predator animal,’ that the ecosystem was incomplete. Bringing back the wolf is allowing us to ‘color in that erased piece.’

“Well, I think for all its preservation and all its attempts to conjure thoughts of the old days, it’s completely incomplete without its number one pack animal, number one predator animal, probably number one smartest mammal. I think it was pretty incomplete until the wolf was here...The snapshot of Yellowstone today can’t look like it did 100 years ago without the wolf. The snapshot today can’t even look like it did the day the last wolf stepped out of [the] Yellowstone boundary and so that snapshot was like somebody got a big eraser and went down the center of the photo and that’s where the wolf should be. So now we’re attempting to color in that erased piece.”

Other wolf watchers, such as Heather, simply state that the wolves bring back a balance that makes the place more complete.

“I think they bring back a balance that was gone for a long time. Like they’re noticing how the coyote population is going way down and some people are worried about it and some people aren’t. But it’s one of those things where you have to look at what it was like before and I think it just brings more of a completeness to the place.”

Some of the wolf watchers also tied completeness to the wildness aspect. That completing the ecosystem helps to make Yellowstone wild.

“Well to me it entails all the animals in an ecosystem being there. That’s what wild to me is. If all the animals are there then the impact people have had has been minimal, and of course, there were people here though anciently as well. There were Indians and things like that, but if an ecosystem is complete from the species point of view then it’s a wild place, there’s something that’s unique about it nowadays. You don’t have to travel to Alaska or you don’t have to travel to Africa. We’ve got a place right here in the continental United States that’s really a complete ecosystem pertaining to the animals anyway.” (Brian)

Although several wolf watchers talked about how the wolves are diminishing populations of other species (such as elk and coyotes), the wolf watchers also articulated
that the wolves are helping to benefit other animals. Wolf watchers commented on that the decrease of coyotes has led to an increase of foxes and that wolf kills feed more than just wolves. Wolf watchers have seen other animals partake in the feast of the kill.

“The one thing that I didn’t mention is I think this wolf reintroduction has had a real positive effect on the other animals too and there’s all the other predators like that are here today, the coyotes and the eagles and the bears and everything are benefiting from the wolf kills. The wolves have killed a lot of coyotes and for a while there, I guess they were kind of cutting the numbers of them down, bit I’ve never seen really any evidence of lessening population of coyotes. In fact, now I think they’re actually coming back and rebounding because I’ve seen many more coyotes lately than I have in the last few years. Then also the foxes, coyotes kill a lot of foxes evidently and the last couple of years I’ve noticed an increase in the number of foxes. So, all the different animals are benefiting from these wolf kills. I’ve seen the grizzly bear come in and chase off the wolves, the wolves will make the kill and the bear will come in and chase them off and stuff like that. So they’re all benefitting and helping kind of the balancing process of the ecosystem as they talk about it. So it’s had a positive effect in that respect.” (Jim)

“It’s kind of interesting that it’s been beneficial for the bears as well in the Park. I don’t think I realized before this trip that they were such, I don’t know, buddies, but that they kind of helped each other out and that it was really a positive thing for the bears in the Park as well because they’ve kind of, I think, had a pretty tough time in the last decade or so. So you know, it’s kind of nice to see not only that the wolf’s starting to thrive, but the bears are benefiting as well.” (Alison)

This natural balance social construction of the wolf incorporates more than completing or balancing an ecosystem; it sets up the idea that bringing the wolves back is returning Yellowstone National Park to the way it once was. Wolf watchers pointed out that bringing the wolves back returns YNP back to the ecosystem it once was. Bruce finds significance in returning the Park to the ecosystem it once was in the ripple effects that it has on other species.

“The more we get into this, the more we see the ripple effects that bringing back the wolves has created for the bears, the coyotes, the elk, for everything out there. So, bringing back the wolves was really only step one. All these other things in the long run are even more promising. So it just seems so often when I’m talking to let’s say a reporter or someone at more length, or a visitor, you can kind of quickly go over the basics of the whole story and that certainly is exciting and they you start to get into the ramifications which I think becomes more exciting. So it really is a grand experiment in
a large natural area to attempt to restore it to the way it used to be and the wolf was really the only significant major species that was no longer present. So to restore it was especially significant in terms of all these ripple effects which there will really be no end to, just like there was no end to the ripple effects of taking the wolves out.\textsuperscript{235}

Alison sees the reintroduction as a way to start balancing things back out and put it back to where it was 'kind of before we starting mucking with it.'

"I think it's going to start putting things a little more in balance. It's gotten to where, you know, I've visited for many years here and it's gotten to where, oh yeah, there's another elk and there's another bison. It's almost like they're vermin. There's no predators, there's nothing going after them, they're everywhere, you know. And you know that adding another predator to the environment it's going to eventually balance things out a little better and put it back kind of before we starting mucking with it. So we're finally mucking with things in the right way, it seems like, and this is just one of those things."\textsuperscript{236}

Mark shares his sentiment and connects returning it to the way it was to the idea that the wolves are meant to be here.

"I think it's just returning it to the way it was, the way it was intended to be. I can't even remember when they started eradicating them, taking them out and killing them, but they're meant to be here and they're supposed to be here. I know the ranchers around here are very upset about it and still are, but this is a park, it's for everyone and they're meant to be here."\textsuperscript{237}

--Right to be Here

The fact that the wolves were here before and that it was us as humans that eliminated them seems to be the foundation for wanting to return the wolves back into YNP, to return the Park into what it once was – a more complete ecosystem. The wolf watchers discuss this foundation through the terms that the wolves have 'a right to be here', such as Mark did in the preceding excerpt, and that through the reintroduction/restoration that we can 'rectify a mistake.' This discussion on the wolves having 'a right to be here' and that we can 'rectify a mistake' adds to the discussion of natural balance through broadening the scope of what it means.
Wolf watchers discuss that the wolves have a right to be here through the ideas that the wolves balance out the system, as well as that it’s not right to have one species and not another.

“‘To balance out the whole scheme of things. It’s not right to have one species and not the other. Hell, they’ve got the right to be here and it’s up to us to make sure that they keep that right.” (Ben)

“I don’t know, it’s just a good feeling to know that [something that] they just came in and shot and took completely out of the area is once again back in. I think it is probably as much as anything... There’s got to be a way it can be worked out for them to be here. They were rightfully here.” (Seth)

Rectifying the mistake really means returning Yellowstone into the ecosystem that it once was. Wolf watchers discussed how bringing them back after eliminating them is a good thing.

“Yes, well certainly a good way to answer that would be to talk about how government people, including park rangers were killing them off in the early days, to rectify that mistake by having park rangers involved in restoring in these years is a nice way to balance off that story. There’s not too many times in history where you really do have a chance to rectify a mistake and almost always it’s too late, it just can’t be done. So this was a chance to do that.” (Bruce)

“[J]ust knowing too that they should’ve been there all along and I think kind of feeling kind of guilty that we wiped them out in the first place. Just feeling like they’re back where they belong, and all is right with the world, it’s a good thing I guess.” (Melanie)

So what does all this discussion about social constructions mean? Yellowstone avoided the use of names, but naming the wolves is not the issue. Instead of the literal name that people connect with the wolf, it is the underlying psychological construct that is creating the social biography of the wolves. Through these different constructions wolf watchers are fashioning their own social biographies of the wolves. Once they start seeing wolves they become involved with that wolf’s history. Melanie became so
involved that she almost stopped watching wolves completely when No. 39 was shot and killed.

"I really didn’t realize that I was so emotionally attached...I read about her being shot in the Cody paper and I just cracked up."^262

Despite the social biographies and mythical perceptions of the wolves, people still see them in a role of naturally balancing out the Yellowstone ecosystem. These different social constructions are not autonomous, but are interconnected. People view these three social constructions-mythical, human systems, and natural balance-as enhancing one another. George describes it the following way.

"I don't have the background to understanding the number of elk and that sort of stuff," he adds. "But clearly the coyotes [had] increased, there have been consequences, I think it essentially makes this a more complete ecosystem. And that's what enhances the wilderness aspect here."^263

The purpose of this discussion is to show that wolf watchers socially construct the wolf in the mythical sense, in terms of human systems, as well as in a natural balance sense. One is not necessarily separated from the other, but instead they enhance one another, helping to create a fuller, more intricate social construction of the wolf.

**Centrality to Lifestyle**

How has the wolf watching experience affected the watcher’s daily life at home? How do the wolf watchers relate this experience to family and friends? In general, how has it affected their lifestyle? These are the questions that are explored in this section. Some of the points that will be discussed are the affect on lifestyle, how the wolf watchers want Yellowstone to be part of their life, the attachment towards the wolves that is created, how the wolf watchers share and remember the experiences they’ve had in...
Recreation

One way that wolf watching has impacted some of the wolf watchers' lives is that it changes the way that they recreate. This not only includes when they visit the park, but for the wolf watchers that live nearby, it influences what they do when they have free time. For those visiting Yellowstone, the wolf watching experience becomes an important aspect of the Yellowstone experience, they choose to do that over other recreational activities. George discusses how the wolves have changed their recreational activities, that they’re “past the point of where we come here [to] see the typical things.”

“I mean I think clearly we’ve come back to Yellowstone once for sure well, no, actually twice, because of the wolves. We might have stayed in Grand Teton for the whole duration, that’s a wonderful place too, lots of things to do. We might have stayed there for the whole trip this time, but because the wolves are here, we came up and certainly the first time. So it’s changed how I recreate and where I go. It’s, we’re way past the point where we come here [to] see the typical things, we stop at the geyser and that sort of stuff but I think we try to have as much of an experience as we can so we spent yesterday afternoon on the Soda Butte Creek and that sort of stuff. It changes the way we recreate I guess.”

For wolf watchers, such as Lee, that live in nearby towns, the wolves change how they spend their time. Lee can come out in the morning for a couple of hours before work and can see the wolves in the Valley.

“But since the wolves have been reintroduced, I’ve really concentrated heavily into that. It brings such good opportunities for [photos and videos]. With being so close by, I can go to work maybe for the day and I can come out for several hours in the morning and take 20-30 minutes to get out here. So, but I see them all through the valley here and up in Pebble Creek there.”

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Wolf watchers also comment that the experience can lead to change in a person’s life. That it has made the individual a more rounded individual, that it’s changed their perspective of the Lamar Valley. Bruce sees that the experience can make a change in a person’s life and is a reason why he thinks children should come out. The experience has the potential to change them for life.

"[W]e’ve had a lot of experience where kids from ranching towns in the region have come here and seen the wolves and have been just as excited as everyone else. I would think there’s an analogy to a situation where two human ethnic groups are trying to kill each other, they demonize each other and that justifies killing each other. Whereas if you were actually to meet someone in a more neutral context of that opposing ethnic group, it would be kind of hard to still believe that. Surprisingly, even just a situation like this where maybe a kid would see these wolves sleeping and walking around, maybe playing, I think can really change a person for life in that from that point on it would be hard to see these as demonic creatures that deserve to be totally killed off."

Ben talks about how the wolf watching experience has made him a much more rounded person inside. It’s the idea that he’s accomplished something for himself. In addition, there is the sentiment that it’s enlightened his life.

"It makes me feel like I’ve done my duty to myself to come out here and see them in hopes that I could maybe share it with somebody. It just makes me a much more rounded person inside. Outside of that I just go to work like everybody else, but inside I feel like I’ve accomplished something for myself...Enlightened by life, like I said before. Whether or not somebody else comes out here or not, that’s a different story. If I die tomorrow I can say I came out here and I saw it, I can take me [to] my grave and be happy with it."

For others, the experience is not so much life altering as that it is a change in perspective. Nathan discusses how the experience has changed his perspective of the Lamar Valley as being an incredible area for wildlife watching.

"So it’s, yeah, it’s definitely changed my whole life’s perspective of this whole area out here as being such an incredibly immense area for incredible wildlife viewing. It’s been great."
For others, the experience is life altering because of the attachment that develops from watching the wolves. Melanie describes how she became so attached to the wolves and that it really impacted her when one was shot illegally. For the year after the death of #39, Melanie didn’t go wolf watching much because she didn’t want to get that attached again. Although this is a long quote, I think it really shows the relationship that Melanie had with number 39.

“And that summer when Number 39 had come back to the pack, and so probably for the first month mostly we saw her and the pups, and one day I went out and there was nobody else around there, it was about 10 or 11 o’clock, and I think I was birdwatching. I wasn’t even expecting wolves and I was pretty close to where we were this morning [Site 3], and I see white running and I look and there’s 39, and then I’d realize, oh, the whole pack, all 11 of them, they’re all strung out along the river bank there, and the adults are all just running, just this beautiful full out, like they had an appointment somewhere. And here are the pups back here, lollygagging around and they’re playing and chewing on things. The grandma would just sit there and patiently wait, and she’d just look at them and kind of look at the sky, and it was so humid. And then she’d wait until the pups caught up, and then they’d all take off running down the bank again. And by this time the other adults are way downstream, and then pretty soon the pups would lag behind and be goofing around again, and she’d sit there and she’d wait for them. And it was just incredible, and there was nobody else there but me...And then a year ago last winter, I was taking the Cody paper and there was an article about her being shot, and I cried and I cried, because it was [so] personal. And I thought at the time, I thought this is ridiculous, but it was just the whole story about her and everything was just so fascinating...And so last year when I came out, I didn’t go wolf watching very much. I can’t even really explain why, it’s just that, it was almost like I’ve lost heart for it or something, I don’t know. I didn’t want to get that attached again or something, which is silly.”

Spiritual

Along the same lines as this idea of attachment is that the wolf watching experience is a spiritual experience. Wolf watchers talk about wolf watching as a spiritual experience in different ways. Melanie describes wolf watching as going “to my church” and that it “feels like kind of a religious experience.” Alison echoes that sentiment with the thought that “it’s almost a religious kind of thing.” She along with Renee and Tracy talk about making the “annual pilgrimage,” “back to Mecca.”
wildlife photographer also comments on the spiritual connection that some of his customers have to the wolf.

"And I told him, in the morning like that, the odds of hearing them howl were not very good, and I said, you're standing there freezing your butt off. So he decided to go to Mass with some friends of ours which should be a new experience for him. So I go to my church, he goes to his, because that's the way it feels, it feels like kind of a religious experience." (Melanie) 

“But it’s almost a religious kind of thing to come here and be here.” (Alison) 

“It’s the yearly trip back.” (Alison)  
“Yeah, the pilgrimage.” (Tracy)  
“I try to come back every year.” (Renee)  
“Mecca, we’re back to Mecca” (Alison) 

“When you talk to some of the customers in my work, they’ll have this real spiritual connection to the wolf. I’m not quite sure where they got that at, but that’s what they say. And a lot of them have it.” (Ray) 

Part of Life

This sense of attachment towards the wolves and the wolf watching experience leads into the broader discussion of the wolf watchers wanting Yellowstone National Park and the wolf watching experience as a part of their lives. This sentiment is expressed in a variety of ways by the wolf watchers, such as wanting to retire out here in the YNP area, that the person, “wouldn’t want to live anywhere else,” that the person is willing to work in the Park, and that the person has constructed his life to maximize how much he can be there. What really emerges out of the interviews is that wolf watchers value the experience and want to be able to continue having the wolf watching experience as well as the broader total Yellowstone experience.

Some of the wolf watchers such as Melanie, Tom and Bruce work in the Park in order to see the wolves. They have decided that they love it out in Yellowstone and want
it to be a part of their lives. Melanie took a buy out from her job so that she can spend summers working in Yellowstone. Tom talks about how the friends that he’s made working in Yellowstone have served “to deepen my love of this place,” and “confirmed my resolve that I want this place to be a part of my life.” Bruce mentions how he was willing to pass up other opportunities so he could stay working in Yellowstone. He also mentions how he has constructed his life to maximize how much he can be in Yellowstone.

“So we started coming on vacation and it never was enough, you know. Well three years ago, I got offered a buy out for my job and I just decided to take it and see what else there was out there, and so I got the job with the Hamilton’s, and this is my third season working for them. And I just really love it out here. I want to stay, I don’t want to go home at all.” (Melanie)

“But things that come to mind are again, the friends, the acquaintances that I’ve made out here. They’ve served to deepen my love of this place, and my care of this place we call the greater Yellowstone ecosystem, and the processes that make it up. And have kind of confirmed my resolve that I want this place to be a part of my life, that whatever I do professionally, I want there to be room for me to come back here to work in the summers.” (Tom)

“I guess my first thought is to go back to what I said before about the issue that for me this is such a great opportunity that I would certainly be willing to pass up any other thing that came along to continue to do this, that I just know how valuable this is. So I constructed my life to maximize how much I can be here and it’s worked out pretty well for me to do that so far. This has become a top priority in my life to try to continue to document the wolves.” (Bruce)

Another wolf watcher, Tess, relates a similar sentiment in that in a few years she and her husband would love to work in the Park because the Park, “is home.”

“Eventually in a few years, we’d like to be able to either come down and work in the park or even just doing the hosting would be nice--anything for a campspot. Even if we don’t, we’ll be here anyway. This is home. People refer to that they go back and work and then this is like coming home.”

Later in the interview Tess continues to discuss how she and her husband want to keep the Park and the wolves a part of their lives. She does this through talking about the
controversy over having the wolves in the Park and that she and her husband are willing
to pay for being able to have them there. It is best summed up when she says,
“Everything has a cost and I think this is an important something. We’d put out money
for it.”

“And as many people who have come through that we have even seen over the
years in the turnouts, they’re all just so excited when you show them. I would think there
would be such an out cry. Particularly since there is no place else for wolves to come.
Nobody wants them, Canada doesn’t want them back, there’s no place left in the United
States that’s going to take them or has the area to do something like this. What are they
going to do with them? So, we’re very hopeful but as time goes on and we think that
compensating the ranchers is a very good idea. It definitely is. And anything new, of
course, would stir up great controversy hopefully if the judgments are drug on out and the
ranchers see, there’s got to be some compromise that maybe there is a way of living with
them and making the exceptions that they have to with it. And if it takes paying them,
we’ll pay them. It that’s what it takes, if they can prove it was wolf losses, why whatever
it takes to keep them here, I guess. I’d pay, if the increased the entry fee, I’d pay. They
had us fill out a survey when we came through the entrance last spring that they had
several, I don’t know if they gave them to everybody, but anyhow asked us to participate
and asked us a lot of questions. I don’t know if you are familiar with the survey they had.
A lot of it was on winter study and buffalo and just pretty well covered a lot of things.
Winter use coming into the park, should there be plowing, what do they do with the
buffalo and some of the questions would you be willing to pay...would you pay lump sums of so much. It’s definitely worth several hundred dollars. Everything has a cost
and I think this is an important something. We’d put out the money for it.”

In addition to wanting to work in the Park, some wolf watchers discuss how they
either live by the Park and “wouldn’t want to live anywhere else” (Maria) or that they
plan on trying to retire out West by the Park (Ben). This sentiment continues to
perpetuate the thought that wolf watchers really do want the Park and the wolf watching
experience to be a part of their lives.

“There were a lot of reasons but that [being able to see the wolves] was one of
them absolutely. I find myself, when I write to people, that when I first got here, like,
you wouldn’t believe how incredible this is and just the fact that you can wake up
everyday and look at a 1,000 foot mountain and have animals in your yard and that I have
2.2 million acres to play in that most people spend their lifetime trying to get to to either
visit for a couple of days or they spend a lot of money coming here over and over. It’s at
my disposal and that’s just a constant plus for me. I wouldn’t want to live anywhere else.” (Maria)²⁷⁹

“Eventually I would like to buy a place out here to have, retire and just stay here.” (Ben)²⁸⁰

Sharing With Others

This theme of centrality to lifestyle also encompasses how people share their experience with others. Is it an experience that they find important to share with others. How do they share it with friends and family? In addition, is the memory of the wolf watching experience one that they’ll keep remembering? What emerges is that wolf watchers like to share the experience while at Yellowstone as well as once they’re back home. Several of the wolf watchers talk about how they like to share the wolf watching experience with others while in Yellowstone as well as bring people down. Rose discusses how it’s fun to share the experience with other wolf watchers, “sharing your stories and being a part together.” There is also the sentiment of friendliness among the wolf watchers that was discussed earlier in this quote.

“[T]he most fun is sharing it with someone, sharing your stories and being a part together. There’s this camaraderie and people who have these expensive scopes were sharing them...”²⁸¹

Larry also comments on how visitors recapture the story by telling others. He also continues by saying how the wolf watching experience is great fun for the whole family.

“And then in the summer it’s really exciting because you get people that are tourists, it maybe even their first time at Yellowstone National Park and when they do see a wolf it’s just the most amazing thing they’ve ever seen and that’s great. Everybody[‘s] sort of excited en masse, and you’ll have been up in Cooke City and you’ll hear people come in at lunch or dinner, ‘Well, we saw two wolves,’ and just sort of recapturing their
story and it's certainly the highlight of their trip and they’ll be talking about it for years, especially if there are little kids. It’s great fun for the whole family.”

To share the experience, wolf watchers also commented that they like to bring people with them to Yellowstone. Tess relates how she and her husband usually bring a grandchild along to share the experience and that it’s “kind of like seeing it for the first time again because you’re seeing it through their eyes.”

“Oh, it’s kind of like seeing it for the first time again because you’re seeing it through their eyes. All three of them were really very excited, very interested, wanted to read about them, read the sign boards, the older two much more likely to get up and look early and stay out late and spend hours looking through the scopes. The boy that’s sixteen has already said he wants to come work summers, so we’ve definitely got a convert, a follower here. I don’t know, we always had our girls, they enjoyed it, it was interesting and now it’s their kids who we’re bringing. This is the first fall in probably four years that we haven’t had a grandkid with us, but the other daughter now has one that’s seven and one that’s three so the next generation will probably be coming, the seven year old will probably be with us next year.”

Another wolf watcher, Nathan, discusses how much of a thrill it is for him to bring down someone for the first time to watch wolves. From reading the quote you can get the feeling he enjoys the excitement that the person has for seeing a wolf for the first time.

“Well, it’s fun for me to be able to show somebody such an endangered speices and it’s a thrill for me to be able to show somebody for the first time what a wolf really looks like, and they see it and they say, ‘wow, that things huge! You know, look at the size of the ears and the size of [the] legs.”

Nathan later in the interview, returns to this discussion and comments on who he would want to share this experience with. This is the type of experience where he would bring people that are more interested in it, that aren’t going to just think, great a wolf and then want to leave.

“So I’m not going to bring some people up here that are saying, ‘oh, yeah, there’s a bear, great,’ you know. ‘There’s a wolf, great, that’s cool, I saw it, now let’s go home.’
So I’d rather have people that are much more into it, [that] can relate a lot more to the whole experience, I think."

The wolf watchers also discussed how they shared the experience with friends and family once they returned from their visit to Yellowstone National Park. The way most wolf watchers share their wolf watching experience is through telling about it, what they saw. There is a sentiment, however, that there is great difficulty in trying to convey what you’ve seen to people that haven’t seen it for themselves. Heather says she’ll probably tell people about what she saw, that she was able to come everyday and see them and that she learned a lot about their social structure.

“I will probably start off by telling them I went to Yellowstone and spent the summer watching wolves and a lot of people will ask me about it and just kind of tell them about where I was and how I was able to come up here everyday and see them and really got to learn about their social structure and actually got to know different wolves and stuff like that and just try to get them interested in it and hope that maybe I can bring them back up here with me."

Nathan says he’ll try and describe the experience, saying “there’s just no other place like here in the world,” because of the interactions and wildlife one gets to see. But he also includes how hard it is to explain how much you can really see, and what you have seen, unless the people have been there themselves. It’s hard to explain the “ultimate wildlife experience.”

“Well, people ask me, you know. They're like, well, what, you know, what's up there, you know, what's it like? And I say, you know, it is incredible up there. There’s just no other place like here in the world that you can see this much wildlife and this much interaction and this much beauty really in one place. It's an amazing place. And it's not overcrowded like most other parts of the park are, so you can actually, you know, drive around here and not be crowded with, you know, kids and campers and RVs running all over the place. And, you know, to be able to sit here yesterday and see four bears over there and another bear over there, and then last night we went and saw another black bear over here, and all within like two hours. And even in Jackson where we do have bears and there’s some wolf activity down there, you just can't see all that from one spot, and it's hard to explain to some people. It's just like you have to see it to believe it, to be able to really get up there, especially in May when you can sit here and see a herd
of 300 bison, a herd of 5,000 elk out there, and there's a couple pronghorn herds, and there's bighorn sheep and mountain goats up on the rocks up here, and there's falcons and eagles and hawks flying all over the place, and the wolf pack comes flying across, and bears. And it's like, wow, it's the ultimate wildlife experience. It really is. And you can try to explain it but you can't really. You can't unless you see it for yourself what it's like."

Ben relates a similar sentiment in that it's difficult to relate the experience back to others that haven't been to Yellowstone to watch wolves. He wants to be able to bring them out so he can share the experience with them.

"It's really hard to go back and talk to them and they don't know how to relate to it, but I want them to be able to come out here too because I don't know [anyone] in that town that comes out here and sees the wolves. There's nobody, so I just....I wish they would come out here too...I want to be able to share some of this stuff with other people."

A thread that seems to flow through these excerpts is that it is difficult to try and describe the experience that these wolf watchers have had. Nathan said, "And you can try to explain it but you really can't," (excerpt 286) while Ben described it as not knowing how to relate it to others (excerpt 287). This thought was echoed by other wolf watchers also. Ted discusses how you can tell people about what you have seen and try and give them a general feeling of how you felt, but "language fails us" in trying to describe the full experience. He makes the analogy that it's like "trying to describe a rainbow in words."

"It's really awesome. You can tell them that you saw them and describe them and give them a general feeling of how you felt but that's about it. That's where language fails us...I give up on trying to describe it sometimes. Exercise in futility, trying to describe a rainbow in words. Language fails us, it's impossible. The same goes with seeing the wolf or seeing something like that, especially coming back from back east. There's still wildlife where I was from to some degree, not mountain lions, cougars, black bears, there's so many disappearing. And then coming out here and seeing a wolf is definitely a moving experience to be able to describe it to somebody else and how you felt, if not impossible, it's hard to do. I don't think that in writing you've been able to relate the whole thing. Like when you take a picture of something, if you see something
beautiful and take a picture of it, there's no way that picture will ever express ten percent of what you saw with your eyes. Not impossible, but difficult."

Ted not only touches upon the deficiency of language when trying to express the experience, but also the insufficiency of pictures. He is not the only wolf watcher to comment on this sentiment. Although wolf watchers may take pictures, many, such as Will, seem to realize that the photos "don't do it justice." But as Larry notes, the pictures can bring back "more than just the little slice that it captured."

"Photographic evidence, we use photographic evidence and say they don't, the pictures don't do it justice. That's how I'll do it." (Will)

"If I saw one I'd be trying to take a picture of it, but certainly when I look at my pictures it brings back the whole, I mean it brings back hours and hours that captures a microsecond or whatever, but it's definitely part of an experience that was at least a day if not a couple of days...[I]t brings a lot more than just the little slice that it captured." (Larry)

Friends & Family Don't Understand

This discussion of the inadequacy of language and pictures to describe the experience to others that haven't experienced it themselves, leads to a discussion about how for many wolf watchers, although they share the experience with friends and family, there is the sense that the friends and family don't understand why the wolf watchers do what they do. Tom relates a recent experience he had when talking with a friend about his experiences out in Yellowstone. In it he points out that his friend asks, "Don't you get tired of doing that?"

"Recently, I had a situation where I was talking to a very good friend back home in L.A. about going out and watching the wolves and at one point in the conversation she said, 'don't you get tired of doing that? Aren't you tired of that yet?' or something like that, and it just seemed like such an odd question to me."
Another wolf watcher, Heidi discusses how her family is not as interested in the outdoor, and that her family would be just as happy going to the zoo.

"Most of our family members aren't as interested in the outdoor as we are and they say, 'that's neat', but they don't, they'd be just as happy going to see them in the zoo."^292

Two wolf watchers used the terms 'nuts' and 'nutty' to describe how their friends and family members called them. These terms convey the idea that these friends and family members just don't understand why the wolf watchers do what they do. But as Tess points out, "[d]ifferent strokes for different folks."

"Our friends back home think we're just nuts. But this is our vice. This is where we spend our money and this is where we spend our time doing this. They do other things. Different strokes for different folks... They just can't imagine coming and staying like we do for two to three weeks. They're like, 'what do you do there?' We keep saying we'll meet you here and we'll show you this part of the park that most people don't know exists." (Tess)^293

Melanie echoes this thought with the use of the term 'nutty.' She comments that her family doesn't understand why she keeps returning, but the people she meets out in YNP are similar in mentality and understand the "specialness" of the experience.

"Oh yeah, most of my family, well they all think I'm nutty. I said, 'you know we came on vacation in '94, we were here for 2 and [some] days, it wasn't enough. So the next year we came for like 4 or 5 days, it wasn't enough, the next year we were here for a whole week, still wasn't enough.' And they said, 'you're going back again? What else is there to see?' 'Everything.' 'Yes, well how many times can you watch Old Faithful?' 'However many times it goes off, you know?' 'How many elk do you want to see? How many bison does it take to satisfy you?' I said, 'it'll never happen.' And they just, they completely don't understand. Nobody I know at home understands, and that's the nice thing about coming out here to work, because most of these people are pretty similar in mentality, they understand the specialness well, a goodly number of them that come this time of year, especially just to get away from the heat in Arizona."^294

This sentiment of finding other people that understand the experience and the 'specialness' of it imparts the thought that an important part of the social dynamics of the wolf watching experience is this sense of camaraderie with other people that understand.
Melanie, as indicated by previous excerpts, is not the only wolf watcher to share the thought that friends and family back home don’t share the excitement and understanding of the experience. She is also not the only one to have found friendships among the other wolf watchers as indicated by the discussion in the social dimensions of the wolf watching experience. Tom in excerpt 48 discussed how he has made many friends with other wolf watchers, that at least half of his email addresses are friends he’s met through wolf watching. Tess comments in the following quote that there’s ‘good people and neat friends’ to see while wolf watching.

“`We’re just as excited to come the next time as we were this time. How many weeks? When are you guys going to be back? It’s neat. Good people and neat friends and it’s fun to keep in contact with some and some we only see once a year or some are fall people and some are spring people and some lucky ones get to come every weekend.`"^295

What this discussion indicates to me is that the wolf watchers really connect with other wolf watchers because they understand what the experience is about, they understand about the specialness of it. This is a factor often missing in relationships with friends and family back home.

Another Trip Back

Another aspect of this broad theme of centrality to lifestyle ties together these other aspects. Do the wolf watchers become attached to the wolves as well as to the experience so much that they’ll come again? Is this lived experience, the chance to see the wolves ‘in their world’ important enough that the wolf watchers will change their lifestyle, in that they will come back to visit or even to stay? Emerging out of the interviews and many of the previous excerpts is that many of the wolf watchers will

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venture back to Yellowstone with the wolves as “a highlight of the trip.” Allen comments that he and his wife will be back and the main reason will now be “because of the wolf.”

“So we’ll be back. Because there’s not a lot of people here. Again, it’s a nice part of the park, it’s laid back. There’s not a lot of traffic. This was the first time we stayed at Pebble Creek. We’ve driven by it several times, but we’ve never stayed at Pebble Creek. We’ve stayed at Indian Creek, but we couldn’t stay there this time because of the soft side of the camper. The main reason that we’ll be back here now is because of the wolf.”

Travis imparts a similar thought that he’ll be back and the wolves will be a
“highlight of the trip.”

“I’ll probably always come back to Yellowstone, but the wolves will always be an attempt or a highlight of the trip.”

The sentiment that wolf watchers would visit and watch the wolves again is not indicative of all wolf watchers. Peter, for instance, would not make a special trip back for the wolves. Although he thinks it’s “just a lot of fun to see them and to hear them” he wouldn’t make a special trip because “they pretty much stay out of sight and way off.”

“It’s just a lot of fun to see them and to hear them. It’s worth the trip one time. I wouldn’t come back next year just to hear them howl and see them on the ridge. I’d come back to photograph if I saw them and photograph other stuff, but I wouldn’t make a special trip, especially knowing what I know now, that they pretty much stay out of sight and way off and all that kind of stuff.”

Trips to Other Natural Settings

Although Peter would not make a special trip to Yellowstone just for the wolves, other wolf watchers indicate that they will. Not only that, but many wolf watchers expressed an interest in seeing wolves in other natural settings as well.

“After coming to Yellowstone, I probably would. Back home I think Yellowstone got the most attention. As far as me being in a national park, I read a lot about their introduction here, and that’s the only place that I could think of that I could go see
wolves. But if another place, in another hopefully, national park, national forest [I would go see them]." (Matt)

“I’d love to see them back where I’m from, the red wolves used to be there, but doubtful if it will happen again. Too much development and not enough habitat left for them to roam in. That would be great to see them because I think that wolves or some of the other wildlife anywhere for them to be maintained to be a viable pack or whatever, they have to have enough room to move. If I could see them and see that they were doing well that would give me hope that there’s still enough land for them to roam freely upon. Yeah, definitely I’d love to see them.” (Ted)

Wolf watcher Tom comments on being “very excited to see wolves in Minnesota” but still thinks that the reintroduction aspect of Yellowstone “makes it a little bit more special” to him.

“Almost, but there is still at least way back there in my emotional reaction to it all, there’s still something special about this. And I suppose it would be the same if they were introduced somewhere else, like the Olympic Peninsula or something. But, yeah, I’d be very excited to see wolves in Minnesota, and there might not be any real difference in the level of enthusiasm or in the manifestation of my enthusiasm outwardly. But on some level, the whole reintroduction piece to this puzzle makes it a little bit more special to me.”

During this discussion of the desire to see wolves in other natural setting areas, the point about the chance and consistency of sightings in Yellowstone is brought up, that it’s “almost a sure bet.” Although wolf watchers would like to see wolves in other areas, such as Alaska and Minnesota there is the thought that it would be “a very involved activity.” There is also the sense the total Yellowstone experience, in that “it’s all right here.”

“I’d love to go to Isle Royale, I’d love to go to Alaska. I think the thing that makes this one so special is that you can, I mean it’s almost a sure bet. I guess I’ve just been really lucky that so many of the times that I’ve gone out, I’ve gotten to see at least one.” (Melanie)

“So I’ve always wanted to see wolves in Alaska or in their natural environment, Minnesota or Alaska, but I guess Yellowstone with wolf sightings just as one of many popular past times in Yellowstone, that’s why it’s more appealing here. If you don’t see a wolf or if you do see one and you get a little, you know, want to do something else, it’s
If we have opportunity to go to Alaska, I’m sure I’ll want to see them there. I haven’t really considered Minnesota so much but I think wolf watching there would be a very involved activity, you’d have to be very dedicated to see that glimpse of a wolf.” (Travis)³⁰³

“If we went to Minnesota we’d look. But it’s like why we’ve not gone over to the Blacktail Plateau and looked over there for instance. Cause this is the best spot so far that we know to look for wolves.” (George)³⁰⁴

What do the Wolf Watchers See the Experience Leading to?

Control/Management of Wolves

Wolf watchers, as discussed under the human system social construction, see value in the wolves and the reintroduction as a model for other projects. In addition, they see it as a way to broaden understanding about wolves and reintroductions. This includes a better understanding of the need for control and management of the wolves outside of the Park. Several of the wolf watchers acknowledge that for the reintroduction to work that control of “nuisance” wolves that kill livestock is “justified.”

“And I think [ranchers] do have some justified opinions, if they have problems with the wolves getting out of the park and killing livestock. I think it is justified to have to get rid of the problem wolves, you can’t just let them keep expanding to the point where they do take people’s, spoil their livelihood or stuff like that.” (Lee)³⁰⁵

“I think that when wolves leave the park and become a nuisance, they’re like any other animal, they have to be controlled. Whether that be with a government trapper or a government shooter or even hunting or even if it’s a problem with the livestock industry and they have a wolf that’s coming into their band of sheep or their cattle, they basically have a license to kill them if they can in fact prove, of course, that there was a problem. I see no problem there at all.” (Allen)³⁰⁶

It would only be fair to point out that not all wolf watchers share this sentiment of controlling wolves is a good thing. Travis believes that all hunting of wolves is wrong. He broadens his scope to wolf hunting throughout the US, including Alaska. He thinks that with the use of technology, especially helicopters for wolf hunts is not a “fair fight”,

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that it’s more of an “eradication.” Travis believes that the killing of wolves without “the possibility of his living, his escaping, going somewhere else” is wrong.

“For man to use technology because when you think of the family of the wolf and how socially dependent they are on each other and how each member plays a vital role and how they mourn for their dead and how they evolve and they’re in Alaska or they’re in the woods and then somebody decides that there’s too many of them and we use helicopters to shoot them from the sky, what kind of sanctuary do we ever even offer them. We kill them without an alternative. I know man’s encroaching on all the environment, but to kill a wolf without the possibility of his living, his escaping, going somewhere else, I think that’s wrong... It’s the all hunting of wolves, but I think the helicopter really went over the edge because they could do it in mass quantities, they could do it around trees, around rocks, it was from the air and the wolves hadn’t experienced that before so there was no escape. So although it’s all hunting of wolves, that really went over the line to see that, to see that we’ve gone to using helicopters to fight wolves... It’s certainly not a fair fight, no it’s more of eradication, more of like sitting ducks, there’s no chance, it’s not a fight. The wolf is struggling to just exist now.”

Development of Lamar Valley

However, wolf watchers also discussed what the wolf watching experience may mean on the smaller scope of Park management. The issue of what type of development in the Lamar Valley would be appropriate came up in conversations quite a bit. There seems to be some disagreement as to what would be acceptable to have in the Valley.

Some wolf watchers discuss the desire for an interpretive center, either at the Slough Creek area or at Pebble Creek campground (Map 2) where as others think that would be inappropriate, but interpretive signs would be good. There are also some wolf watchers that don’t think that there should be signs, that the area “must not change.”

George doesn’t think that the Lamar Valley should have a visitor center, but some signs would be good. He sees that a sign could serve as “some ammunition” for parents to talk with kids about and that’s “good stuff.”

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“I think we sure shouldn’t change Lamar Valley at all. No visitor centers as far as I’m concerned...[T]here’s a grizzly sign up there above the Antelope Creek drainage, you know, the outlook up there? I think that serves a useful purpose so that wouldn’t hurt. That’s not a visitor center. I think that wouldn’t necessarily be negative especially in an established place. That would be okay. I thin one of [the] things that parents need is some ammunition to talk with kids so, I think the signs do that. That’s good stuff I think.”

Other wolf watchers such as Allen and Brian think there should be signs, but not too many, as well as a visitor center in either Pebble Creek (Allen) or Slough Creek (Brian). Allen thinks the displays belong in the area because it is now a wolf watching area and he doesn’t see that changing. He thinks the displays should teach visitors more about the wolves and where they might see wolves, though he warns about creating high expectations. Although Allen wants these displays, he wants it kept to a minimum.

“There’s going to have to be some displays along, like in this area. This is the wolf watching area now and I think it’s going to stay that way just because of the way it’s a wide open valley here and Hayden Valley as well, and I think there could be a display and explain the wolf...Of course you can’t have these little displays along the road very frequently. That just doesn’t work... Well, I would rather see it more minimal myself. Again, it gets back to the hype. I think that maybe you have one or two sites where you might see a wolf. Like here, it’s going to avoid a lot of congestion along the road and be on the lookout all the time and also watch your driving, but I think if you have a place like here and a place like there, the Lamar area just by Pebble Creek. Pebble Creek is a great campground to have a wolf display. It’s off the road, people could come in and if there’s a nice wolf display there, they could really enjoy the display and learn a lot about wolves and where they might see a wolf. You could see a wolf anywhere in here. I guess Hayden Valley is okay too, but Hayden Valley is more for water foul and bison and moose, so I think that it would be important to have an area like this or a site like this, maybe two or three in the park, but that’s it. Don’t make it sound like you’re going to see the wolves running down the road all through the Lamar Valley. I think it’s important to keep it minimal and not hype it up too much because that does mess people’s expectations up when you hype it up too much, I think.”

Brian shares similar comments in that he thinks there should be more educational places to read about wolves. He thinks that an educational site/visitor center at Slough Creek would allow people to get some kind of “educational process” as well as alleviate some traffic problems.
"[B]ut if you want my opinion about how they handle the wolves in Yellowstone is I really think that they ought to have more, especially in Lamar, educational places to pull in and read about them and walk into some little building, whether it’s next to Buffalo Ranch or whether its... Or even at Slough Creek where they just have that sage brush there, take a half an acre and put some kind of educational site in there and I don’t think you would have the traffic jam problems and stuff that you would see. You would be able to control the traffic a lot better because you’d be running people through some kind of educational process first."

Tom also thinks that signs would be beneficial because they clue people into “certain important features or ideas or concepts” such as wildlife viewing etiquette.

"Of course one of the Parks Services awkward situations they’re constantly trying to balance is signs. How many is too many? I mean you don’t want to create signs all over or have signs all over the place that are just going to be an eyesore. But you want to have enough that people are clued into certain important features or ideas or concepts including such things as wildlife watching etiquette in the appropriate spots. So yeah, maybe one or two signs here are [that] would be a good thing."

They also discuss what the signs and center should inform visitors about. Of course, there should be interpretive information on wolf behavior and what’s going on with the wolves currently (excerpt 309, 310). But in addition to this, wolf watchers would like to see information on proper wildlife watching etiquette (excerpt 311) so that people don’t affect other watchers’ experiences through noise and obnoxious behavior, but also so that there is less vegetation degradation as discussed previously in the Results chapter.

There are wolf watchers that don’t want signs to go up nor do they want to see visitor centers in the area. They like the fact that the area is “not developed”, and are adamant that the area “must not change.” Nathan comments on how it’s nice that the area is not developed because it makes it feel like it’s really for wildlife watchers. He also comments that it let’s people to network and talk with one and another.

“And I think it’s nice because the park hasn’t, you know, really developed this area very much out here at all, so it’s kind of like this area of the park is here for wildlife
watchers only, which really makes it kind of nice because people out here, I don’t know, they really network with each other a lot and everyone’s kind of interested to show each other what they’ve seen and talk a lot about what they’ve found and, you know, that’s pretty neat[.]”  

In a similar sentiment, Henry is adamant that things mustn’t change, that the Lamar Valley should look this way in “100, 200, 200,000 years.” That the only changes seen should be “natural” changes.  

“For me, they must not change. This is how it has got to look in 100, 200, 200,000 years. The only change has got to be natural. What the world does to it must be natural. I’d hate mankind to do too much with it. I worry that they will. We were at the Grand Canyon this time last year and there’s a mining company who are just waiting to develop one part of it and they’re just waiting for the right president and if they get the right lobbying, a big chunk of the Grand Canyon will disappear. It worries me that that’s all that balances it at the moment, the right president. The wrong president and there will be great changes which would be a shame. Money rules, here and everywhere. Personally I’d like to be able to come back in a hundred years and see it almost unchanged.”  

For Heather there shouldn’t be development because people can actually “learn more” by coming up to the area, than “just by reading the signs.” In addition she brings up a good point in that the wolves may not always be seen in that area and that there’s “no telling where you’re going to see them.”  

“I don’t think there really needs to be [more development] because with so many people coming up here, people come up here and they actually learn more than just be reading the signs. That and the wolves move around all the time so there’s no telling where you’re going to see them.”  

This disagreement over what type of, if any, development should occur in the Lamar Valley brings up a point that I think Allen says best.  

“When it comes to recreation, the public is a very fickle customer. You can’t please everybody all the time even though you’d like to.”
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This chapter will first summarize the results. The summary will follow the four themes that guided us through this thesis—the nature of the experience, alternative ways of experiencing wolves, broader meanings of wolves, and the centrality of the experience to lifestyle. Before doing so, it is important to repeat that all of these themes and subthemes are very much interconnected. Although discussed separately, together the themes create an intricate and interrelated understanding of the wolf watching experience. Because of this interrelatedness, I discuss very similar points under several themes and subthemes. Often a discussion is not limited to a single theme, but crosses into discussions in other themes.

Although many of the themes and subthemes were discussed by several of the wolf watchers, by no means is there "the" wolf watching experience. In other words, different wolf watchers have different experiences. The dimensions of the experience emerged from across the sample, meaning that any one individual may not necessarily experience all the dimensions. However, it is conceivable that a wolf watcher could experience all the dimensions.

The discussion part of this chapter canvasses conclusions drawn from the participants' stories about their wolf watching experiences. It does so by going back to the first two chapters and addressing the purpose of the study and the contributions it makes to the field.
Nature of the Experience

The nature of the Yellowstone National Park experience is one of “a little untainted scenery,” of diverse topography and activities. The YNP experience is “Wild America,” where visitors can see not only diverse wildlife, but interactions between them as well. More than that, YNP offers an experience that is “full of surprises, full of surprises with the weather, with the wildlife, with the people,” and that make it a “neat” experience. Others describe Yellowstone as “unique,” “a tremendous place,” that being in Yellowstone, well, “there’s nothing like in the world.” Wolf watchers talked about the nature of the YNP experience as a total entity, with diverse topography and scenery, diverse wildlife, and diverse recreational opportunities. All of these opportunities are available in one experience.

More specifically the Lamar Valley is described by some as the “Serengeti on North America” due to the wildlife watching opportunities it provides. As one wolf watcher described it, “you can sit here and see a herd of 300 bison, a herd of 5,000 elk out there, and there’s a couple pronghorn herds, and there’s bighorn sheep and mountain goats up on the rocks up here, and there’s falcons and eagles and hawks flying all over the place, and the wolf pack comes flying across and bears...it’s the ultimate wildlife experience.” However, it is not only the wildlife, but the fact that the wildlife watching experience has the backdrop of Yellowstone National Park, in particular the Lamar Valley, that lends this sense of ultimate experience. For many wolf watchers, this
underlies the idea of the Yellowstone experience as a total package, a sum greater than the parts.

Several wolf watchers fervently described the wolf watching experience as a part of the larger Yellowstone National Park experience. It is the “whole experience,” it is the scenery, it’s knowing that the wolves are out there. Wolf watching is “another piece of the puzzle.” It is the “whole picture, the land, the animals, the people are friendly.” Not only is it “another piece of the puzzle,” but they go together; you can’t have one without the other. The Yellowstone wolf watching experience is not a wolf watching experience unless you have Yellowstone as the backdrop and vice versa.

However, there are a variety of reasons why people are drawn to wolf watching in YNP. These reasons include: it’s a chance to see wolves in the wild; it’s a chance to see wolves before they might be removed; and it’s a chance to see natural wolf behavior. Furthermore, many wolf watchers are drawn to wolves because they’re so similar to dogs, to the puppy they have back home.

A large component of the wolf watching experience is the social dimension. Most wolf watchers talked about a sense of community and friendliness. There is a sense of shared experience as well as a sense of etiquette. Many wolf watchers discussed how wolf watchers appear to be more conscientious of others’ experiences and how they may impact them. Some examples they discussed include: the lack of howling by wolf watchers; people distancing themselves from the wolves, and; the element of self policing among the wolf watchers.

In addition, another component of the social dimension that emerged from the interviews is the idea that there is a range of wolf watchers. Several wolf watchers
indicated that there was a mixture of wolf watching types that included dedicated wolf watchers as well as “stop and go” wolf watchers who have a checklist mentality. Overall, what several wolf watchers discuss is that there is a range of wolf watching types; that wolf watchers do not value necessarily the same experiences.

The type of interaction with wolves that wolf watchers valued varied with the individual. However, the most prevalent interaction valued is one where wolves interact with each other as well as interact with other species including bear, bison, and elk. Seeing interactions between species is a special draw because there are few other places where one can see them in natural settings. Furthermore, seeing interactions between species includes seeing kills and several wolf watchers valued seeing a kill happen in nature.

These are not the only interactions valued, however. Some wolf watchers also value having individualized experiences and backcountry experiences. They discussed that seeing wolves in the backcountry is different from seeing them from the roadside. In addition, for many wolf watchers there is a progression of experiences sought. They discuss how at first they just want to see a wolf, but as they come back, they want to see new things, be it two or three wolves, or a takedown and kill.

But underlying this sentiment for many wolf watchers is the idea that while the sighting of the wolf is important, knowing the wolves are in the Park is even more important. These wolf watchers describe that getting a glimpse of a wolf is “the icing on the cake,” the “cherry on top.” To them, knowing that wolves are part of the experience is what’s important. With that in mind, many of the wolf watchers’ expectations were met and even exceeded. Though some wolf watchers may value certain interactions
more, such as seeing a kill, knowing that the chances of seeing such interactions occurring are slim; knowing that the wolves are out there; and, thinking that seeing a wolf is a bonus, helps ensure that their expectations are met.

When watching wolves, the issue of wolf visibility arises. Before watching wolves, many of the wolf watchers learned where the best place to see wolves was. They obtain information from many sources including the internet, the YNP newspaper, rangers, friends, and family members. In addition, several wolf watchers discussed how they learned that patience is necessary for wolf watching; learning that a wolf does not come along because they’re waiting for it.

Several wolf watchers continued the issue of wolf visibility by discussing that while YNP allows a chance to see wolves, this inherently allows for the possibility that visitors will not see wolves. In addition, there is a discussion that the sightings of wolves are consistent. As one wolf watcher commented, you have “100%” chance of seeing wolves if you go out enough. People visit the Lamar Valley because there is consistency in seeing wolves, but most wolf watchers still realize that you can’t expect to see wolves all the time. Many wolf watchers point out that this anticipation of ‘are we going to see them or not’ adds to the experience.

This discussion of the chance and consistency of wolf sightings leads to a discussion by several wolf watchers about seeing the wolves ‘in their world’ and the institutionalization of the experience. Several of the wolf watchers talked about how seeing wolves in YNP afforded them the opportunity to see wolves “in their world,” to be participants, not merely observers of a television show. In Yellowstone, you are a “first hand witness,” not someone watching what someone else did. Whereas, one might think
seeing the wolves in a natural environment, with only a chance to see them, evoke a more
wild and unstructured experience, some wolf watchers discussed how the opposite is true
to them. These wolf watchers discussed the experience as becoming more
institutionalized, in part because of the consistency of sightings. They discuss how the
experience is being institutionalized in two ways. First, that wolf watching is becoming
an established practice, just another checkoff point on a list of things to do in YNP. The
other is that the experience is becoming more and more of an institutionalized experience
having a public character, so that Yellowstone National Park has been called a “good
zoo” by some wolf watchers.

Alternative Ways of Experiencing Wolves

Wolf watchers discussed other ways in which they have experienced wolves, such
as in books, television shows, movies, captive settings and other natural setting
experiences. Most wolf watchers dealt with this discussion in two ways: First, in how
these alternative ways affected their experience in YNP; and second with comparisons
between the Yellowstone wolf watching experience and these alternative ways of
experiencing wolves. Oftentimes, several of the wolf watcher’s comments indicate that
these alternative experiences have had a positive effect on the YNP experience. Some of
the effects highlighted include: helping to introduce the watchers to the wolf watching
experience; helping to guide the watchers to where to be; and, for most wolf watchers
these alternative gave them knowledge about wolves.

When making comparisons between the Yellowstone wolf watching experience
and these other alternatives, what emerges from several interviews is that these other
experiences are “not as intense,” that there really is “no comparison” because the experience in real life in YNP is “just unbelievable.” An important component brought up by some wolf watchers is that the YNP experience is different because it is a lived experience. It is your own experience; you’re the one watching the wolves directly. Many wolf watchers expressed the sentiment that in Yellowstone, you get to be a part of the experience, something that is unavailable in books, television shows, movies, or captive settings.

**Broader Meanings of Wolves**

This study explored the different social constructions of the wolf created by the wolf watchers. What was found is that wolf is constructed in three ways: in mythical terms, in terms of human systems, and within the notion of natural balance/biology. However, this is not to say that all interviewees constructed the wolf in all three ways, but when looking across all the interviews, these three themes emerged. Nonetheless, an individual could exhibit all three social constructions of the wolf.

The mythical construction of wolves is fanciful, not based in fact. It is best defined as imaginary, fictitious, or not based on facts or scientific accounts. This mythical construction includes perceiving the wolves as wild and as symbols of wilderness and wilderness, that the wolves bring back a sense of wilderness to the Park. Another perception is the mystique that surrounds the wolves, in part because of rarity of seeing them and their predatory nature. In addition, some wolf watchers idealize the nature of the pack structure into a supreme family unit that is elevated above or compared to our own family structure. There is also the use of human characteristics, with terms such as
“everybody’s got a job,” “they teach their children,” “they have one sort of president,” and that the pack structure is a figure of “a civilized wildlife.”

Beyond these mythical constructions, many wolf watchers also construct the wolf through human systems, or how humans interact with them. This social construction relates to how people perceive the interaction between people and wolves. Some wolf watchers see the wolves as a way to help promote restorations and reintroductions of not only wolves, but other species as well; perceiving the wolves here as a model for future reintroductions. Not only do several wolf watchers perceive the wolves as iconic in terms of reintroduction efforts, but they also see wolves as educational tools, tools for learning about ecology, about wildlife, and about the history of wolves.

Also entwined in this idea of wolves being a part of a larger human system is the notion of wolves as pawns in a political war. Entangled also in this perception of wolves as political pawns is the notion of economics and how it plays into politics. Several wolf watchers see the wolves as polarizing the issue of wolf reintroduction, which some believe in the end will help the wolves. The notion of economics involves the rancher’s perspective as well as the ecotourism boom. Many wolf watchers realize that ranchers are concerned for their livelihood, but at the same time see the money that is funneling into the Park and the nearby towns from all the visitors. Value is seen in wolf compensation programs and the benefit of added business for nearby towns.

Even with these mythical and human system constructions of the wolves, many visitors still see wolves in relationship to natural balance. Bringing the wolves back to Yellowstone National Park, they believe, is creating a more natural and ecologically balanced ecosystem. Along this same line of thought is the notion that the wolves
complete the Yellowstone ecosystem and return the Park to the way it once was; and closely allied to the belief that the wolves have a “right to be here.”

It’s important to remember that these social constructions are not autonomous, but very much interconnected. The mythical construction, seeing wolves in terms of human systems, as well as in a natural balance sense, are not necessarily separate from one another, but instead they enhance one another, helping to create a fuller, more intricate social construction of the wolf. However, an individual may construct wolves in only one or two ways, not all three, nor will they necessarily be interconnected.

**Centrality to Lifestyle**

Many of the wolf watchers want Yellowstone National Park and the wolf watching experience to be a part of their lives. However, how the wolf watching experience has impacted their lives varies. For some, the experience has changed how they recreate. They come to the Park and choose to watch wolves instead of and in addition to other activities in the Park. Furthermore, several also choose to come to the Park and watch wolves when they have free time from their jobs.

Not only do several wolf watchers comment on the change of recreational patterns, but some wolf watchers comment that the wolf watching experience could really change visitors’ perspective of wolves and of the Park. Moreover, some wolf watchers relate this idea back on themselves, commenting that the experience makes them more rounded individuals, thus letting them accomplish something for themselves.

The sense of attachment that many wolf watchers evidence throughout the interviews leads into the broader discussion of the wolf watchers relationship with
Yellowstone National Park and the wolf watching experience. This sentiment is expressed in a variety of ways by several wolf watchers, some wanting to retire out here in the YNP area, others “wouldn’t want to live anywhere else,” while others work in the Park, and still others construct their life to maximize how much they can be there. Emerging out of the interviews is that many wolf watchers value the experience and they want to be able to continue having the wolf watching experience as well as the broader total Yellowstone experience.

This theme of centrality to lifestyle also encompasses how people share their experience with others. Several of the wolf watchers talk about how they like to share the wolf watching experience with others while in Yellowstone as well as bring other people to the Park. Likewise, most wolf watchers like to share the experience with others when back home from the trip. The way most share their wolf watching experience is through telling about it and what they saw. There is a sentiment, though, that it is very difficult to convey what you’ve seen to people who haven’t seen it for themselves. Several wolf watchers described this sentiment with such phrases as, “and you can try to explain it, but you really can’t,” and “language fails us,” it’s like, “trying to describe a rainbow in words.”

This discussion of the inadequacy of language leads into a discussion of how the wolf watcher may not be understood. Many of the wolf watchers share the experience with family and friends, yet several wolf watchers discussed how there is a sense that the friends and family don’t understand why the wolf watchers do what they do. Terms such as “nuts” and “nutty” are used to describe the wolf watchers, as well as phrases such as, “don’t you get tired of doing that?” So the friendships that wolf watchers make with the
other wolf watchers often creates a sense of community since most family and friends
don’t really understand the attraction. Several wolf watchers discussed how they connect
with other wolf watchers because they understand what the experience is about and they
understand how special it is.

Because there is this attraction to wolf watching, many of the wolf watchers will
venture back to Yellowstone with the wolves as “a highlight of the trip.” Many also talk
about returning to Yellowstone as going “back to Mecca,” that they need to make the
“annual pilgrimage.” However, not all wolf watchers share this sentiment and some said
they probably wouldn’t make a special trip for the wolves.

The wolf watching experience in Yellowstone is not only an attraction to return to
Yellowstone, but for some wolf watchers it also sparks interest in seeing wolves in other
natural settings. Even with this desire to see wolves in other natural areas, most wolf
watchers also hold the sentiment that the Yellowstone wolf watching experience is
unique and that the Yellowstone experience is “a little bit more special.” In Yellowstone
there is a better chance of seeing wolves than in other natural areas, as well as a
consistency in sightings in Yellowstone that isn’t available anywhere else.

What do the Wolf Watchers See the Experience Leading to?

Many of the wolf watchers discussed how they see value in the wolves in
Yellowstone in terms of this being a model for other reintroductions and for broadening
an understanding and educating the public about wolves. This also includes a better
understanding of the need for control and management of the wolves outside of the Park.
Several of the wolf watchers acknowledge that for the reintroduction to work, control of

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"nuisance" wolves that kill livestock is "justified." Again, it's important to realize that not all wolf watchers share this thought. A few wolf watchers believed the killing of wolves without the possibility of escape is wrong.

Furthermore, most wolf watchers also discussed what the wolf watching experience might mean on the smaller scope of Park management. Emerging out of the interviews is a discourse over what type of development in the Lamar Valley would be appropriate. There is disagreement over the type of development that wolf watchers would like to see in the Valley. Some wolf watchers desire an interpretive center, either at Slough Creek area or at Pebble Creek campground, while others think that would be inappropriate but believe interpretive signs would be good. Both the interpretive center and signs would be useful in educating the visitors about the wolves, however, some wolf watchers commented that there shouldn’t even be signs; that the area, “must not change.” These wolf watchers indicated an appreciation for the fact that the area is not developed.

Discussion

What emerges out of the interviews is that wolf watchers are not a homogenous group of individuals. To understand the nature of the wolf watching experience and the wolf watchers' social constructions of wolves is to understand that there are multiple experiences and social constructions occurring. There is neither one wolf watching experience, nor one social construction that all wolf watchers identify with.

Wolf watchers themselves discussed how they saw a range of different types of wolf watchers, often based on the length of stay by visitors and the depth of knowledge.
about wolves and more specifically the Yellowstone wolves. Furthermore, emerging from the results are some criteria that can be used to establish a specialization typology of wolf watchers. As discussed in the Literature Review, specialization criteria have predominantly revolved around the categories of 1) investment into the activity, 2) past and/or recent experiences, and 3) centrality to lifestyle. The results from this study indicate that these categories could prove to be quite useful in trying to establish a typology of wolf watchers, if the appropriate questions are asked for each category.

The category of investment into the activity has often been limited to equipment and/or economic commitment. For the wolf watchers typology broadening this category to include time involvement is needed. Questions that would be pertinent to ask for this category would include the following themes:

♦ Importance of wolf watching to the trip
♦ Number of trips for wolf watching
♦ Length of stay for the trip
♦ Length of time watching wolves
♦ Knowledge about the wolves
♦ Type of equipment

Observations made in this study tend to see a positive relationship emerging among these themes and a more serious wolf watcher. The wolf watchers who come most often and spend the most time watching for wolves tend to know the wolves and to have some of the better equipment, i.e. the better scopes, etc.

Questions pertaining to past and recent experiences allows for exploration of the nature of the interaction valued. The results of this study suggest that there is a positive
relationship between the progression of the nature of the interaction valued and the more serious a wolf watcher is. In general, newer wolf watchers value seeing a glimpse of a wolf more than a wolf watcher that has seen wolves more times doing much more behavior. In this study, many interviewees discussed this progression, but in a survey situation it may be more difficult to inquire about it. This is because predominantly wolf watchers, whether they are new to it or not, would value seeing some exciting wolf behavior, e.g. a kill, but perhaps for newer wolf watchers just seeing a wolf would be as valued as the kill. A set of scales could help lessen this problem, however. Furthermore, questions pertaining to expectation of the experience should also be asked. Did their recent experience fit their expectations? Why or why not?

Centrality to lifestyle is another good category for a specialization index of wolf watchers. Themes, emergent from the interviews, that are particularly pertinent to the wolf watching experience are the following:

♦ Personal identity, or how the individual perceives themselves—do they consider themselves a “wolf watcher”, a “serious wolf watcher” or not
♦ How important is the social dimension of the experience—the more “serious” wolf watchers indicated that the friendships they form are important for the sense of community it brings to them
♦ Will they make wolf watching a part of their lives—will they make return trips, will they work in the Park, will they move to the area in order to wolf watch more often, etc.
♦ Is there a sense of place attachment to YNP—how does wolf watching in other areas compare to YNP, etc.
Using these three categories with appropriate questions pertaining to important themes can help set up a specialization index for a wolf watcher typology. However, emerging out of the interviews is that there are some problems with a continuum of specialization. Not only are there different experiences and constructions across the wolf watchers, but there are different experiences and constructions within individual wolf watchers. Many wolf watchers have different experiences among trips, from the morning to evening, among frontcountry experiences and backcountry experience and so forth.

This results in the movement of most wolf watchers across the continuum. Most wolf watchers do not fit on only one spot of the continuum, but make trade-offs and move throughout the continuum. One good example of such, is that at the basis of wolf watching is the anticipation, the spontaneity of it, but on general, wolf watchers go to YNP because there is a consistency in wolf sightings. Therefore, most wolf watchers are diminishing the anticipation factor for the “security” of a wolf sighting. This shifting within the continuum makes it difficult to type wolf watchers, because so many of them are making trade-offs and having different experiences.

This study also attempted to develop a better understanding of the wolf watching experience. Although, there is no one experience, the results paint a good picture of what are some of the different dimensions found in the wolf watching experience. Figure 3 listed what these different dimensions included, but more succinctly, some of the dimensions of the actual wolf watching experience include: the draw of wolf watching, preparing for the trip, the social dimensions of it, the nature of the interaction valued, wolf visibility, and the dichotomy of seeing wolves “in their world” and yet the
institutionalization of the experience. However, not to be lost is the sentiment that wolf watching in Yellowstone is a part of the total Yellowstone experience. Moreover, the Yellowstone wolf watching experience is not a homogenous one; wolf watchers have different and unique experiences. However, this study lays a foundation by laying out the different dimensions that emerged from across the sample of interviews.
CHAPTER SIX: IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

What can we learn from this?

To better understand what can be learned from the wolf watching experience, it is beneficial to look at a similar activity, whale watching, and see what has come out of research on it. In many ways whale watching and wolf watching are similar. Both creatures were hated and despised, long feared and often persecuted. Each considered vermin to be rid of: both synonymous with the devil. Baja whalers, because the whales were "smashing boats left and right" and killing men "christen the species the 'Devil Fish'" (Payne 1995, p. 219). However, in a more positive light, both species can be seen in their natural environment as well as in captivity, on television and in movies. Television shows and movies have had a "positive influence on the public’s growing interest" in each species (Payne 1995, p. 221). In addition, both whales and wolves are seen as integral components of their natural environment.

The research in the whale watching field suggests there are economic, educational, and conservation opportunities emerging (Hoyt 1995, Duffus and Baird 1995). In the economics realm, the whale watching industry now brings in more money than the world's whale killing industry (Payne 1995). In 1995 the estimated number of whale watchers was 5.4 million per year, with total revenues exceeding $500 million per year in the United States alone (Hoyt 1995). World wide, whale watching is bringing in economic benefits to many local communities (Carlson 1996).

Notwithstanding, whalewatching research indicates that perhaps this economic side, or commercial side, has overshadowed both the educational and scientific/conservation benefits (Hoyt 1995). In many countries, whalewatching is
considered to have educational value. Through watching whales, people can learn more about them and the marine environment. Hoyt (1995) has drawn up some strategies for improving whalewatching, some of which pertain to making it more educational and scientifically useful. Whalewatching can complement scientific research by having whalewatching boats include scientists who are studying the whales. Having scientists on board helps to further the research of whales, as well as interpret the environment and occurrences to the whale watchers. Another aspect that Hoyt relates is bringing in surrounding community residents, school children and adults, who wouldn’t normally go whalewhaling to build community relationships, but also to educate them about whales and build support for whale conservation.

Stemming from education and scientific research is the sense of a conservation value. By learning more about the whales, the public can better see the need for conserving them. “If the IWC is to manage whales for the world, to ensure that they are studied and conserved, it has to consider their most persuasive use today. And it is no longer whaling, it is whale watching,” (Hoyt 1993, p. 47). If overshadowed by economics, then the opportunities are being wasted (Hoyt 1995).

Whalewatching research has also expressed concern over the whalewatching industry’s affect on the whales themselves. Although there is some disagreement over the impacts on the whales, if any, impacts are being taken account in management decisions. (Hoyt 1995, Duffus and Baird 1995, Payne 1995). Infused in this discourse is whether impacts to whales override maximizing the human recreational experience. This is also under debate.
Wolf watching can also have these three values—economic, educational/scientific, and conservation. Economically, wolf watching could conceivably bring in money to YNP and the surrounding communities through increased visitation. Furthermore, wolf watching, especially in the context of YNP has value in the educational and scientific realms. There is great potential in educating visitors about wolves and wolf ecology and this in turn may affect conservation efforts of the wolf. In addition, because of the wolves’ visibility, scientific research on the normally elusive species is much easier. YNP affords the opportunity for scientific research on not only wolves themselves, but also on their impact on the surrounding ecosystem.

And this opportunity of seeing the wolves’ impact on an ecosystem/surrounding environment is important in conservation and reintroduction efforts as well. By seeing how the wolves have impacted the Yellowstone ecosystem, resource managers can approximate how wolves may influence an area in other reintroduction efforts. This may be of special interest in reintroduction/conservation areas where there is much support for game hunting because resource managers will need to assess how wolves will affect the game population.

In addition, results from this study previously discussed how many wolf watchers see Yellowstone as a model for reintroductions/restorations. The wolf reintroduction in Yellowstone is seen as a successful model for other species reintroductions for not only the United States, but for the world. This creates a sense of encouragement for doing wolf and other species reintroductions in other places. However, the context of the reintroduction is important, because there is place attachment involved. Would people see this reintroduction as so successful if it had occurred in a place other than
Yellowstone? It is difficult to tell from this study, although there is a strong sense of attachment to having wolves reintroduced in a national park which at one time eliminated the species from that area. Nevertheless, wolf watching can still be valued for the conservation impact it may have.

There is merit in looking at the whalewatching research because it can be useful in planning management strategies in wolf watching areas to maximize upon these values. If an area such as Yellowstone wants to build support for wolves and wolf watching, looking at these values and utilizing them in management plans may provide a long-term benefit for wolves and wolf conservation. However, it is also important to decide whether the wolf watching experience should risk impacting the wolves. Before deciding management actions, an organization, such as the National Park Service, should first decide how to weigh the human benefits with the impacts it may have on the species.

Management implications

There are several management implications that result from this study. To better manage for wolf watching, resource managers need to understand what it is all about. This study helps to lay the foundation of the different dimensions that may exist in the wolf watching experience (Figure 3). It is also important to note that most wolf watchers see Yellowstone National Park as something distinct from a zoo. It is the nature of the experience that makes it different; in Yellowstone, there is the Wild America possibility, the unique opportunity of seeing unplanned behavior in a natural setting, whereas in a zoo there is the lack of anticipation. Zoo visitors are almost guaranteed to see the
animals, whereas in a natural setting there is the anticipation and the expectation that you may not get to see a wolf.

Although a few wolf watchers commented on Yellowstone becoming “a good zoo,” for many wolf watchers the Yellowstone wolf watching experience is often an experience valued for more than just entertainment. People are coming to see and understand wolves as a part of an ecological system of interactions. There are visitors incorporating both educational and ecological values into the wolf watching experience. Managing for this type of opportunity requires resource managers to be able to educate the visitors about such topics.

Furthermore, resource managers can capitalize on the wolf watching experience by offering tours of areas where wolves may be seen. In Yellowstone, the Park Service could offer tours and/or get more commercial tours to go to Lamar Valley for wolf watching. It would economically benefit the Park, as well as surrounding communities as well, especially those near the Lamar Valley since this is the main place for wolf watching. A component of doing so would be to better advertise information about the wolf watching opportunity in Yellowstone and the best location for it. However, in doing so, the Park needs to realize that it will increase the number of people in the Lamar Valley, and this crowding may diminish the experience of the other wolf watchers. Even if the Park decides not to promote the wolf watching experience, it has the ability to guide the development of the capitalization of the wolf watching experience through its management of key wolf watching areas, in particular the Lamar Valley.

Several wolf watchers expressed concern over the impact that development, especially that of a visitor center, might have on the naturalness of the Lamar Valley area,
whereas others supported having a visitor center. Nonetheless, a few interpretive signs could provide the visitors with educational information not only about wolves, but the area and habitat as well. These signs can better educate visitors on wolves and the history of wolves in the Park, providing for a base of support for wolf conservation. In addition, signs discussing the Lamar Valley as the habitat also broaden the wolf watching experience to that of the Lamar Valley experience. What this does is help to keep the expectations of the experience less focused on seeing a wolf and therefore if a visitor doesn’t see a wolf, the experience is still a positive one. The visitor has at least gained an appreciation for the natural environment and all of its components.

Interpretive signs and visitor centers are not the only type of development to address. Increased numbers of visitors to the Lamar Valley may mean the need for more amenities, such as bathrooms. If the Park decides that they are needed, the decision of where to put them is important. Wolf watchers do not want the character of the Lamar Valley to change and putting in bathrooms in inappropriate areas may do just that. Pebble Creek Campground would serve well as a place for extra amenities. The distance from the road and from prime wolf watching areas allows the natural character to remain in the prime wolf watching areas. The Lamar Valley Picnic area would not be a good selection since it’s in view from a prime watching site (site 3). However, the impacts to the campers of the Pebble Creek Campground need to be considered if that area is chosen for extra amenities, as well as the transitory nature of wolf watching. In other words, where wolves are most often seen may change year from year.

Other management implications include impacts on social atmosphere as well as displacement of visitors. Several wolf watchers have already commented on the
increased number of people in the Lamar Valley, and adding more numbers to it will most likely affect the social dimensions of the wolf watching experience. Not only that, concerns about displacement of wolf watchers and other visitors of the Lamar Valley (anglers especially, since this area before the wolves was predominantly used by anglers) should be addressed. The Park, as well as other natural resource managers wanting to support wolf watching, need to balance the economic benefits with those of the recreational experience, as well as to weigh the cost of the ecological degradation that will occur with more people coming to an area.

In addition, better enunciation of wildlife viewing etiquette would be beneficial. This would help decrease the visitor’s impact on each other’s experiences as well help to lessen the impact on the environment and on the wolves. By strengthening the use of rules and etiquette, resource managers are taking a proactive approach to conflict resolution. This is especially valuable in a resource area that may have several different activities occurring. If rules or etiquette are developed and promoted by the managers, hopefully the different visitors will cause less conflict.

The utilization of the more knowledgeable and serious wolf watchers may prove beneficial to the Park. They could help with disseminating viewing etiquette and interpretation information. They could also prove beneficial in communicating with the Park about the needs of this particular visitor group. Having wolf watchers in communication with the Park could also prove beneficial in helping to set up norms. Because there does appear to be a range of types of wolf watchers, there is the potential for conflicts to occur. By having a communication line open between management and
the wolf watchers, there is the opportunity for Park management to intervene and reduce tensions.

**Future Research**

This study has resulted in several additional questions. A very apparent question involves the different dimensions that emerged from the interviews. Figure 3 lists out the different dimensions that were discussed by the sample. A question that results is how can we operationalize and compartmentalize these different dimensions for a larger sample and/or a different population sample, i.e. sampling other parts of the Park? If done, how would the results differ from what has emerged in this study?

Specialization and the wolf typology continuum are also topics that can be further researched. This study suggests specialization is occurring and offers criteria for the typing of wolf watchers, although there is much shifting within the continuum by many wolf watchers. However, research into whether those criteria are appropriate and what the relationships are among the degree and range of specialization and of the wolf watchers could prove beneficial. Furthermore, more understanding about the specialization of wolf watchers could help the Park better understand the different experiences that occur. In addition, a better wolf watcher typology would allow comparisons to be made across different wildlife watchers to see how similar or different they might be.

Another question that arises from the wolf watching phenomenon and this research is where is wolf watching going? In other words, as the activity increases in popularity, will a “save the wolves” mantra become as important to the conservation/environmental movement as “save the whales” once was? Is an outgrowth
of this wolf watching going to be a social movement? Are these friendships blossoming into a larger organized network that will become a social movement? If it does become a social movement, what does that really mean to Yellowstone Park management; or more broadly, what does it mean to natural resource management?

This study causes questions to be raised about displacement and place attachment. Because of the increased use of the Lamar Valley, are other visitors being displaced? This is important because before the wolves, this was a less used area of the Park and people seeking fewer people/crowds sought out this section. With the increasing popularity of wolf watching and number of visitors to the Lamar Valley, where are the people seeking few people/crowds going; or are the numbers still small enough that people aren’t being displaced? Furthermore, could visitors be displaced because of conflicts between activities, such as fishing and wolf watching, not because of crowding?

Wolf watching in Yellowstone also affords questions about place attachment to arise. Threaded throughout the interviews of this study was how the wolf watching experience is such a part of the larger Yellowstone experience. There was a real sense of attachment to Yellowstone. What are the meanings associated with Yellowstone and why aren’t they associated with other places? Why is there this sense of place attachment to Yellowstone? Is there this sense of place attachment in other natural areas where people can watch wolves, such as at Ely, Minnesota or in Arizona?

Not only has this study explored the nature of recreational experiences individuals seek with respect to wolves and how wolf watchers socially construct the wolves, but it ends with a discussion on further questions to research. Moreover, looking at a topic
such as wolf watching leads one to ponder the root of animal watching. What does it mean to "watch" something? What does it then mean to be a wolf "watcher"?

According to Webster’s New World Dictionary, the definition of "watch" includes such phrases as, "to be on the alert;" "to look or observe, especially attentively;" "close observation for a time, in order to see or find out something;" and, "to be looking or waiting attentively" (Neufeldt and Guralink 1994). Furthermore, Webster’s defines "wait/waiting" as, "to stay in a place or remain in readiness or in anticipation;" and, "to be, remain, or delay in expectation or anticipation of" (Neufeldt and Guralink 1994). Therefore, a large component of what wolf watching is, is anticipation, the "are we going to see a wolf or not" mode of thought. When wolf watching is couched in this thought of anticipation, a better understanding exists because it is finally realized that it is anticipation that should be managed, not the experience. By managing for anticipation, the experience is not destroyed.
Appendix A: Interview Guide

**Nature of the experience**
1. How come you came down to Yellowstone National Park?

2. How important is wolf watching compared to the other activities in Yellowstone National Park?

3. Could you tell me about the wildlife you saw on this trip? Did you get to see a wolf? What was that like? Where did you go to see it? Has your experience fit your expectations of Yellowstone National Park?

4. How important is it to have an actual wolf sighting? Do observations of particular wolf behaviors affect the experience differently?

5. Did you do anything special to prepare for this visit? Did you read books on wolves before coming? Do you use specialized equipment such as spotting scopes etc? How has this affected your experience here?

6. How familiar are you with the wolves here in Yellowstone National Park? Have you see them in YNP before? Do you know the names to the wolf packs, the numbers of individual wolves?

7. Are there certain activities you would or would not do to attract the wolf’s attention? Have you seen others do these activities?

8. What is the social atmosphere among wolf watchers?

**Alternative ways of experiencing wolves**
9. Have you seen wolves in places other than YNP? What was that like? Can you tell me about those experiences?

10. Would you be interested in seeing wolves in settings such as the Grizzly Discovery Center, where you know you will see a wolf?

11. Is seeing wolves in other places or in other mediums, such as television, movies or books different from seeing them here in YNP?

**Broader meanings of wolves**
12. How long have you been interested in wolves? What is it about the wolf that attracts you?

13. What do you think about having wolves here in Yellowstone? What is the importance of having wolves in YNP?
14. How would you describe the wolves in Yellowstone?

Centrality to life
15. Has your wolf watching experience changed your perceptions of wolves? Has this influenced other parts of your life? If so, how? (Have you joined wolf conservation organizations, etc).
Have other wolf watching experiences shaped your life?

16. How often do you go out wolf watching?
(If this was the first time) Do you plan on doing this again?
Have you/would you bring others here to see wolves?

17. Do you know other wolf watchers? Do you talk with them about your experiences? Do you think they seek similar or different experiences?

18. How do you discuss your wolf watching experiences to friends/family that are not wolf watchers?

19. If you can think back to a time when you did see wolves, can you think of how it affected you?

Closing Question
The purpose of this study is to better understand the wolf watching experience, is there anything else about the experience that you would like to add?
**Appendix B: List of Interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date Interviewed</th>
<th>Where Interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rose and Earl</td>
<td>Retired couple that comes to YNP every summer, have been coming to the Lamar Valley to watch the wolves ever since the wolves were reintroduced</td>
<td>7/3/1999</td>
<td>Campsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason, Claire, and Amanda</td>
<td>Family from Florida, been in YNP for a couple of days, Jason and Amanda have not seen a wolf yet, but Claire has</td>
<td>7/4/1999</td>
<td>Campsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie, Will, and Danny</td>
<td>Katie and Will are former zookeepers who haven't seen wolves in the wild; Danny has lived and traveled in Africa and been to the large game parks, additionally he talks about when his mom and grandmother were growing up in Norway and there were bars on the windows so the wolves wouldn't get in</td>
<td>7/4/1999</td>
<td>Campsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alison, Renee, and Tracy</td>
<td>Friends, all used to work in the Park, they like to come back to see each other and the Park, this is the first time back since the wolves were reintroduced</td>
<td>7/22/1999</td>
<td>ITF—site 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Friend of Tim's, more interested in botany than wolves</td>
<td>7/23/1999</td>
<td>ITF—site 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>License plate: REWOLF, has been coming to YNP for years, strong interest to see wolves, wants them to be a success, takes several classes at the Yellowstone Institute</td>
<td>7/23/1999</td>
<td>ITF—site 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>Commercial guide, but this trip is with a friend who has never seen a wolf</td>
<td>7/23/1999</td>
<td>ITF—site 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott</td>
<td>From the Midwest, never seen a wolf, but very anxious to</td>
<td>7/25/1999</td>
<td>ITF—site 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>A wolf researcher</td>
<td>8/9/1999</td>
<td>ITF—site 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>A professor in political science, has been coming to YNP for years, has seen changes occurring in the Lamar Valley since the reintroduction of wolves</td>
<td>8/9/1999</td>
<td>Campsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>A college student that came out for the sole purpose of watching the wolves, would like to eventually do some research on the wolves</td>
<td>8/10/1999</td>
<td>ITF—site 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry and Jane</td>
<td>School teachers from England, this is their second trip to YNP, they came to see the wolves</td>
<td>8/10/1999</td>
<td>ITF—site 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travis</td>
<td>Has been to YNP before, but still hasn't seen a wolf</td>
<td>8/21/1999</td>
<td>ITF—site 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>A former Wildlife Services employee, not a proponent of the wolf reintroduction this summer</td>
<td>8/22/1999</td>
<td>ITF—site 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heidi and Mark</td>
<td>Family that enjoys coming to YNP for the scenery, wildlife and the experience, seeing a wolf just makes the trip better</td>
<td>8/22/1999</td>
<td>ITF—site 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owen</td>
<td>A wildlife photographer, in YNP for a vacation, did a lot of backcountry camping in YNP when he was younger, had forgotten that wolves were in the Park until he arrived and would like to see one</td>
<td>8/23/1999</td>
<td>ITF—site 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Identification/Activities</td>
<td>Visit Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth and Tess</td>
<td>Identify themselves as wolf watchers since the wolf reintroduction, they come to YNP every summer for several weeks and camp in either Slough Creek or Pebble Creek campgrounds</td>
<td>8/23/1999</td>
<td>Campsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted</td>
<td>A backcountry ranger for YNP</td>
<td>9/4/1999</td>
<td>House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>A frontcountry ranger for YNP, deals with the wolf watchers</td>
<td>9/5/1999</td>
<td>Campsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melanie</td>
<td>Enjoyed watching wolves on vacation that she continued to come back, took a buy out from her job so she could work in the Park and watch wolves more often</td>
<td>9/5/1999</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Interpretive ranger for the Lamar Valley area, very interested in watching wolves and enjoys doing so, part of the reason for being an interpretive ranger was so he could watch wolves, knows a lot of the other dedicated wolf watchers</td>
<td>9/6/1999</td>
<td>ITF—site 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Professional wildlife photographer, has been coming to YNP for years for photos, interested in seeing wolves, but doesn’t expect to get any pictures of them</td>
<td>1/15/2000</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>A wolf watcher from the central east coast area, drives out for several weeks each winter for the last couple of years for vacation and would like to buy a home in the area, really is learning a lot from listening to other wolf watchers</td>
<td>1/16/2000</td>
<td>ITF—site 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Non-professional wildlife photographer, used to be a big game hunter, but now shoots photos</td>
<td>1/16/2000</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>A Canadian with much interest in conservation and national parks, comes to YNP every winter and spends a week in West Yellowstone snowmobiling and a week in Gardiner so he can come to the Lamar Valley and see wildlife</td>
<td>1/17/2000</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larry</td>
<td>Lives in the surrounding community, enjoys coming out and watching wolves and going into the backcountry to see if he can see them, interested in getting pictures of them</td>
<td>2/19/2000</td>
<td>ITF—site 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>Lives in the surrounding community, comes out to watch and videotape wolves several times a week before and after work, has had a lot of different experiences with them</td>
<td>2/19/2000</td>
<td>ITF—site 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Lives and owns a business in the surrounding community, has seen wolves once in the Park, goes out as often as she can</td>
<td>2/19/2000</td>
<td>At work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray</td>
<td>Wildlife photographer, came to get pictures of YNP in the winter and predominately some bison and some elk and hopefully a wolf, has gotten some wolf pictures before, but from a distance</td>
<td>2/19/2000</td>
<td>ITF—site 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*ITF = in the field*


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