Power, Ambiguity, and Trust:
Occupational and Organizational Culture in Wolf Recovery in Washington State

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Exploring stakeholder perspectives on economic options to facilitate wolf re-colonization in WA
Purpose

Emerged from interviews

• Examine occupational and organizational issues within the WDFW that may affect wolf recovery efforts

  • What is the nature of the relationship between livestock owners and WDFW?

  • What is the nature of employee relationships within WDFW?

  • How might these impact the effectiveness and efficiency of the WDFW-led effort to facilitate wolf recovery?
"Facilitate change towards improved work and working conditions...based on a thoroughgoing analysis of the psychological factors of work in its many forms” (Millward, 2005)

- Most studies of the human dimensions of wildlife pay attention to other stakeholders rather than management institutions
- Institutions play significant roles in natural resource/wildlife management
  - Little known of their effectiveness and efficiency
  - Surveys show unfavorable employee work-related attitudes
• Non-directive interview techniques
• Recorded
• Transcribed verbatim
• Coded using a grounded theory approach
Trust: what livestock owners had to say about WDFW

Trust is multifaceted: emotional, behavioral, and cognitive

• “We don't have meetings with them anymore. You know that communication is just shut off and it’s because there’s no sense in it. I don't believe anything they tell me. They could tell me the sun's [going to] shine and I bet it wouldn't.”

• “…I say, “who are you? And what are you doing here?” I had already figured out who he was, Department of Game official. I said, you can't come on here without my permission. He said, I can come on here any time I want to.”
Why Trust Matters

• “Once the trust relationship has broken down, public employees find it more difficult to perform their tasks” (Yates, 1982)

  • Affects job performance and consequent effectiveness and efficiency
Communication within WDFW

Commission
  Director
    Wildlife Program Manager
      Regional Director
        Regional Wildlife Program Manager
          Conflict Specialist
          District Biologist
          Assistant District Biologist

Game Program Manager
  Conflict Program
    Carnivore Section
      Wolf Biologist
"In this Region alone, you've got the district bio, the assistant district bio, you’ve got me, and you’ve got the state biologist being involved. It leads to huge communication problems, and who does what job duty, whereas in [another state], one person did it all. To me it's very broken up and it's a cluster here."

"I know that there have been needs for specific information to be out to the public so that we can utilize it and those timelines- we get delays, so many folks needing to touch this issue right now, so much concern and sensitivity about what’s being said and by whom and how we’re saying it and to whom we’re saying it and whom we’re saying it with. All those things can really slow down the information and messaging."
What WDFW had to say about it

• “That's just what happens when you've got a lot of people involved and poor communication and people don't trust each other or respect each other....It's just ego-driven. So, at this point I'm like, I don't care if I keep the job I'm in, I'll go somewhere else.”

• “And that's the worst thing, they sit there and talk about how they [want to] be transparent, but they're not even transparent with their own agency. They're not asking staff who actually have experience with this, because I'm way down here and they're upper management, and they know more and they know better.”

• “In this department, every decision is made in Olympia with very little input from field personnel. And that's when a lot of the crazy ideas tend to come out, and then the lowly field person will find out about them and they have to call Olympia and say, “what are you doing? Have you thought about this, this, and this?” And they say no. Well, you might want to before we actually do this type of stuff.”
“Employees’ perceptions of uncertainty concerning various aspects of their jobs”  
(Breaugh & Colihan, 1994)

• “I originally applied because I thought I could- it would stay similar to being able to do those things. Protect wildlife, help people with their needs and then educate, and it's just gotten away from that a little bit. But- (Interviewer: What is it now?) I don't know, I don’t know.”

• “You know, I don't, because our positions are new, they're trying to still figure out our technical roles as far as responsibilities. So all six program managers get together and are trying to decide what our jobs should be, and all the regional program managers want it their way.”
Why Role Ambiguity Matters

• Linked to: job performance, self-efficacy, self-esteem, turnover, job satisfaction, organizational commitment
Factions

• New people with wolf experience elsewhere and long time employees in WDFW

• Conflict specialists and wolf biologists
Long Term versus New Employees

• “Oh god, here I go on my anti-rookie tirade. But they don't really listen to what we think. And I've corrected people that said a lot of, “you know we're just starting this, we're just getting going with-”. (sighs) We're not just starting it here. But they think we're just starting it and they've kind of jumped on it and taken control of it and they forgot that well, we've been doing this and we've been working together and we've been figuring stuff out.”

• “Ask them. You can ask them- you’ve got people on staff with all this wolf experience, why don't you ask them when there's a pregnant female what to do? So to me it's just, I don't know, a lack of respect, or they just don't know me, or they don't have any faith in what I do.”

• “And I've been in Washington for only a short amount of time, but within my first month I was having battles with a lot of people in the Department saying this is not a good idea.”
Conflict Specialists versus Wolf Biologists

• “The biologists want the fun, fluffy, I'm [going to] go into the den and pull out the cute fluffy wolf puppies, and I'm going to do the trapping and all the fun stuff, and I [want to] avoid all the pissed off people. And it just leads to head butting because, if it's crappy work they don't [want to] do it so they'll dump it on us, they just want all the fun stuff. Well, who doesn't want just all the fun stuff?”

• “I need to know where those wolves are, and how many pups there are, and where they're hanging out so I can intercept all that stuff. But the biologists [want to] do all that and then they don't tell us where it's at, and so how are we supposed to do our jobs in a proactive way?”

• “If I'm the guy monitoring the wolves, I'm continually talking to [ranchers], giving them personal verbal updates over the phone on where these things are, it gives them a better idea of what's actually going on out there. Rather than somebody else whose primary job isn't to monitor wolves, but they hear it through the grapevine what's going on, and then different stories get sent back to the producer and then you have to try and correct that person because he's the only one that knows that producer.”
So What?

• **Occupational stressors**
  - make it difficult for field staff to relay information to livestock operators reliably
  - Strain relationships with partners
  - Prevent team building and alienate staff

• **But- knowing is half the battle!**
  - Clear understanding of problems within WDFW can be used:
    - To design interventions and improve management
    - Target institutional obstructions to inducing and maintaining trust, effectiveness and efficiency
Thank you to all interviewees for many hours of gossip & Colin Noteboom, Malia Prescott, Anqi Chen, and Cecilia Henderson for many hours of transcribing
Questions?

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