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Quest for Return of the Timber Wolf; But Not Everyone Is Eager to See Predator in Adirondacks

DAO,, JAMES. **New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast)** [New York, N.Y] 21 July 1994: B.1.

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Abstract (summary)

"This isn't a zoo here," said Larry Reandeau, a businessman in Tupper Lake who is active in the Adirondack Solidarity Alliance, a property-rights group. "We come under regulations that no one else has to face, all in the name of environmentalism. But it isn't environmentalism. It's socialism." A Tough Sell

Mr. [Scott Thiele] said there was more to his effort than just filling a niche. "It's about nature's health," he said. "It's about the wholeness of the ecosystem."

Scott Thiele wants to repopulate the Adirondacks with eastern timber wolves, which probably disappeared from the region around 1890. (pg. B1); Scott Thiele, on a lake in Sabattis, N.Y., is part of a loose-knit movement to repopulate state and national parks with the eastern timber wolf, once America's top predator. "The wolf gives a mystique to the wilderness," he said. "A lot of people just want to know the call of the wild is still out there." (Nancie Battaglia for The New York Times) (pg. B6) Map shows the location of Adirondack Park and Tupper Lake. (pg. B6)

Full Text

Special to The New York Times

Scott Thiele was bouncing down a rutted logging road in the Adirondacks recently, thinking about Jack Nicholson and the feral music of the backwoods, when the thought struck him: what a perfect spot for a howling party.

Amid the secluded bogs, hemlock forests and placid lakes where fishermen dreamily canoe, he envisioned tourists at dusk and a guide who mimics the mournful cry that has sent shivers down spines for centuries.

No full moon needed. Just real wolves to howl back.

So goes one of Mr. Thiele's many pitches for an idea he has been single-mindedly selling to the north country: to return the eastern timber wolf to the Adirondacks, the vast and sparsely populated state park that covers most of northern New York State. Wolves for Yellowstone

In his quest, Mr. Thiele, 33, has joined a loose-knit national movement to repopulate state and national parks in Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Montana and Wyoming with North America's once top predator. In the movement's latest and perhaps largest victory, the Department of Interior agreed recently to reintroduce 30 wolves into Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho over the next year.

Mr. Thiele argued that repopulating the Adirondacks with wolves, which probably disappeared from the region around 1890, would make the natural order healthier because wolves prune away aged and infirm animals, particularly deer and beaver. But wolves will also make the economic order healthier, he said.

"Nobody will come to the Adirondacks just because coyotes are out there," he said. "But the wolf gives a mystique to the wilderness. A lot of people just want to know the call of the wild is still out there."

Plenty of Adirondack residents disagree. Residents worry about wolves killing pets and livestock. Hunters argue wolves will decimate the deer population. A few biologists even question whether wolves ever lived in the region.

Property-rights groups see wolf restoration as a veiled attempt by environmentalists to increase state and Federal control over the region, since the wolf is protected under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

"This isn't a zoo here," said Larry Reandeau, a businessman in Tupper Lake who is active in the Adirondack Solidarity Alliance, a property-rights group. "We come under regulations that no one else has to face, all in the name of environmentalism. But it isn't environmentalism. It's socialism." A Tough Sell

Even Mr. Thiele's supporters say he faces an uphill battle. A proposal by the state to bring moose from Canada and New England foundered last year when Adirondack residents raised fears about car accidents with the 1,200-pound animals. Wolves, with all their negative baggage, could prove an even tougher sell.

Langdon Marsh, the State Commissioner of Environmental Conservation, said: "I recognize there is a lot of unwarranted fear and superstition about the wolf. But nevertheless, there is the reality of significant public concern."

Though he has a handful of helpers, Mr. Thiele is something of a one-man sales team for the wolf. A six-footer with a soft voice and long beard, he has sold time-share condominiums, computers and office equipment. But he said he became fed up with what he called "the lies of the corporate world" and decided to get involved in environmental causes.

He learned of the Yellowstone wolf-restoration project while traveling in Montana last summer and decided to bring the idea east. So he formed the Adirondack Wolf Project, raised \$7,500 in foundation grants and hit the road.

Though he owns a home in Montrose, Pa., he has been living out of his rusty 1986 **Hyundai** as he crisscrosses the north country, living on oats and yogurt, bathing in mountain streams and sleeping in campgrounds and friends' backyards.

In the small towns where he gives lectures to advance his cause, Mr. Thiele has faced some tough crowds. His notes were stolen at one session, a videotape at another. He has received death threats on his special phone line, (800) 310-WILD. In Silver Bay, someone asked, "If we're going to bring back the wolf, why don't we bring back smallpox, too?"

But elsewhere, support has been substantial. "The wolf is such a wonderful family animal," said Janet Chapman at a session in Tupper Lake. "Man could learn a lot from them."

Peter O'Shea, a retired police officer who lives in the town of Fine, contended that only a vocal minority opposed wolves. "They have set a stage so people are loathe to speak up on any environmental issue," he said outside the meeting in Tupper Lake. "But 80 percent of the people love these woods and they want these animals."

The goal of Mr. Thiele's crusade is to prod state and Federal agencies to study where wolves could thrive in the Adirondacks. He believes that the region can sustain 20 to 30 packs, about 100 to 150 wolves; he envisions starting out with wolves captured in eastern Canada and released in the Adirondacks. 'Symbol of Wilderness'

Though wolf-repopulation efforts are under way in several states, Minnesota is the only place outside of Alaska with a sizable wolf population. There, wolf advocates say, evidence is growing that wolves, hunters and farmers can coexist.

But biologists who are critical of Mr. Thiele's proposal say the Adirondacks are more densely populated than northern Minnesota, so wolves and people would cross paths more often here. They noted that in the recent lynx restoration in the Adirondacks, many of the 83 animals released in the wilds were struck by cars.

The biologists also contended that the wolf's place atop the predatory ladder has been filled by coyotes.

"The wolf is a symbol of wilderness, it is a critter that just by its presence stirs the imagination," said Dr. Rainer Brocke, professor of wildlife ecology at the State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse. "But as far as the ecosystem goes, it wouldn't do a whole lot. The coyote has largely taken its niche."

But Mr. Thiele said there was more to his effort than just filling a niche. "It's about nature's health," he said. "It's about the wholeness of the ecosystem."

Photograph
Scott Thiele wants to repopulate the Adirondacks with eastern timber wolves, which probably disappeared from the region around 1890. (pg. B1); Scott Thiele, on a lake in Sabattis, N.Y., is part of a loose-knit movement to repopulate state and national parks with the eastern timber wolf, once America's top predator. "The wolf gives a mystique to the wilderness," he said. "A lot of people just want to know the call of the wild is still out there." (Nancie Battaglia for The **New York Times**) (pg. B6) Map shows the location of Adirondack Park and Tupper Lake. (pg. B6)

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