

Earth Island Journal

SUMMER 2002

Volume 17, No. 2 \$3.95 (\$5.25 Canada)

News of the World Environment

**Supercomputers,
Clones & Robots:
Reinventing Nature**

**Chemtrails:
A Secret Techno-fix for
Global Warming?**

**Biodiesel Revolution
Vegetable Oil Fuels Trucks**

www.earthisland.org



Late in 1998, a landmark meeting was convened high in the Rockies to further the protection of America's large predators – the grizzly bear, the mountain lion and the wolf. The Predator/Ecosystem Protection Summit achieved the remarkable goal of uniting some of the top predator biologists and conservation advocates in the country.

The summit was organized by WildFutures, a project of Earth Island Institute that works to bridge the gap between science and conservation, finding collaborative ways to develop and implement effective conservation strategies.

The summit concluded that there was a need to convince the public that, in order to protect these majestic and misunderstood animals, we need to protect large and interconnected wildlands. As Mike Phillips, Executive Director of the Turner Endangered Species Fund put it: "The two go hand in hand. We will not have large carnivores unless we protect large wildlands."

To meet this need, WildFutures Director Sharon Negri hired filmmaker John De Graaf to collaborate on the creation of a compelling documentary that could meet the needs of a wide range of conservation groups. De Graaf is best known for his award-winning documentary *Affluenza* (a rallying cry for the voluntary simplicity movement) and his film, *David Brower*, a tribute to the legendary founder of Earth Island Institute.

The resulting 25-minute long film, *On Nature's Terms: Predators and People Co-existing in Harmony* offers inspiring narratives that show how the country's attitudes toward predators are undergoing a profound change. With images of US Forest Service teams removing roads to restore habitats, ranchers adopting non-lethal predator controls, and coalitions of individuals and agencies cooperating to protect critical wildlife corridors, *On Nature's Terms* clearly demonstrates that humans can learn to coexist with predator species.

The film briefly recounts the overblown myths about grizzlies, lions and wolves that fueled the near-extinction of predator populations as our pioneer ancestors made their way west. Even after the frontier was settled, the media continued to inflame public fears, portraying wild animals as a danger to public safety and agriculture. Many of these antiquated notions still persist.

Today, the biggest threat to predators is the loss of habitat as urban sprawl and road-building pave wildlands, fragmenting them into isolated biological islands in a sea of human development. Predators are the one group of terrestrial fauna that is most at-risk from the geographic isolation caused by roads.

On Nature's Terms addresses the crisis with the hopeful narratives of rural and urban

Protecting Predators 'On Nature's Terms'

by Sharon Negri and Julie Didion

Americans who are finding solutions to living in harmony with predator species. The personal stories of these biologists, conservationists, homeowners, ranchers and agency personnel reveal a profound transformation of thought – from viewing predators as threats and commodities to a newfound realization of the important role these animals play in maintaining the balance of nature.

This role is a complex one. Conservation biologists consider large predators the "top-down regulators" of the natural world – meaning they exert a controlling influence on their prey and, in turn, every other part of the food pyramid. Once predators are

solution. "The recipe for success... is to have wolves where there are large continuous tracts of unsettled, wild land – places of low human population density," Smith says. "We've got to save big, wild lands. And, by saving big, wild lands, you can save wolves."

On Nature's Terms highlights the story of Claire Schlotterbeck, a southern California woman who raised \$50 million in three years to save Coal Canyon, a wildlife habitat that was threatened by development. Claire's dream was to create a wildlife refuge that would be a place of beauty and inspiration in the midst of a large urban area. Working with the developers and with local, state and federal officials, Claire succeeded in creating the Coal Canyon Biological Corridor which links two existing parks with a bridge of protected wildlife habitat.

Becky Weed, a Montana rancher (and Harvard graduate) who has been raising sheep with her husband Dave Tyler since 1993, is committed to using only non-lethal methods to protect her flock. One of Weed's innovative "non-lethal methods" is having a llama scare off approaching predators. As Weed told the filmmakers, "Once we got the llama, we basically have had almost no losses to coyotes." Weed is convinced that co-existence is "the most practical approach.... The native predators have a role to play."

Weed and the others featured in the film share the belief that predators not only play an important role in the ecosystem, but also bring meaning to our lives. Without them, some of the world's essential magic and mystery would be missing. They speak for a growing number of people who may never hear a wolf howl or see a grizzly in the wild, but want to know these majestic creatures are living free and wild in our nation's wilderness.



Thomas Mangelsdorf/www.mangelsdorf.com

'With fact, insight and passion, *On Nature's Terms* shows why we must treasure predators and how we can share our planet with these magnificent creatures.'

**– George Shaller,
Wildlife Conservation Society**

removed from an area, the food chain is fundamentally disrupted – usually to the detriment of the overall ecosystem.

One of the biggest success stories in the modern conservation movement is the reintroduction of wolves into Yellowstone National Park. *On Nature's Terms* records examples of biologists, conservationists and government workers cooperating to restore ecosystems by returning once-eradicated predators to their native habitat.

Douglas Smith, Yellowstone's Wolf Project Leader, has been working to reintroduce wolves to the park since 1994. Smith confirms what biologists have long known: "Predators symbolize healthy ecosystems. Having wolves in place means all the links on down to the lowest level are intact."

Reintroducing predators is only part of the

What You Can Do Ask your local PBS station to schedule a showing of *On Nature's Terms*. Copies of the film are available for \$20 (including postage and handling). Individuals and conservation groups may order from "WildFutures/EII" [353 Wallace Way, NE, Suite 12, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110, (206) 780-9718, www.earthisland.org/wild-futures]; libraries, businesses and educational organizations can request copies through Bullfrog Films [www.bullfrogfilms.com].

The WildFutures' website lists 12 action steps you can follow to protect carnivores and their habitats and provides links to other groups working on these issues.