

# Carter Niemeyer

## Debunking wolf myths

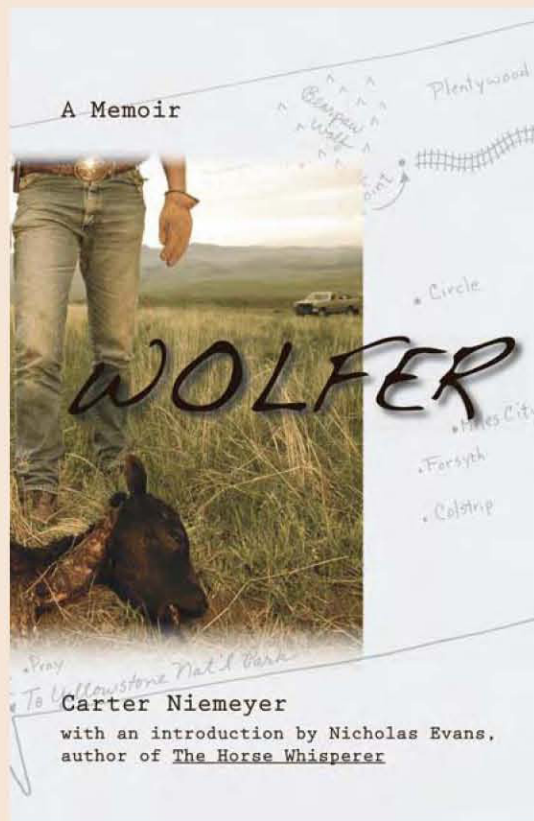
Carter Niemeyer is a former trapper turned Wolf Management Specialist for USDA Wildlife Services and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He was a member of the wolf capture team in Canada for the mid-1990s Idaho/Yellowstone wolf reintroduction. Throughout his career, and to this day, he works tirelessly to examine livestock deaths that are attributed to wolves, seeking solid evidence as to the real cause for the death.

Now retired from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Carter has written a memoir about his experiences called "Wolfer." Wolf Haven International has a shared history with Carter Niemeyer. In conjunction with Carter and federal agencies, Wolf Haven received former canid residents Nooksack and Tenino Montana. Both had long lives at Wolf Haven, have since passed away and are buried in our wolf cemetery.

### Are the wolves that were reintroduced into Montana and Idaho non-native or different from earlier wolves?

I have to support the science, and specialists in morphology and genetics on wolves indicate that the wolf that was brought down from Canada is the same wolf that lived here previously. And I did some research into books on early wolves that were captured in the Northern Rockies, even as far south as Colorado during the days that wolves were being hunted down in the 1930s; and the body weights were very much the same.

So I feel that this wolf that was brought from Canada is the same species and genetics as the wolves that lived here once upon a time. I think people have to remember that the northern Rockies – we call it the northern Rockies in Idaho and Montana, but actually we're a southern extension of the northern Rockies out of Canada – and all of those wolves in Canada have the potential and



the ability to disperse. I believe what happened over the last 50-60 years is that individual wolves have come from Canada following the Rocky Mountain chain and ended up periodically in places like Montana and Idaho.

### Why do people have such strong emotions about wolves?

Well, principally, the grief is about people more than wolves, because people have so many different values and wolves mean so many different things to different people. And, of course, you go back to the myths and the fairytales. Early European settlers dealt with wolves trying to kill their livestock, when livestock was kind of displacing the wild ungulates. And so it's always been a curse to the livestock industry and a competitor with them.



And then as we move forward, I think people have grown away from the land and become more urbanized, and most people don't even understand what a wild wolf is all about. And so there's just a lot of fear and misconception on the one hand, and on the other hand, they resemble someone's pet dog; and so you elevate them to a status where they're noble, majestic and man's best friend, and the real answer is that it's somewhere in the middle of all this.

### What do you say to people who want absolutely nothing to do with wolves?

Well, anyone who's opposed to wolves in the northern Rockies, it's a little late now. The wolf is here; I don't see the wolf going away for a long, long time to come. I think people are going to have to adjust and recognize that this is another predator in our environment that we're going to live with.

It's reestablishing a position that it once had. And it has many benefits. I mean you can't just look at wolves always in a negative, but they're a culling factor. Predators like the wolf are what made elk and deer herds and ungulate populations healthy over the years, too. They cull them; they keep them sharp and healthy.

And, of course, smaller predators like coyotes are going to have to give them wide space, because they will kill coyotes and displace them. And I think ungulate herds behaviorally have had to change. They've had to get sharper now, because the predator that used to hunt them is back. And so, it absolutely is creating a new niche and other animals have to give it wide birth.

### What do you think is the biggest myth about the wolf?


I think there are a tremendous number of misconceptions by people

***“Wolves, for whatever great strides they've made in the modern mind, continue to be persecuted, and there's truly no basis for it.”***

**– Carter Niemeyer,  
Wolfer**

on all sides of the issue. A wolf is a large canine predator that eats elk and deer and red meat. And beyond being a wild animal, doing its thing that it's created to do, adding all these human qualities to the wolf is to me, the biggest misconception.

I mean, you can look at one and call it beautiful, but a wolf is a wolf, and it's unfortunate that they have to be put on a pedestal or demonized, and this is all human-imposed perceptions of the wolf.

The wolf now is sort of this cultural shock that has been imposed upon some people, but they're probably the least dangerous of all of the largest predators. 

**Carter Niemeyer addresses agency and other wildlife personnel regarding flight monitoring and tracking techniques.**

JULIE LAWRENCE PHOTO.

