

Changing *the* *Landscape*

A progressive vision for wildlife
protection in the 21st century

by WAYNE PACHELLE

This essay is excerpted from *The Bond: Our Kinship with Animals, Our Call to Defend Them* by HSUS president and CEO Wayne Pacelle. Slated for release by Harper Collins/William Morrow in April, the book points the way to a humane economy: one built not on extraction, suffering, and killing, but on the celebration, stewardship, and care of animals. In the following excerpt, he takes readers on his journey through America's national park system—from his time as a student conservation officer to today's fight to save wolves.

I've spent time in most of America's 50 or so national parks, and each stands out in its own way—the sensational colors of ancient wood at Petrified Forest, the brilliant red rock formations at Arches, the shaggy, white mountain goats bounding up the almost vertical faces at Olympic. But for me, one park holds a special place in memory. It's Isle Royale National Park—a rocky, out-of-the-way archipelago, washed on all sides by the cold swells of Lake Superior.

I arrived at Isle Royale in the summer of 1985 as a ranger for the Student Conservation Association (SCA). Over the next four months, I hiked almost all of its 165 miles of trails that scarcely mar this classical boreal forest. Breezes off the big lake chill the air even in midsummer, and it rarely gets warmer than 80 degrees. The same breezes stir the leaves of white pines and quaking aspens, sending a gentle flutter through the stillness of the park. There's a solitary beauty to the place, and I found it everywhere—on long hikes, canoe trips, and very quick dips in the cleanest, coldest water in North America. For all its beauty and tranquility, Isle Royale also tested my reverence-for-life ethic, with swarms of blackflies and mosquitoes that welcomed me to the park in their own way.

The park was established by an act of Congress during the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt, but even by the 1980s it saw only 10,000 or so visitors a year—nothing compared to the 8 million or so who entered the Great Smoky Mountains National Park or the 3 million who went to Yosemite. The park is so remote that at first even wildlife had a tough time getting there. Wolves loped across an ice bridge to the park around 1950, doubtless in pursuit of an abundant moose population that descends from the hardy originals who made an incredible swim from Canada. Bears never made it, and deer didn't last. Red foxes and beavers did establish themselves, and I saw them often. Bald eagles nested there too, and the habitat

is also perfect for northern loons. As a child, I had read about the wolves and moose of Isle Royale and always hoped to see the park firsthand. Researchers had discovered that wolves had an impact on the entire park ecosystem—not just the moose, but also the beavers and foxes, and in turn, the fish, birds, and even plants. Something about this cascade effect enthralled the naturalist in me—each little movement of nature affecting everything else around it.

There is a quiet in the boreal forest—it is not filled with the variety of life of a tropical forest or a coral reef. It is grudging and spare in sustaining animal life. That thrift appealed to me. It was more modest than ornate. There was no outsized feature—no huge

mountain, ancient tree species, or powerful waterfall—to leave you in awe. Yet in its proportionality, the place commanded your respect.

The place had tugged at me for a long time, and when I got the SCA assignment, I was thrilled. I was just 20 years old, and soon I was not only on the island but showing tourists around like an old hand. I never saw any wolves—they were few in number, wary of people, and hard to spot in the thick forest. But I saw plenty of other wildlife. I'd pass time

studying a mother moose and her calf, or watching loons make their awkward crash landings on the lakes. They were much more elegant in their movements on the water than in the air. They'd gracefully disappear beneath the surface, and I'd try to guess where they'd emerge, often on the opposite side of a large pond.

A mother fox gave birth to her kits under the cabin where six of us lived. I wondered if these foxes were driven by the same impulses as the first wolves who befriended humans—starting that fateful process of domestication. The foxes showed genuine interest in us, and we returned the favor.

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igan, had been tough on me, especially when he was drinking. He often told me that my preoccupation with animals was a waste of time, and he delighted in recounting his hunting excursions, adding extra detail for my benefit. But I saw another side to him when the baby foxes appeared under our cabin. He watched them endlessly and talked about them excitedly. It was a lesson for me that the human-animal bond can touch anyone, even those who seem least likely to care.

That summer at Isle Royale came at a turning point in my life, when I was starting to think seriously about animals and nature and our duties to both. For the creatures who lived there, Isle Royale was a sanctuary from the unsparing pressures of humanity. All of the violence of nature was at work there every day, and no one clued in to the struggle between predator and prey could hold an idealized or sentimental view of nature's operations. But there is a world of difference between animals killing animals for survival, and humans killing animals for no reason at all, except money or sport. At least here, there were no trophy hunters traipsing into the picture to bring gratuitous death, no steel traps to bring needless and prolonged suffering, and none of the other destructive influences that only human beings, at their most careless, can inflict upon wildlife.

Human beings were welcome guests in the park, drawn there by a sense of exploration, fascination, and a spirit of stewardship. The handiwork of the ages, and of the Creator, had left us something that could not be improved upon. I felt proud that the American people had set aside this place and, in fact, an entire system of national parks—ensuring that some places would be protected for all time. Wild animals needed more places like this, and so did we. At summer's end, when I pushed off from Isle Royale for the last

time, I felt that I had been given a glimpse of human stewardship at its best. And whatever work lay ahead for me, I wanted to see more of it, and I was committed to do my best to make that happen.

UNFAITHFUL STEWARDS: BETRAYING YELLOWSTONE'S BISON

Yellowstone was a far more mixed and conflicted experience for me, the kind that shows you the world as it is, rather than how you want it to be. My first trip there, in the summer after college graduation, was memorable in the best way—a tourist's panning of the park's treasures. The place is like a fireworks display of the natural world—the herds of bison, the water of Yellowstone Falls disappearing into a froth in the canyon below, the panoramic views of the Lamar Valley and regular roar of Old Faithful. Hiking down to a lake in the park's center, I even spotted a grizzly bear a few hundred yards away. If Yellowstone had just a subset of these wild animals and geological and floral features, it would be impressive enough. But to have all of them in one place seems miraculous, and it helps explain how Yellowstone inspired the very idea of a national park system.

On my second trip to Yellowstone, it was winter and bitterly cold, and everything about the trek was more harsh and raw. I traveled there to help the bison, and to publicize a problem that surfaced there in 1989 but sadly remains unresolved more than two decades later. Montana agriculture and wildlife officials had decided to allow the sport hunting of bison straying from the park—even though Yellowstone had been meant as the final refuge for the few bison who had survived the market hunting onslaught of the 19th century.



These officials viewed the growth and roaming of the northern herd not as a sign of species restoration, but as a dangerous intrusion of trespassers. Yellowstone's northern boundary was a demarcation line, and no bison were to cross it. Not only did state officials think that bison would compete with cattle for grass and knock down the ranchers' fences, but, most important, that bison might also spread disease to the state's cattle industry—jeopardizing Montana's certification as a brucellosis-free state. When I became national director of The Fund for Animals in 1989, I went straight to Yellowstone to help shame state authorities into halting the hunt. Here was a creature best known as the classic example of human excess and callousness in the treatment of wildlife. And yet there were still men who looked at bison and wanted to shoot them.

To reach the fertile valleys beyond the park, the bison followed the groomed pathways, plowed roads, and trails packed down by snowmobiles. Their destination was a quilt of lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and private ranchers. At a lower elevation than the park, these border areas had less snow, which bison could dig through to feed on the grass below. There were no cattle here during winter—and very few during the summer—but state officials were convinced that bison would pass on brucellosis, a bacteria that causes cattle to abort. About half the bison had the disease antibodies, but not the disease itself, and the idea of bison transmitting brucellosis to cattle was far-fetched—and a practical impossibility for the male bison, since brucellosis is spread through placental material.

The state planned a lottery hunt, with the winners of the \$1,000 permits not only getting a freezer full of meat, but also a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to shoot the last free-roaming bison in North America. Like Civil War reenactors, only with real guns, they could replay a defining moment in American history, slaughtering the bison for sport. State and federal authorities would choreograph the exercise, with Montana wildlife officials serving, in effect, as hunting guides.

I showed up at the park without announcing my purpose to the hunters or state authorities, though they found out soon enough. I came with video camera in hand and said I was there to document the first hunt of free-roaming bison in the 20th century. A number of journalists had arrived, from *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and other newspapers, so my presence, while suspect, was not conspicuous.

On the hunt's first day, I hopped in the back of a state truck with the hunters and a few reporters and made small talk as the vehicle bounced down gravel roads toward scattered groups of bison. We passed through extraordinary country—broad mountains covered in thick blankets of snow, the Yellowstone River with its fast current cutting through the valleys, and the famous open sky of Montana. But the majestic scenery was all backdrop that day. All concerned were focused on the hunt, but for different reasons: the state personnel wondering how the nation would react to this ex-

periment; the hunters calculating where to fire their first shots on such massive quarry; and me dreading the carnage about to unfold. Montana wardens had been sent out as scouts to locate the bison and then to radio their whereabouts to our driver. Once the vehicle was close enough to the bison, he stopped the truck, and the hunters hopped off. One by one, they spotted the bison, readied themselves, and took aim with their large-bore rifles. The sound of gunfire filled the air, in what seemed a “hunt” only in name: it looked more like an execution. The bison didn't have a chance, and one after another they fell in a heap.

A few survivors ran away after hearing a shot or seeing a herd mate fall, but most just stood there befuddled. These animals were used to seeing people, and before that moment had never been harmed by them, much less slaughtered in a sneak attack. In a second large volley, hunters shot an entire group of about a dozen bison, and the animals were all splayed on the ground, with blood streaking from their bodies and then blending into the snow and the exposed ground. I walked with the hunters through the field, surveying the warm carcasses steaming in the cold winter air and leaking blood onto the snow. One hunter had shot a pregnant bison. I walked toward him as he started cutting her up, and watched as he put his arm inside and pulled out the fetus of an already well-formed bison. As I looked on wordlessly, he grinned and said, “It's a lot of fun.” You'd think that such a sight might have awakened some capacity for remorse in a man, but not this fellow. He didn't seem troubled at all and apparently considered the unborn calf a kind of bonus.

I got back into the truck, and the state officials drove a 14-year-old boy to a clearing unobstructed by trees. They instructed the young hunter to shoot at one of three bison standing about 200 yards away and offering us a perfect profile. It was a long shot, and it struck me as madness that this kid was being told to attempt a feat that would test the marksmanship of even the most highly skilled adult.

The boy took aim with his scoped rifle, squeezed the trigger, and sent a bullet in the bison's direction. The gun's kick knocked him back a step. Several moments passed before we realized the bullet had struck the middle bison. What a shot. She went down but was not dead. It seemed that she had been shot in the spine. Bison are famously tough creatures, and she tried to get up, only to fall back down again. She made another valiant but unsuccessful attempt. She kept at it, again and again. Stan Grossfeld, a reporter and photographer with *The Boston Globe*, was standing beside me, and he started counting her vain efforts to stand up—he logged more than 40 failed attempts to rise.

The men seemed unfazed by the spectacle—they just stood around watching the crippled animal struggle. The kid was elated, and the group stood around for a good 10 minutes reliving the moment and congratulating the young marksman. At length, they got into the truck and made their way over to the dying animal.

Here were the people entrusted with stewardship of the bison, and yet they were shooing the creatures out of the park and into the line of fire.

A Conversation with Wayne

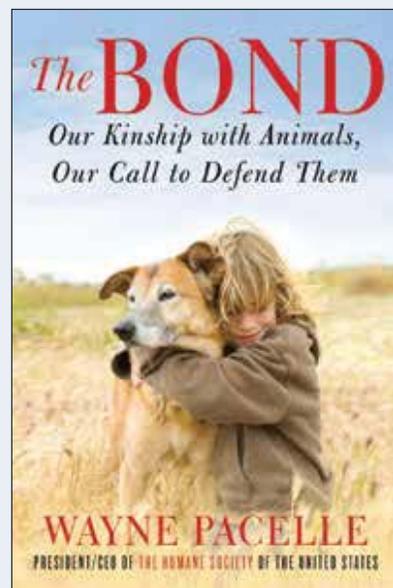
In January 1993, Wayne Pacelle traveled to Fairbanks, Alaska, for a state-sponsored “summit” to decide the fate of wolves. Alaskan officials wanted to send sharpshooters aloft in helicopters to slaughter hundreds of these animals. Wolves, you see, were bringing down caribou that human hunters believed were rightly theirs to take. I attended as a journalist for *The Los Angeles Times*. I listened as Wayne spoke. He talked over the heads of the assembled crowd of noisy, uncompromising hunters and their Alaskan political patrons. Wayne addressed the sensibilities of the larger America. He spoke of human responsibility to safeguard animals.

His foes made a mistake that chilly winter. They underestimated Wayne and his message. They saw him as a man on the fringe. And they weren’t alone in that view.

For the next 13 years, I witnessed the progress of Wayne Pacelle as he tirelessly crisscrossed this nation in the cause of compassion. So powerful was his call that four years ago I left journalism and joined Wayne’s staff at The Humane Society of the United States.

Something remarkable had happened during these years. With Wayne in the lead, the animal welfare movement laid firm claim to the American mainstream. Opponents who tried to defend the status-quo mistreatment of animals were forced to the fringes of our civic conversations.

Now, Wayne’s continuing dialogue with America moves forward with the April publication of his first book, *The Bond: Our Kinship with Animals, Our Call to Defend Them*. — **John Balzar**



Q: You explore a paradox in *The Bond*. Will you give readers of *All Animals* a hint of what’s inside?

PACELLE: I argue that we have a deeply contradictory set of attitudes and behaviors toward animals. There’s so much love and appreciation for animals, yet also so much cruelty and abuse. I wrote *The Bond* to disentangle some of these contradictions and to try to show us a new way forward. It’s a hopeful book, and while I don’t skid past the problems that exist, it’s not a numbing catalogue of problems. I place the issues within a historical context, and using anecdotes and my personal experiences, I try to reframe the debate and call attention to one of the most important moral failings of our time: the misuse of our power when it comes to our treatment of animals.

Q: What was the inspiration for this book at this time?

PACELLE: I have spent my adult life fighting for animals, most of that time with the nation’s most important animal protection organization, The Humane Society of the United States. I have traveled to every state and to many nations throughout the world and met tens of thousands of people. Wherever I go, I run across people who care about animals, reminding me of the universality of the human-animal bond. I want to harness this energy to roll back our systematic mistreatment of animals. I do believe that how we treat animals is one of the fundamental measures of our humanity.

Q: You sound a call for a humane economy. Can you elaborate?

PACELLE: Let’s face it, most cruelty is rooted in economics—in the raising of animals for food, in adorning ourselves with fur or exotic leather, in pastimes we call entertainment, even in the business of breeding pets. This institutional mistreatment of animals is driven by a short-sighted hunger for profit. Or sometimes it occurs just because that’s how things have been done in the past. When I speak of a humane economy, I’m asking consumers, businesses, and investors to raise their line of sight and to find new ways of doing business that do not cause such cruelty to animals. As I write in *The Bond*, the horrible mistreat-

ment of animals on factory farms “is the creation of human resourcefulness detached from conscience.” We have to ask ourselves how many innovations we could bring about by applying that resourcefulness in a way that is guided by conscience.

Q: As you describe in the preface, there are many worthy causes to support. You could have made a successful career leading any one of them. Yet you ended up here. Did you choose animals, or did animals choose you?

PACELLE: Animals have always tugged at my pant leg. I never needed anyone to tell me right from wrong when it came to the care of animals. I knew animals were different, but different in good ways. This has been a calling for me ever since I can remember. While many causes attract my interest, there is something so wrong about the merciless exploitation of animals. I refuse to stand aside and let it happen without standing in the way of it.

Q: One early reader of your manuscript reacted by saying that no animal got left behind in these pages. Does that sum up your philosophy?

PACELLE: It’s not enough to love and pamper your dog or your cat. It’s a start, and a good one. But we have duties to all animals, since each one of them has the capacity to suffer and feel pain. They all deserve our compassion, including animals in the food production system, those prodded and dissected in the laboratory, and those captured, trapped, and otherwise chased down by us in the wild. These are the goals of The Humane Society of the United States, and that is my goal for our world. I write about the biochemistry of our bond with other creatures—it’s instinctive and readily explainable. But the full expression of the human-animal bond requires moral awareness and commitment. Animals are not just in the backdrop of our own story, but at the center of the whole drama, and how we treat them is one of the great themes of the human story.

About 20 minutes after the whole scene had begun, the boy completed his achievement with a final, point-blank shot to the bison's head.

When I wasn't documenting the slaughter, or publicizing it to the press, I was shepherding bison back into the park. I'd clap my hands and throw rocks behind them to herd them past the park boundary, where they'd be temporarily safe. Unbelievably, I saw National Park Service personnel doing the opposite, trying to scare them in the opposite direction. Here were the people entrusted by the American public with stewardship of the bison, and yet they were shooing the creatures out of the park and into the line of fire. These guys thought the bison herd had grown too large, and they were quite happy to herd them along so that the state could finish them off. I had always seen the Park Service as a force for good, but not this time. They brought discredit to their mission and to their uniforms—the ones bearing the National Park Service insignia, with the noble bison right at the center.

Hunters shot 569 bison in the winter of 1988-89, and the few surviving bison in the state retreated back to the park as spring approached. Montana had accomplished its short-term purpose of clearing out the animals one way or another, but the news reports had not been favorable. The whole spectacle had repulsed the public, who saw hunting bison as the sporting equivalent of shooting a zoo animal.

In the face of withering criticism, the state abandoned the public hunt the next year, worried not about the welfare of the bison but about tarnishing the image of hunting. The killing went on, with Montana officials taking over the task. In some years, few bison left the park, but every few years, there would be a larger exodus, and the public controversy would flare up again. Still, Montana authorities would not relent and, working with the National Park Service, actually began capturing bison to ship them to slaughterhouses. The state even contemplated an extermination of the entire Yellowstone bison population and repopulating the park with bison unexposed to brucellosis. There were congressional hearings after the major kill of 1989, and also in later years, especially as state and federal authorities began to manage the bison like a rancher handling a cattle herd.

In March 2007, nearly two decades after my first trip to Yellowstone, Representative Nick Rahall, a West Virginia Democrat and chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, convened a hearing on the fate of the bison. His opening statement captured the thoughts of many Americans: "Is it any wonder then that the American public periodically looks on in horror at footage of employees of the United States Department of the Interior participating in the slaughter of Yellowstone bison?" he asked. "The gen-

eral public is under the impression that these animals are being sheltered and protected by the federal government, not rounded up and shot. And the obvious question is why. Why is the Department of the Interior murdering its beloved mascot?"

A NEW MODEL FOR WILD LANDS PROTECTION

Ironically, one rationale for reintroducing wolves into Yellowstone was to bring back a major predator of bison, elk, and other prey animals to keep their populations in check. But the political reaction in Montana to wolf reintroduction was hostile and swift. Ranchers, hunters, and their allies did not want a single wolf to step into the state.

But this was a federal matter, with the Endangered Species Act legally requiring the restoration of species listed as threatened or endangered. And in the case of Yellowstone, the crown jewel of the national park system, the restoration of wolves was a powerful symbol of correcting a wrong of the past and making the park whole again. President Bill Clinton's Interior secretary, Bruce Babbitt, an ardent environmentalist, defended the reintroduction plan in the name of good stewardship and ecological integrity. So with great local controversy but also with much national fanfare and celebration, government officials trapped wolves in Canada and transported them to Yellowstone and parts of Idaho in 1995 and then released them in an experiment to restore what had been lost.

As a witness to the slaughter of bison, I had conflicted feelings about wolf reintroduction. I thought wolves should be restored because they were part of the natural ecology, and I regarded their elimination from the West by trapping, hunting, and poisoning as a despicable chapter in our history. In theory, I was all for reintroduction. But I also knew that soon their population would increase, and their range expand beyond Yellowstone, just like the bison's. I was sure that the same demarcation line would be set for them



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and the same clash of attitudes would surface. When they became abundant enough to lose federal protection, the aggressively pro-hunting and proranching states of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming would take control. We would have honored the right principles, but, in the end, the political power always shifted back to hunters and ranchers, and when it was all over they'd have their way. Wolves would be hunted and killed. Their packs and families would be destroyed. State officials would kill pups in their dens. In the end, I just didn't think it would be a good outcome for wolves. But I stayed on the sidelines as the leaders of environmental groups and the Clinton administration charged ahead with the plan.

Wolves were meant for these lands. Mothers reproduced, and pups survived, and the population grew faster than even the experts had forecast. They had an immediate impact on the ecosystem, reducing elk numbers and allowing the forest's undergrowth to be restored. It wasn't long before competition inside the park caused pioneer animals to explore the areas beyond. As the number of packs increased, Interior secretary Dirk Kempthorne, a former governor of Idaho, proposed removing wolves from the list of protected species in the northern Rockies. The HSUS and a coalition of environmental groups held back this effort in the federal courts, arguing that the states lacked plans to maintain sustainable wolf populations.

But that hardly settled the matter. In 2009, President Barack Obama's Interior secretary, Ken Salazar, formerly a U.S. senator from Colorado, proposed delisting wolves again. And after more than a half-dozen wins by our legal team in court, a judge balked and then allowed a preliminary delisting in two of the three states. State officials did not waste a moment in opening up hunting seasons for the first time in decades. In 2009, Idaho sold 10,000 hunting licenses—putting the ratio of hunters to wolves at more than 15 to 1. Idaho Gov. Butch Otter had previously declared that he'd be “prepared to bid for that first ticket to shoot a wolf myself.”

Montana followed suit, and hunters there killed nearly all the wolves from one of the most studied packs in Yellowstone, destroying its social structure and leaving orphans, a few other survivors, and not much else. Fortunately, the same federal judge issued a final decision some months later that rebuffed the administration, restored the endangered status of the wolves, and blocked the subsequent hunting season. Now U.S. senators from Idaho and Montana are seeking to enact legislation to delist wolves, trying to remake the law after repeatedly coming up short in the courts.

In this century, Yellowstone will again play a vital role in protecting wildlife. But the unhappy experience of wolves and bison reminds us that even the biggest of parks like Yellowstone are not big enough. The mere presence of wolves and bison and other wild animals in a single park is not sufficient, as long as they are hypermanaged and treated like walking museum pieces or as so many specimens needed only to fill out our postcard picture of the ideal park. They are not just populations to be managed, contained, controlled, or culled. They are individual creatures whose lives and travails matter for their own sake, especially when they are harassed or threatened by cruel and officious people. After all that these creatures have been through, they deserve much better than that.

To give them the chance to survive, or better still to flourish, we need a new model of wild lands protection—large, protected areas joined by corridors, allowing animals to freely roam as nature intended, to be where and what they were meant to be. The great goal would be a wilderness network of parks and corridors from northern Mexico, through the Rockies, and all the way up the spine of the mountains to the Yukon. Some of these pieces are already in place, with millions of acres set aside as parks and national forests. To complete this unified stretch of wilderness will require more public lands, more protection of wildlife on ranches and other private lands, and the same kind of vision and political will that gave us Yellowstone. ■

JOE VOGAN/ALAMY

