



# Changing Tracks: Predators and Politics in Mt. McKinley National Park

*Timothy Rawson*

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A century ago, nearly all Americans agreed that the fewer wolves, the better. Now many people ardently defend wolves for ecological, ethical, spiritual, and symbolic reasons. *Changing Tracks* chronicles the issue that helped reshape our views toward predators. The wolf-sheep controversy in Mt. McKinley (Denali) National Park, Alaska, had a profound impact on the evolving definition of National Park Service policy and still echoes in today's discussions of wildlife management. In the 1930s, the Park Service began to question the existing purpose of parks as game refuges. Wolves had been extirpated in other parks, but when the service stopped killing them in McKinley, concern for the declining Dall sheep population aroused antiwolf sentiment. The ensuing argument over park wildlife policy lasted more than twenty years, as Alaskans and the nation's sportsmen urged vigorous wolf control rather than letting a natural balance prevail in the park.

The controversy brought Park Service biologist Adolph Murie to Alaska, where he conducted the first scientific study of wolf ecology. Yet politics and sentiment proved more important than science, dictating agency action, as is often the case in public policy. Arguments over wolves, in Alaska and elsewhere, now seem endless, and they started here. *Changing Tracks* is an essential Alaska story, but the issues constitute a cornerstone of conservation history that has been replayed in ecological management and philosophy worldwide.

"*Changing Tracks* is exceedingly well written and a pleasure to read." (Journal of the History of Biology)

"[A]n important contribution to the literature of national park history and of the wolf. . . . In tracing the story [Rawson] was able to shed light on the larger stories of changing attitudes toward animals, especially game and predatory animals, in American history in general and national park history in particular." (Environmental History)

"Timothy Rawson has written a splendid book. . . . [H]e spans philosophy, evolving perceptions, biology, politics, agency principles and pragmatics, and ethics. He writes with facility and style because he has mastered the vast documentary trove that holds the story. . . . Across all this rugged terrain Rawson retains his balance, and provides historical perspectives true to the times he records. . . . It is all in this beautifully written and researched book . . . as they say in the trade, it is a page-turner." (Alaska History)

"Few subjects illustrate shifting notions of wilderness in national parks better than the treatment of wolves. . . . Rawson's account provides a rare opportunity to see how agency leaders decide what was in the best interest of wild nature and the nation . . . this work [is] informative and compelling and a valuable addition to our understanding of nature." (Pacific Northwest Quarterly)

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