

Natural Environments of North America**Gray Wolves**

The gray wolf originally ranged from coast to coast across North America. But wherever Europeans settled, wolf extermination followed. A relentless war against these animals was waged with rifles, traps, and poisons for more than 300 years.

For many years government agencies paid cash bounties for wolf carcasses, and federal hunters tracked down any rumor of survivors. Erased from most of the East long before the end of the 1800s, gray wolves were gone from the West by the 1930s. By the 1960s the only ones alive south of Canada were a handful living deep in Mexico's Sierra Madre, a score on Isle Royale out in Lake Superior, and 300 to 700 in northernmost Minnesota. In 1967 experts declared that the species was facing extinction south of Canada.

Why were humans and wolves in conflict? The primary reason is the competition that existed between humans and wolves. As the wolves' natural prey was wiped out, they turned to eating what they could find—domestic livestock. To protect their land and livelihood, ranchers reached for their rifles. Wolves were soon gone.

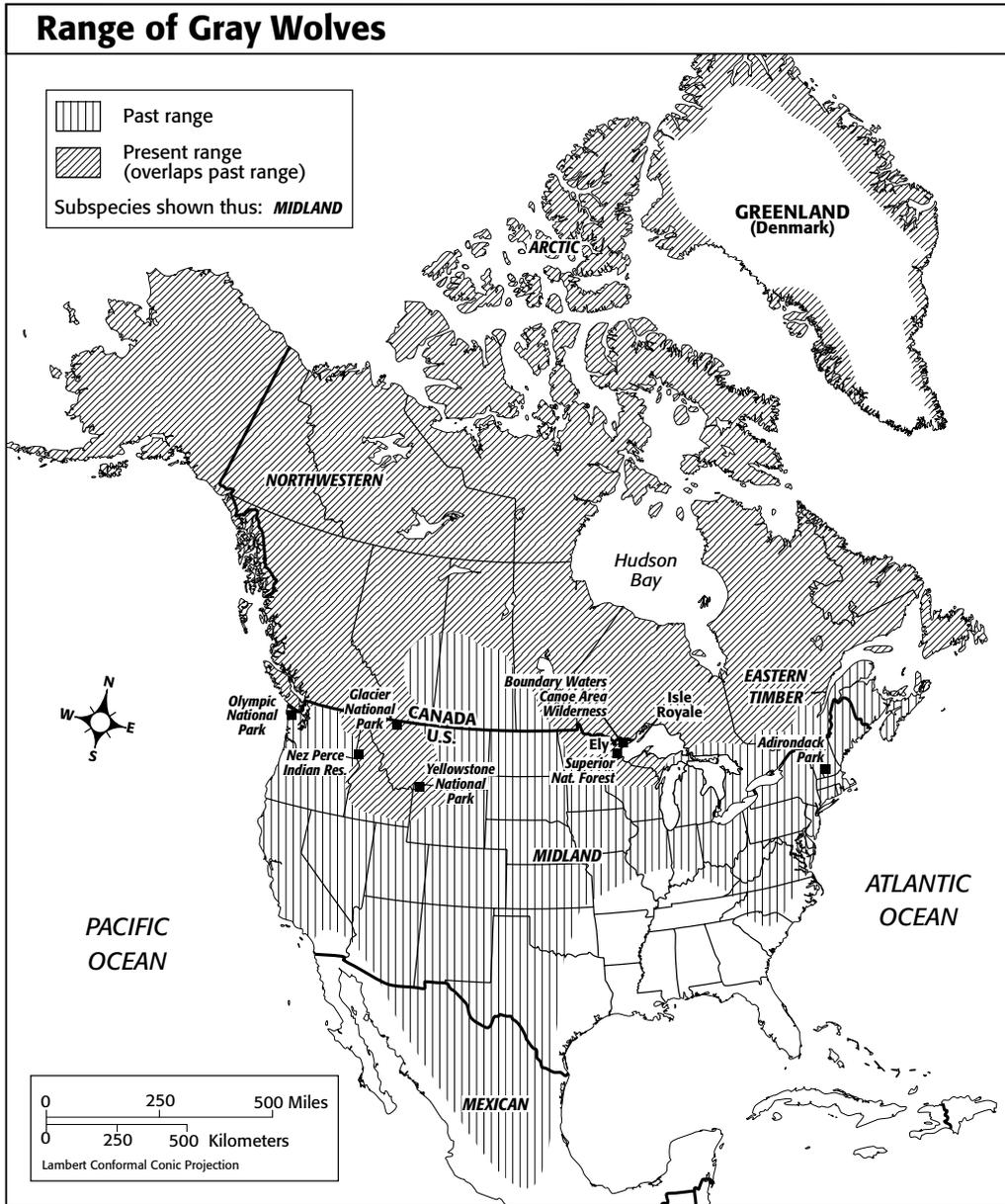
In 1974 the gray wolf won protection under the Endangered Species Act. In the 1980s, nearly half a century after the last known citing of a gray wolf in the continental United States, a few Canadian wolves rambled over the border and colonized a portion of Glacier National Park. After sanctioning the slaughter of wolves for decades, federal agencies in 1995 launched an ambitious project to restore the animals in parts of their former range.

The plan involved airlifting wolves from Canada into Yellowstone National Park and the Frank Church Wilderness, as well as protecting wolves moving into Montana on their own. Though successful—there are some 90 wolves in Yellowstone, 70 in Idaho, and 75 in Montana—the program faces continued challenges by those who still oppose wolves living alongside humans. Look at the map on the next page and then answer the following questions.

- 1.** What was the primary reason for exterminating gray wolves from North America?

- 2.** What is your prediction for the future of the gray wolf in North America? Why?

Chapter 7, Critical Thinking Activity, continued



3. Which country in North America is home to the greatest number of gray wolves?

4. In what part of Greenland do wolves currently live?

5. Name the U.S. states in which the three major wilderness areas are currently home to gray wolves.
