

WELCOME TO THE PACK – YOU’RE A JR. PACKTIVIST!

When we say your voice matters, we mean it. By taking action in support of wolf recovery, even the small steps count. As wolves return to the Pacific states of California, Oregon, and Washington they do so on a vastly different social, political, and ecological landscape than elsewhere in the country. Wolves need each other and their packs to survive and thrive. By working together, metaphorically as a wolf pack – a pack of activists, and by amplifying our voices together, you, too, can help the Pacific Wolf Coalition in our wolf recovery efforts of these magnificent apex predators. By providing you with an action toolkit, we call it our *Jr. Packtivist Kit*, you can be the voice for wolves.

Kids Living With Wolves

In rural communities, there are kids just like you living with wolves or learning that soon, they too, will live with wolves. Although these kids may like wolves, they are probably more scared about the wolf's return due to the myths that surround the animal, and the potential changes their families will make in order to share the landscape with the returning predator. It is important to put yourself in their shoes to better understand what they might be feeling.

From One Wolf Activist to Another: Story’s Story

Our friend and youth wolf activist, Story, has quite the story of her own. Maybe you share some of the same thoughts and perspectives?

"The first time I saw a wolf in the wild roughly coincided with the time I got my first dog at six years old. My dog was my best friend, and I couldn't help but notice how similar wild wolves were to my dog. I'm still amazed by those similarities. Wolves are also a lot like us - they are social, intelligent, and family-oriented. They are ecologically important as well. Wolves are endlessly fascinating to me.

...I was about six years old when I went to Yellowstone... My mom tells me that I was excited to wake up before dawn to look for wolves and that I loved to scan the hillsides with scopes. I mostly remember watching that tiny speck of a black wolf, probably more than a mile away, trotting along the skyline early in the morning...A few months before the trip, I remember begging my parents for a dog and finally adopting him. I was always an animal lover, but after Shadow joined our family I fell in love with canines.

After my trip, I became pretty obsessed with wolves and, as my teachers can attest, I made every school project wolf-related. I read about them, wrote about them, drew them and painted them - and learned a lot about them in the process."

Why should we help wolves? Why should we speak up for them?

As humans, many of us have a deeply-rooted passion for helping or wanting to help. This could be helping rescue animals. It could be helping a family member, friend, child, or stranger. It could be helping protect wild and endangered animals. It could be helping protect wild and endangered plants. It could be preventing a bad development or building project in your community. It could be helping protect wild spaces. It could be any cause or policy that we feel passionate about supporting - or opposing, in some cases.

"Wolves are also a lot like us - they are social, intelligent, and family-oriented. They are ecologically important as well. Wolves are endlessly fascinating to me... I speak up for wolves because I feel that wolves are one of the most misunderstood and polarizing species on the planet. So many people, including policymakers, still believe that wolves are a significant danger to people, and that belief impacts how the government manages wolves."

Here's something really cool: There are lots of other kids out there that care just as much as you do!

We know exactly what it feels like to care for something so much, to appreciate it so greatly, that when we consider what life would be like without it, it can be heartbreaking and even infuriating. Let's say a species of wild animal you've cared about since you were really young, since you first saw its tracks on the trail you followed, is no longer protected. How would you feel? What would you do about it?

That 'DO' part is action – an act of will or something done. However, sometimes more important is recognizing why we feel the way we do about the things we care about most. That emotional connection, on whatever level it may be, helps give us the motivation, energy, and nudge to take action.

"Specifically, the first time that I directly testified on behalf of wolves was when the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission was considering adopting the state's Wolf Conservation and Management Plan as wolves began to return to the state. I had written a speech, intending to read it aloud to the Commission, but when I got to the meeting and saw all of the people I lost my nerve and decided to just submit written comments when they called my name. However, as I heard the testimony of the other people, I felt that I had to speak up. So much of what people were saying was based on myth - one too many people said that they were worried about letting their kids wait for the bus if wolves were around. So when they called my name, I gave my speech to the whole room, and I was glad that I did something to try to counteract the abundant misinformation about wolves."

What does that word activist or activism mean anyway?

"...I try to be as involved as I can in the political process concerning wolves. The way I see it, if I haven't done my part as a member of the public to participate in the political process, then I should not complain about the outcome. We live in a democracy and we have a great opportunity to help shape public policy. We have the responsibility to take advantage of that opportunity to help wolves and wildlife when we can."

One definition states that activism is a doctrine or practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue. An activist is the individual responsible for seeing to it that an action takes place in support of or in opposition to a controversial issue. An advocate is also an individual who argues for or supports a cause of policy and may work for the actual cause or group. **YOU ARE AN ACTIVIST, AN ADVOCATE, AND AN AMBASSADOR!**

I'm a kid. What can I offer? What can I do to help?

"As a young person, I felt that I offered a unique perspective to the debate, and perhaps made an even greater impact than the adults in the room because of my age. It is going to be scary and it's possible you will encounter some angry people; wolves provoke a lot of emotions. The important thing is to not think about yourself. Instead, think about the wolves and what a difference you're making for them by putting the time and energy into making your voice heard. Also, remember that the people who disagree with you are people too, and they deserve your respect. It's always important to try to understand another person's point of view, even if it's different from yours. Try to figure out what you have in common and how you can work together."

Everything You Do Matters

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has. "
- Margaret Mead

You don't have to be an award-winning author, public speaker, or have a PhD in wildlife science, but it's helpful to know as much as you can and to ask questions. The more you know, the more confidence you'll have to speak for what you care about. Here's a sample statement that Story used for her first testimony at the Washington Fish & Wildlife Commission hearing in support of the adoption of the Washington Wolf Conservation and Management Plan. She wrote this and testified

when she was just 12 years old:

"Members of the Commission:

"My name is...When I saw my first tiny speck of a wild wolf in a telescope that was almost as big as me, I was six years old. Ever since that day, wolves have intrigued me and sparked my imagination. Since then, I have painted them, written about them, and studied them extensively. I have watched them in the wild on numerous occasions. I hope to, one day, make a career out of studying wolves and also coming up with ways to prevent livestock/wolf interaction. It would be wonderful if I could make that career happen right here in Washington state. It saddens me to see that such resentment is fueled toward wolves. Dogs, our beloved companions and workers, are genetically more than 99% wolf, and dogs kill more livestock nationwide than wolves do.

"I want to represent young people in saying that I believe it is very important that we keep wolves in Washington for my generation; my generation is going to have to live with – or without – whatever your generation does to the world. My personal opinion is that the Wolf Management and Conservation Plan that we are all here today to discuss is not perfect for any party, but I am here to support it because it seems to be reasonable.

"So I ask you to please adopt this Wolf Recovery plan. Thank you for your time."

Testifying at a public hearing is a great way to be an effective advocate for wildlife. These provide opportunities for people to engage with legislators, commissioners and other government officials. Public speaking can be a nerve-wracking experience, but despite your nervousness, remember how important it is for decision-makers to hear from people who care about wildlife and the environment. Your testimony makes a difference and here's why:

- Verbal testimony has an emotional impact on elected officials.
- News reporters frequently cover hearings, so you have a chance to convey your message to a broader audience.
- Making the time and effort to testify sends an important message to the agency and the public about your commitment and attention to the issue.
- Agencies are always under pressure and appreciate the support to do the right thing.

It All Starts Somewhere

**“Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.”
- Arthur Ashe**

Such great words from Arthur Ashe. Start where you are - maybe it started with a childhood experience like Story's, or maybe you've just learned about endangered wildlife species. Wherever you are right now is a perfect start. Don't let the things you don't know discourage you. Find that passion and let it guide your next steps. Telling just one person wolves need their help is raising awareness one more person at a time and these small steps will create a movement over time. A great resource that Story created is a Facebook, Twitter and Instagram page. Check it out and see what great things kids are doing for wolves.

Kids4Wolves -- @Kids4Wolves – kids4wolves.blogspot.com

We couldn't have said it better than Story herself:

“Educate yourself, educate others and get involved.”