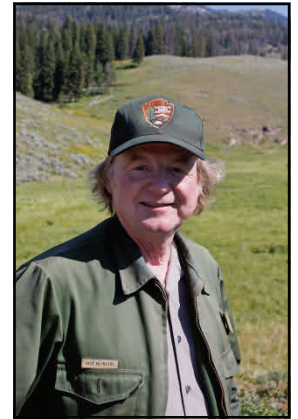




Notes *from the Field*

April 2013



Dear Yellowstone Wolf Project Donors,

On December 6, 2012, an iconic and famous wolf was legally shot in Wyoming's wolf hunting Zone 2, adjacent to the eastern border of Yellowstone National Park. She was the alpha female of Yellowstone's Lamar Canyon Pack and had been seen by tens of thousands of Park visitors over the years. Her death was reported in *The New York Times* and other papers and news outlets throughout the world.

I knew this female wolf well. I had watched her most of her life and knew many of her ancestors. Informally called the 06 Female, due to her birth in 2006, she was later radio collared and given the identification number 832F. Her great-grandparents had been captured in Alberta in January 1995 as part of Yellowstone's Wolf Reintroduction Program and were released in the Park two months later.

Her great-grandmother, wolf 9, had eight pups that spring and one of her sons, legendary wolf 21, later became the alpha male of the Druid Peak Pack. One of 21's daughters eventually became the alpha female of the Agate Creek Pack and gave birth to the 06 Female in 2006.



Wolf 832F (aka. '06) of the Lamar Canyon Pack, in the fall of 2012. *photo Doug McLaughlin*

She left her family as a young adult and lived a colorful and independent life for the next few years. She became a master elk hunter, one of the best in Yellowstone, and was famous for killing elk by herself. In addition, 06 had scores of suitors over the years. During one mating season she bred with five different males. She left each of those males, however, and continued to live independently sometimes in temporary association with a few other wolves, sometimes as a lone wolf.

When she was nearly four years old, in early 2010, 06 finally settled down. She ran into two yearling brothers who had just dispersed from their pack. They were later collared and given the numbers 754 and 755. At the time that 06 met the two brothers, they had already started a partnership with seven sisters who controlled a high quality territory. Their father, the pack's alpha male, had recently left the group and the sisters needed new males. Despite the brothers being in such favorable circumstances, 06 managed to lure them away from the other females and they joined her in establishing a new pack. That event said a lot about 06. The brothers judged her to be more valuable than seven females.

Being only yearlings, the two brothers had not bred while 06 had more experience. Perhaps due to the significant difference in their ages and experience levels, the brothers, with 755 as

the alpha male, were willing to let 06 be the undisputed leader of the new group they formed: the Lamar Canyon Pack.

Both brothers bred with 06 a month later. She discovered an old wolf den near Slough Creek and prepared it for her pups. The site was centrally located in an area with enough prey to support her family. But it had one disadvantage: grizzlies were very common in the region. In mid-April, 06 had four gray pups in that den: two males and two females. Since the opening to the den was visible from the road, we often saw 06 nursing the pups and carrying them back into the den when they strayed too far away.



YPF photo, Matt Ludin

Fiercely protective of her pups, 06 frequently had to deal with grizzlies that approached her den. She would run at a bear, get behind it, bite the rear end, then run off in the opposite direction of her pups. The grizzly would chase her, but could not match her speed or agility. When the bear stopped, 06 would run back, bite it again on the hind quarters and draw it further away. In one case she spent twelve hours decoying a grizzly away from her pups before she felt it was lured a safe distance away and only then returned to the den. That fall, when the pups were old enough to travel, she led her pack a few miles to the east and resettled her family in Lamar Valley. That had been the territory of her ancestors, the Druid Peak Pack, but the Druids had recently fallen apart due to the loss of their alphas, attacks by rival packs and severe cases of mange.

In early October (2010), I spotted 06 and 755 apart from the other Lamar wolves. They were on a new carcass, but it was hard to determine what it was. As 06 began to pluck fur from the animal I saw claws and realized that it was a grizzly cub! People on the scene told me that they had seen the two wolves surround the bear. Then 06 attacked and killed it. Soon 754 joined the alphas, but he and 755 were not allowed to feed on the cub. Whenever they approached, 06 would snarl and lunge at them. She later carried off the remains in her jaws and brought it to her nearby pups. After all the times she felt that grizzlies had threatened her pups at the den site, it was understandable that 06 would kill a cub that had somehow wandered away from its mother.

After the incident with the grizzly, in late 2010, 06 found the old Druid den, the one her grandmother, wolf 42, had given birth to her mother back in 2001. After investigating the den, 06 cleaned it out and prepared it for her second litter. She returned to the site in April of 2011 and had five pups there.



820, the daughter of 06/755, in March 2013.
photo Doug McLaughlin

That year I saw her make two solo kills. In late March, pregnant 06 spotted a lone nine month old elk calf. She ran at the calf and it charged forward at her. After deftly dodging the charge, 06 stood face to face with the calf. It ran at her again and kicked forward, then kicked down at her. She easily stepped aside and avoided the kicks, then charged at the calf, leaped up, and grabbed it by the throat. The wolf, using her great strength, wrestled the calf off its feet and onto the ground, while maintaining her grip on its throat. It was dead when she released that grip four minutes later.

In November 2011 I saw her and the other pack members near the Lamar River. A five month old elk calf was standing in the water. The pack must have chased it there. About 15 meters from the calf, stood 06 at the edge of the river. She paced back and forth on the shore and seemed to be trying to figure out how to get to the calf. The two brothers, 754 and 755, were bedded east of the calf and appeared to be unmotivated to help 06 make a kill. Three of the pack's yearlings and three of their pups were also nearby.

I then heard a splashing sound. I looked back at the river and saw that 06 had run into the water and was attached to the throat of the calf. The calf soon collapsed into the river. The wolf continued to hold on to its throat. The calf kicked a bit, then its movement stopped.

The prowess that 06 had as a hunter and as a protector of her pups was matched by her ability to deal with rival wolf packs. In the spring of 2012, 06 had her third litter, of four pups, at the old Druid den. At that time, her territory had been invaded by the Mollie's Pack, a much larger group of wolves, and at times the rival wolves were seen within a few miles of her den.



Years before, the ancestors of the Mollie's had controlled Lamar Valley, but they were eventually defeated by 06's ancestors, the Druid wolves, and driven out of Lamar. They settled into a new territory 25 miles to the south. In late 2011, the 19 member Mollie's Pack returned to the Lamar Valley and nearby areas. Outnumbering all of the local packs, they killed several members of the Agate Creek and Blacktail packs. In early

06 (left) and 754 lock in on some activity nearby, spring 2012. photo Doug McLaughlin

February they attacked one of 06's pups, then left it to chase other members of her pack. The pup survived and later reunited with the other Lamar wolves.

On April 25, about five days after giving birth, I saw 16 adult wolves from Mollie's Pack run into the dense forest where 06's den was located. For a few minutes all was quiet. Suddenly, 17 wolves ran out of the trees. Out in front was 06, running for her life, with all 16 of the rival wolves right behind her. Hindered by giving birth to four pups a few days previously, she was rapidly losing ground.

Her situation was dire; she had made the tactical mistake of running on a route that led to the top of a steep cliff. In a few moments she would be forced to stop and turn to face her pursuers. Outnumbering her 16 to one, they would easily kill her. Her helpless newborn pups would then also die, due to direct attack by the Mollie's wolves or starvation.

With the 16 wolves now just a few feet behind her, I was certain that she only had a few more moments of life left. But I was wrong. I had greatly underestimated her ability to survive. There was a small gully down the face of that cliff. With deft balance and agility, 06 raced down it to the Park road, crossed it, then defiantly turned back to look at the Mollie's wolves, who were trying to comprehend what had just happened.



Although 06 was safe, the threat to her family was still very much there: the other wolves were between her and the four pups. All the Mollie's wolves had to do was turn around, follow her scent trail back to the den, and kill her pups.

At that moment one of 06's adult daughters appeared close to the Mollie's wolves. The daughter, born in that first litter of 2010, was now two years old and had been well trained by her mother. She stood in plain sight of the rival pack. The Mollie's wolves immediately spotted her and charged. The daughter ran off to the east, a direction that brought the enemy further away from the pups. Being the fastest member of her pack and knowing every hill and gully in the den area, she easily got away.

The Mollie's wolves at that point seemed

totally disorganized. After running back and forth a few times, they all crossed the Park road, swam the Lamar River, left the territory and never came back to 06's den again.

As soon as the rival wolves were gone, 06 returned to the den. Several weeks later, we saw that all four of her pups had survived the dramatic events and were in perfect condition.

Three months after the chase, in mid-July 2012, I spotted 06, 754, 755, and three other pack members near a yearling bull elk in the Lamar River. Earlier, 06 and 754 had chased the bull into the river, then 755 and the other three wolves joined them.

The bull was standing in deep water with a fast current. The alphas, 06 and 755, both went in the river and swam against the current toward the bull. He stood his ground in the middle of the river as the two wolves struggled against the fast moving water. When they finally got close to him, the bull bounded past them into deeper water. The wolves swam toward him, but the bull easily rushed past them and returned to his original position. The bull could bound through the deep water faster than the two wolves could swim.

The alphas made repeated attempts to get the bull, but each time he slipped away unharmed. After twenty eight minutes of exhausting swimming, the two wolves came out of the river, joined the other pack members and rested. The bull stayed in place in the water.

Alpha male 755 had been with 06 for two and a half years at that time and it now seemed that he had likely learned to be a much better hunter by watching and imitating her. In this attack he had matched her determination and persistence in an impressive manner. 754 was another story. He was bigger than his brother, and likely stronger, but was content to let the alphas do all the work. 754 had watched the attack from the shore, went into the river once, and came back out right away without any serious effort to get the bull.

The alphas rested for forty eight minutes, then 06 plunged back into the river. She bounded through the water at the bull and he rushed past her down stream. Immediately, 06 went after him again. At that point, 755 entered the river and both wolves swam at the bull, but he ran through the water past the alphas.

The bull now seemed tired. He had been standing in the cold water for hours and was not moving with the speed and vigor he had displayed during the earlier bouts with the alphas.

Climbing out of the river, 06 went up on the bank to rest. However, 755 kept at it and bounded through the water at the bull. Once again the bull started to run past the wolf, but 755 managed to bite his hind quarters as he went by. The wolf hung on, then lost his grip as the bull reached deeper water. I saw 06 running through the water at that point. She grabbed the bull on his left side.

Catching up with the bull, 755 bit into his shoulder. Then 06 let go and sunk her teeth into the side of the elk's neck. Together, the wolves wrestled the bull down into the water. In the struggle, 06 lost her grip and the bull was about to escape. All this time, the wolves had been forced to fight the bull as they swam beside him while he had solid footing on the bottom of the river. The lack of leverage put the wolves at a serious disadvantage.

At that moment big 754, who had been watching the attack from the river bank, jumped in the water, swam to the bull and got a solid bite on his throat. His intervention was the turning point of the attack. The other three adult wolves followed 754's example. They dove into the river and all six pack members bit into the bull as they swam beside him. The combined force of the six was enough to force the bull into shallow water, where they finished him off.



755 (left) and 06 creek side in December 2011. photo Doug McLaughlin

The actions of 754 at the very end of the attack showed that like his brother, he had learned to be a better hunter by watching 06. He copied her technique of making the killing bite on the throat and applied it perfectly. It was still true that 06 and 755 had done most of the work, but 754 proved his value to the pack when the alphas needed extra help the most. Using his size and strength, 754 had bitten the throat of the elk and held on until he was dead.

The next month, in early August 2012 eight of the nine adult Lamar wolves, including 06, 754, and 755, were heading toward a site where a bison had died of natural causes a few days earlier. The other Lamar adult was back with the four pups at the den. As the eight Lamars approached the carcass, they spotted five other wolves at the carcass. I knew that the smaller group was a new pack that consisted of three females from Mollie's Pack and two Blacktail Pack males.

The Lamars ran at the rival pack with raised tails. When the other wolves spotted them they split up and ran off in different directions. The Lamars went after one of the black females in the group. She was 822, a young Mollie's adult, who had been with her original pack when they had attacked one of 06's pups the previous February and had also been part of the raiding party that invaded 06's den in April and chased her to the cliff.

At top speed, 822 ran north, crossed the Park road, and raced up a steep slope. Seven of the eight Lamar wolves stayed on her route as they pursued her. But 755 split off, ran along the Park road to where the slope was less steep and headed up it. He intercepted 822, grabbed her by the back, pulled her down, and attacked her.

Two yearlings ran in and joined the attack. Then 06 arrived and bit 822 on the back of the neck. The other Lamars arrived with 754 bringing in the rear. He grabbed 822 and violently shook his head back and forth. All eight Lamar wolves bit 822 at will.

Some of the other members of 822's pack howled and that caused most of the Lamar wolves to run off toward them. Soon 06 was the only wolf still attacking 822. After a series of fierce bites, she paused, looked toward the others in her pack going back after the remaining rival wolves, then left the blood drenched 822 and ran after them.

I watched 822 after 06 departed and later saw her stand up, take a few steps, then collapse. Within an hour, she was dead from blood loss and shock. Earlier in the year, 06 and her family had managed to avoid many potential confrontations with the larger Mollie's Pack and had survived two direct attacks. Now with the Mollie's wolves split up and divided, 06 and her family seized the moment to mount a counteroffensive, and killed a wolf who had been part of those attacks.



Rick helps Park visitors understand wolves in the field.
(2013)

The Lamar wolves, under the leadership of 06, were once again in control of their territory, and the Mollie's wolves and the newly formed pack left them alone. The pack was exceptionally well organized and extremely well functioning. It was led by the most competent wolf in the region and she had repeatedly demonstrated her hunting and survival skills in front of her family members. They, in turn, had learned many lessons from her. Both of her males, 754 and 755, had proven themselves as hunters and as defenders of the pack, as had her six adult daughters.

Her four pups were healthy and strong and soon started traveling full time with the nine adults. In November 2012, the 13 member Lamar Canyon Pack went east from the center of their territory and crossed the Yellowstone National Park border. On November 11th four and a half year old 754 was legally shot in Wyoming. He was taken in an area that had a quota of eight wolves, big 754 was the seventh wolf shot.

The pack briefly returned to Lamar Valley, then went back to that area, possibly to search for 754. On December 6th, six and a half year old 06 was shot and killed close to where 754 had died. Since she was the eighth wolf taken in that zone, the area was closed to further wolf hunting. The rest of her family would be safe from legal hunting in that part of Wyoming.

Alpha male 755 and his ten sons and daughters later returned to Lamar Valley. His two and a half year old daughter, wolf 776, was now behaving as the pack's alpha female. But the pack soon went back to the area where 06 and 754 had been killed, likely to search for them. We had no way to know if the Lamar wolves fully understood that their two pack mates were dead and their bodies removed from the areas by the hunters..

In late January 2013, 755 came back to Lamar Valley by himself, traveled out of his territory to the west and approached other wolf packs. Since all of the adult females in his pack were his own daughters, he was probably looking for a new mate.

Yellowstone Wolf Project personnel had observed two other cases where an alpha female had died and the alpha male, due to having no unrelated females to breed, left the pack to seek out a new mate. That would be a daunting task for a lone middle aged male that has to contend with rival packs and rival males who would resent his intrusion into their territories and likely try to kill him. In both of those previous cases, the former alpha males died in the attempt to start over.

Right now, it looks like 755 has beaten the odds against him. In early April we saw him with a young gray female who is very affectionate and playful with him.

755 on left seen with a new female last week, April 2013.



Photo: Bobby Nail

They seem to operate well together as a team and killed a bull elk on the second day they were together.

During the time that 755 was back in the Park, we had reports that the rest of the Lamar wolves, still living outside the Park to the east, had a new male, a big gray, that was courting 776 and the other adult females.

On March 12, those wolves traveled to Lamar Valley and visited 06's den site. The group included two big gray males from the Hoodoo Pack, a group based east of the Park, and up to nine of the younger Lamar Canyon wolves, including 776. After two weeks, the Lamar wolves went back to the east. We do not know if they will den there or once again return to their mother's den.

The 06 Female was an extraordinary wolf, easily the most famous in Yellowstone. She had defiantly prevailed against everything that the natural world had thrown at her. Countless Park visitors had seen her during her early independent years and even more watched her start her own pack and raise her three litters of pups. The story of her death was reported world-wide and had a great emotional impact on countless people.

By now, 776 and several of her adult daughters are almost certainly pregnant, and this spring pups will arrive that will be 06's grandchildren. She trained those daughters well and they will pass on that training to their pups. Her legacy lives on in her sons and daughters and will live on for many generations to come.

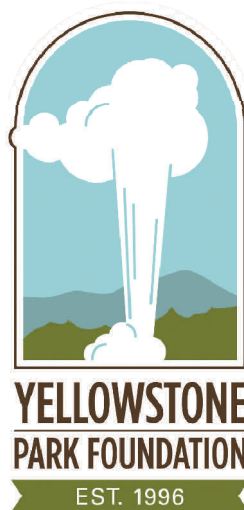
**Thank you for your support of
the Wolf Education Program
in Yellowstone. See you in
the Park!**

Warm Regards,

Rick McIntyre

Rick

P.S. For 18 years, I have tried to show the Yellowstone wolves to as many people as possible. Seeing wolves living out their lives in the wild gives those people an understanding, appreciation, and empathy for the wolf that hopefully will stay with them for the rest of their lives. During those same 18 years, I have done thousands of talks (over 250 in the last 15 months) on wolves to Park visitors and school groups. Hearing the true stories of the Yellowstone wolves also has the power to change lives. I will continue to show wolves to people and will continue to tell their stories, especially the story of 06, 754, and 755.



Thank you to donors like you, who support the Yellowstone Wolf Project - because of you the Yellowstone Park Foundation is able to fund programs and projects that protect, preserve & enhance Yellowstone National Park.

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