

# "The Carnivore Way" could be key to large predator conservation

May 2 2014, by Nick Houtman

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North America's mountainous backbone, stretching from Mexico to Alaska, could serve as a model for balancing the needs of large predators and people, an Oregon State University biologist suggests in a new book.

In "The Carnivore Way: Coexisting with and Conserving North America's Predators," published May 1 by Island Press, Cristina Eisenberg describes the ongoing efforts of humans to coexist with wolves, cougars, wolverines and other species in a largely wild but developing landscape.

Eisenberg, who grew up in a hunting and ranching family in northern Mexico, is an instructor in the Oregon State College of Forestry, a Smithsonian research associate and an Earthwatch scientist. She obtained her doctorate and completed two post-doctoral fellowships at Oregon State.

From her home in northwestern Montana, where grizzlies and wolves outnumber people, she traveled more than 13,000 miles – from the Arctic to northern Mexico – to trace corridors that link carnivores with the habitats they need to thrive. She met with scientists who studied these animals and with officials who found ways to conserve grizzlies, wolves, wolverines and other species. She talked with conservationists who hiked the trails and documented challenges to predators and their prey.

"Large carnivore conservation is ultimately about people," Eisenberg

wrote. "Science and environmental law can help us learn to share landscapes with fierce creatures, but ultimately coexistence has to do with our human hearts."

For Eisenberg, it also has much to do with ecosystems. Wildlife scientists have documented the crucial role that large carnivores play in shaping forests and rangelands, she said.

"When you're out there on the ground and a wolf shows up or a cougar shows up and starts doing what they do, you have these 'aha' moments," Eisenberg said. "What I'm doing in 'The Carnivore Way' is providing a lot of stories and examples. There's a massive amount of science in the book, but in the end, it's sharing those 'aha' moments that help people connect with these animals."

In a world in which ecosystems are reeling from climate change and other human influences, she said, wolves and other carnivores can restore resilience that benefits the resources that people depend on. By maintaining a role for carnivores, ecosystems are more likely to rebound in the face of drought, fire and other disturbances linked to a changing climate.

"Scientists studying ecosystems worldwide have found that carnivores indirectly improve the health and vigor of plant communities by reducing the density of their prey and in some cases by changing prey behavior," said Eisenberg. "In many places in North America, for example, by preying on elk, wolves reduce the browsing pressure that elk place on plants. This enables trees and shrubs to grow to maturity and provide habitat for many other species, such as songbirds."

Eisenberg's research on the effects of predators on ecosystems has been supported by Parks Canada and the High Lonesome Ranch, which occupies 400 square miles in western Colorado. She and Oregon State co-

investigator David Hibbs recently obtained Earthwatch Institute funding that will support their research on wolves, elk, and fire for several years. Articles featuring her research have appeared in *National Geographic*, *The New York Times*, *High Country News* and other outlets.

In 2010, Island Press published her previous book, "The Wolf's Tooth," which describes the ecological roles of large carnivores. She is writing a book on [climate change](#), "Taking the Heat: Wildlife, Food Webs, and Extinction in a Warming World," also for Island Press.

Provided by Oregon State University

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