



## The Oregonian

### Wolf views ignite cultural spat

Portland students rap, rhyme and speak out, drawing sharp criticism from rural interests, and a cultural debate ensues

Wednesday, March 16, 2005

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The Oregonian

It was the rap heard 'round Oregon.

Students from Portland's Sunnyside Environmental School gave their opinions on a state wolf plan at a February hearing. Some did it in unconventional ways: Two rapped along with boom-box music, three read a poem, and others made more direct statements.

They talked of ranchers killing wolves and said the predators deserve to come back to Oregon.

In return they got a lesson in the politics of wolves in the West. State Republican lawmakers chastised their "one-sided . . . street theater" in a letter to the school superintendent, and a pro-agriculture Web site called their education "severely deficient."

If the reaction underscores the divide between Eastern and Western Oregon, both sides hope the students will learn from the episode. An Eastern Oregon county judge will speak this week at the school about cultural differences within the state.

The students say they welcome that, but they are puzzled by all the fuss. They said they just wanted to make a point.

"I knew people really felt strongly," said Matthew Marquette, 13, a seventh-grader. "We tried to speak strongly about what we felt."

Students from the K-8 public school were studying how development of the American West affected wildlife. Part of their assignment was to share their opinions with others. Some submitted written comments on a state wolf conservation plan, and others testified in person on Feb. 10 at a crowded public hearing.

"They've already learned both sides," said their teacher, Jan Zuckerman. "They were there to give their point of view just like other people gave their points of view."

But the students got a chilly reception from Eastern Oregon residents who had driven for hours to the meeting in Troutdale with the goal of describing the havoc wolves would wreak on ranching culture. Many waited in cold wind outside the cramped meeting hall while the students had their say.

"Their view was one-sided and most likely was the view of the teacher," said Elaine Smith, a Prairie City rancher. "It's those of us in Eastern Oregon who are going to be impacted by this. People in Portland aren't going to be impacted by this."

She recounted the proceedings to state Sen. Ted Ferrioli, R-John Day. Ferrioli and Sen. Doug Whitsett, R-Salem, fired off a letter to Portland schools Superintendent Vicki Phillips suggesting the students "may have

been exposed more to propoganda than education."

The students "ridiculed, discounted and denigrated" the concerns of Eastern Oregon farmers and ranchers, they wrote. "Urban Oregonians should not teach their children to celebrate the distress of their fellow citizens," they said.

### **"Issues of fairness"**

The senators asked Phillips to "discuss the issues of fairness and balance with the teachers, staff and students."

Sharon Beck, an Eastern Oregon rancher and co-chairwoman of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association Wolf Task Force, also cited in a column at [www.sierratimes.com](http://www.sierratimes.com) the "squirming members of the Sunshine (sic) Environmental School." The Web site describes itself as "An Internet Publication for Real Americans."

Beck said an Eastern Oregon county commissioner "expressed sadness at the performance, not only for the scorn for the families of their rural counterparts that the children demonstrated but for their obvious innocence of the fact that their education is severely deficient and their social views are being intentionally skewed."

The fallout led Sunnyside Principal Sarah Taylor and the school district to review the teacher's curriculum. They found it balanced, Taylor said. The district hasn't responded to the senators' letter.

Oregon's wolf conservation plan calls for at least eight pairs of wolves across the state, but it would let ranchers shoot those that go after livestock. However, a federal court ruling banning the killing of wolves in Oregon has complicated the state's approach.

### **Students' research**

Jenna Rolle, 12, said her class spent months researching all sides of the wolf issue, and had engaged in class discussions and debates. The sixth-grader said students read more about ranchers than any other group affected by wolves.

Some students said at the hearing that wolves should be subject to being killed if they attack livestock; others said they should be fully protected.

Donna Nolan, 14, read a passage describing a wolf hiding in its den, wanting only food to eat and space to live.

She originally believed wolves shouldn't be killed, she said. But the eighth-grader changed her mind after listening to ranchers at the hearing.

"What they had to say really got to me," she said. "I realized it's their way of life, it's how they make a living."

The students know it's an emotional issue. Ferrioli said he'd be satisfied if the school would invite students from John Day to speak from their perspective about wolves.

As he listened to the students at the hearing, Grant County Judge Dennis Reynolds handed his business card to a Sunnyside student's parent. He offered another perspective. Two days later, he got an invitation to speak at the school, which he will do Friday.

"I figured I can either be like everyone else and complain, or I can do something," he said. "My whole thrust is going to be the importance of understanding the difference between the way of life in Eastern and Western Oregon."

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