Tape 21 Martin Davis (at his ranch)

John- The project is connected to the American Democracy Project. We have middle and high school teachers, as well as some science students, looking at how science and economics affect issues, but even more than that how advocacy groups affect the democratic process or conflict resolution. We need to understand the issues; we also want to understand how people engage the issues.

(Settle into sitting under shad trees on farm. Snow-tipped mountains in the distance).

(1:31) Martin- Maybe I’ll start by explaining what it is that we do. We are, along with the majority of cattle producers in this neck of the woods, we are cow-calf producers. We’re the ones that supply the stock to the Midwest feed lots for fattening and then ultimately into slaughter. A lot of the mountain west is where these calves come from. We’re called cow-calf producers. We keep the momma cow for years. She has one calf a year for us. Our calves are born early spring. We start calving the cows about mid February and we calve through April. At that time of the year we’re feeding the cows, just below the ditch is our hay ground. We have to put up a lot of hay to get out cattle through. We feed pretty much through May then the cattle go into the higher country. As a rule of (2:41) thumb if you look up and down they valley, anything that has grain is probably somebody’s private property where they harvest the grass with cattle. It’s untillable ground of course because it’s so steep, rocky, whatever, Grass harvested by cattle, that’s how we harvest grass. Calves are born early spring. They go to the mountains on their momma, well with the grass and momma’s milk they hopefully get to be around 600 pounds when we market the (3:22) cattle, the calves. That is somewhere around mid to later October. Then as the calves are sold off the cow, they board a truck and head somewhere, probably the Midwest Corn Belt. That’s where they’re ultimately fattened, put another year on them there and hopefully double their weight until they go into slaughter from there. That’s what we do is produce pounds of beef. We get that one paycheck a year in the fall. Sometimes it’s pretty tough to budget diesel fuel and gasoline, and we all know what’s happening to that.

(4:17) I guess I’ll kind of talk a little bit about the wolves. The first problem we had with them was in ’99, the spring of ’99. We went up to check the grass; it was ready to take the cows up there. You want the grass grown up well enough so it stays ahead of the cows, not the other way around and the cows staying ahead of the grass. We decided it was probably time we could go to the mountains with the cows. My dad and my nephew were with me and my nephew said, “hey, I saw something small and black run into the brush down there,” I don’t know what it might have been. He said maybe it was a cub bear. (4:59) and I said well run in there and run him out and let’s see what it is. Being an obedient nephew (laughter) he went in there and out came 7 adult wolves and 6 pups. They had picked that patch of mountain- we own a little basin with a creek running through it and in the bottom of the basin is a patch of willow aspens and they picked that spot as a rendevous area. I don’t know if you know what a rendevous area is, but it’s the spot the pack chooses to raise the pups. Apparently they had just moved in there, just that day or the day before. A long story short, I called a biologist (5:47) in the park. He made some phone calls. Fish and Wildlife Service, all kinds of folks showed up. With the human presence the wolves ultimately were pushed over the ridge but it was still only about a 5 minute hike and the wolves would be back. That was the start of our problems. Like I said, it’s been all of these years, all different things have happened though that time. As far as losing a lot of livestock, we have not lost a huge amount. But the thing most people don’t realize is weight loss is even more prevalent than losing the livestock. When we thought (6:38) our cows have learned, they’ve been chased enough- in that basin I’ve talked about, it’s flat bottomed, it’s a half mile across the bottom of it. They’ve learned that when the wolves show up they run down and get in a tight group. I think it’s the wildness that’s still back there in their heritage like what the musk oxen and what not do and they got in a tight group and they wait the wolves out. We go up there and we find rings of like they were fenced in, the manure about that deep (holds hands several inches apart) and the vegetation trod down, just out in the middle of nowhere so we’ve actually witnessed the wolves holding them in places like that (7:30) through the years. Then the wolves finally give up and leave or whatever they do and the cattle go back to grazing. Meanwhile they weren’t out; those calves weren’t getting the feed they needed to gain weight. That first year we ran into that problem, we had calves sold under contract to weigh 600 pounds. We brought them down out of the hills, we put them on the scale and they were a hundred pounds light across the board. I said there’s something wrong. We ran the calves off, we rebalanced the scale ran them on again. No they were a hundred pounds light. That was a real blow to us.

(8:13) From that time on, we’ve had some years with that same problem, some years not. Another thing that we’ve run across is added stress on the cows, not coming into estrus when they should, in other words getting bred later, in other words a smaller calf come fall. All of those things come in to play. I’ve had people say, why do you complain? If you’ve had a calf killed you get reimbursed for it. Very seldom does that happen. Defenders of wildlife has had reimbursement, that’s kind of the wrong word, what do they call it? Compensation program. I have to hand it to them. They’re the conservation group that gives something back. (9:09) They say we want the wolves; we’re willing to pay for what the wolves do. However, we have to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that a wolf did that before the compensation comes about. That’s the real hard part. Most of the time we find just leg bone or a patch of hide and that’s it. Of course, if we…I had a calf killed up here in this pasture just over these green hills and we took those cattle up there on Saturday afternoon. On Sunday my brother went up there on a horseback ride and he found the calf laying there. He was chewed from his ears to his tail. Big ‘ole wolf tracks in the mud. (9:53) So we were certain what it was. However we have to call the Animal Control men and they’re the folks trained to tell the difference between a grizzly attack, a wolf attack, coyote, lion, all those predators kill differently of course and those guys are trained to tell the difference. He came up there, said yeah; no doubt a wolf did this. So I did get compensated for that one calf. My nephew stayed there with the calf while my brother came down to call him and whatnot and then we all went up. That night then, he went ahead and set traps at the calf hoping to (10:36) possibly catch the culprit. That night a black bear came in, finished the calf off, and messed the traps up. Point is there wasn’t enough left of the calf after one more night that we couldn’t have proved anything so we fund it the day we had to, to have gotten the compensation for.

About four falls ago, 3 falls ago, in the area up there, we graze on government allotments. That fall in September, 24 calves were lost, compensated for one. I think that’s on the outside. I don’t think it’s that common to have that many. I think it’s very safe to say that between 7 and 8, we get compensated for one in seven or eight calves. I think that the (11:32) defenders, if you pin them down they’ll say we’re paying for one in two or three. I think it’s more like one in seven or eight. There’s real problems with that compensation program too and I don’t know the answers. We’re out here trying to hammer out a living. I tell people it’s like – I told a girl one time, I ask her. She was trying to figure out how I was saying what I was. I asked her what her dad did and she said he owned a hardware store, I think in South Carolina somewhere and I said what if your dad was forced to leave his back door open at night at the hardware store and hope that (12:24) the thieves didn’t take too much over night? And the light went on; she finally understood what I was trying to say. That’s kind of in a ballpark, I don’t know if you just want to ask questions. Anything I can answer.

--You’ve got pasture up there. Do you have to truck them somewhere?

(Martin) We got a group of cows over here a few hundred yards and they are scheduled to go to the mountain pasture with them. We will trailer them in stock trailers. We have to go (13:13) about 20 miles is all. We use a corral that a neighbor lets us use and then we drive up into our mountain range.

--So they’re up there until October?

(Martin) Uh huh.

--How often do you check them?

(Martin) Interesting question. In times past we figured once a week to check on them, take them some salt, make sure they’re still in, you know those mountain fences aren’t grand. The elk, moose (13:42) tear the fence down so periodically you have to fix that fence of course. So once a week, we get into haying and get real busy it’s once every two weeks we go up there and check. That was in the old days. I call them the BW Days – Before Wolves Days. Now we feel like we’ve about got to check on them about every other day, just in case they’re getting harassed, you know, we need to know that. That drive up there is 20 miles with a horse trailer and then a ride in. There is a four wheel drive road that we can get clear in but it’s quite rough. The wear and tear on a pickup is tough. So that’s a half day at least, just to go check on them.

(14:27) How much do you use your horses to work with the cattle?

(14:30 Martin) Quite a lot. We do all of our cow work horseback. My brother and I to make ends meet around here we started a guide service. A lot of times we’ll combine taking a visiting, vacationing family with us on a ride and actually check the cows at the same time. Most of the rides take place right here, well, the hitching rack’s right out there that we take off from. So this pasture here gets checked quite often, more so than (points) because this is the two hour horseback ride we take here. As far as the horses, any kind of cow work we use horseback.

(15:21) Most anybody here in the valley who does irrigation it’s out of the rivers and the creeks. There are no irrigation wells here at all and that snow pack you see up there, that’s our irrigating water, waiting to come out. We don’t want it to come too fast of course, which is actually happening right now with it being so warm.

--Do you still take folks up to do hunting, guide?

Mm-hmm.

(15:54) I know last year you addressed it a little bit. How’s that going for you with the wolves?

(15:57 Martin) We started taking – we had the property up there with the old homestead on it, built in 1893, and so we started using that as a hunting camp back in 1976, since we had elk and we had the camp there. It became a real substantial part of our business to stay in business here. The wolf has really changed the population and the way the elk travel around up there. The late hunt, which was designed around trying to harvest the migratory elk coming out of Yellowstone, that’s virtually nonexistent anymore. There’s still a fair amount of elk that come out of the park, but the permits are like 100 permits now. Whereas six or seven years ago it was like 2,000 permits. Maybe not quite that many, but at least 1,500. That part is gone. The regular hunting season, which is the month of November and you might as well say, it’s got to the point, where our repeat hunting clients have said, hey guys when you start seeing more elk and less wolves, let us know, but for now I guess we’ll go elsewhere. If we’re full on hunters, if we have 30 hunters would be completely full. Our hunting season is five weeks long and (17:42) we like to take about six hunters a week so 30 hunters would be completely full. I don’t know if we’ve ever had it completely full, but if we got 20 hunters or so, we feel pretty good about that. There’s been some years, these last few years we’ve had three hunters or five hunters. Last season we didn’t do too bad, I think we had 12. Now this fall we have eight booked. It’s not good and I’m not necessarily saying these wolves killed off the elk, but they have certainly changed their habits, big time. Where all of a sudden we’re seeing more elk down here. Most of our hunting is up there (18:33) we permitted by the National Forest Service and those permits are up there. So down here, if we do hunt we have to stay on our private property, which is kind of small down here. So even though there’s a lot of elk down here we can’t down here much actually, unless they’re coming off the hill and coming down the hay meadows in the fall and they do that some. We feel like a lot of the elk that had been staying up there have been driven down the valley further, both sides of the river. Starting in ’76 we knew pretty much how an elk thought, but anymore it’s all different, it’s totally different.

(19:19 John) I’m an economist, not a wildlife person, so my assumptions may be really, really bad. My perception is that wolves are fairly territorial and that it’s kind of predictable how many wolves might inhabit one area, if that’s the case for the land that you have, now many wolves might that sustain? Then if there was real compensation, actual compensation, for your losses to those wolves what would that take? How many calves in a season would a wolf pack that your land could sustain take?

(20:14 Martin) That could be, I haven’t got the latest report from the park service, but at one time they were saying 1.8 elk per wolf per month in Yellowstone.

(John) Wow. That’s a lot.

(20:31 Martin) So we turn that around to cattle, they’d just put us out of business. That’s in Yellowstone and there’s a lot more wolves in Yellowstone than there is outside. We’ve had another pack here that’s raised pups, when they start raising pups and they’re rendezvousing with those pups.

(20:55 John) I guess if I was Nature Conservancy with really deep pockets, what would it cost to make you whole if I bought the right for the wolf pack to be on your land?

(21:06 Martin) Good question, good question. A person would have to just sit down and figure the time spent with added checking, weight loss, you know, all the stuff that I talked about.

(John) Could you get me within a factor of 10 of what your income was BW? If they wiped you out, there wouldn’t be any income.

(21:41 Martin) That’s just it. A couple of guys across the river have sheep, they’re older gentlemen about retirement age, past retirement age, and they’ve got little bunches of sheep over there. One guy had 30 sheep killed out of his 50. You know, he’s out of business. Really.

(21:59 John) He’s out of business if he doesn’t have an alternative revenue source, but if Nature Conservancy is paying him half what his income used to be, he’s still in business. Is there something that wolves would prefer to calves that you could stock as wolf feed? (Laughter). These are really naïve economist questions, not naturalist questions.

(22:26) Martin- I don’t quite know how to answer that because it’s not just a cow. We’ve got blood lines that we’re trying to keep up that this certain cow is out of that old cow we had 10 years ago and we have the records and to have that all just eaten up is…

(23:00) John- Part of what frustrates me is that everybody I talk to has a position from which they don’t want to consider budging. I’m searching for ways that might allow some, a number of things actually. The frustration for someone like myself seems it’s my way or I’m out of business, let the buffalo or the wolves roam free from here to Alaska. It just seems to me if a solution’s going to be found, either somebody gets decimated on one side or the other or you open up to some crazy ideas like an economist might have to bring in fodder animals, and really compensate and make the people who really want the wolves, pay for the wolves.

(23:56) Martin- I can see where you’re going with that alright. I had said way back when they were first here, it would have seemed to me that would have been real PR for the folks to step up and say we want the wolves here and we know it’s going to be a real headache for you Mr. Rancher, all the added service stuff, here’s $25,000 for the year for you to cope with that. I think there would have been numerous of us that would have said, “Wow! That’s going to help a lot!” It would have been great PR too, but when it was kind of just pushed down our throat.

(24:44) John- If it’s not pushed down your throat. If the Nature Conservancy comes to you and says we want to put our money where our mouth is and we want to negotiate this. We’re going to actually pay you up front so you can hire the extra people to do the extra patrols, doing whatever you need to do. Where would you start?

(24:59) Martin- $25,000. Right off the top of my head here.

John- How many calves a year do you see here?

Martin- About 100 head of cows, there’s some replacement heifers, so 80 calves, something like that, give or take.

(25:16) John- How many acres?

Martin- We have 1,280, but the thing is that there’s going to be a lot of folks that would say this is my private property and I don’t want a wolf on my private property.

(25:31) John- What if the Nature Conservancy is doing it and not the government, then you could say yes or no, right?

(25:36) Marin- True. But I’m telling you there’s going to be a lot of groups that say ‘no, I don’t want that thing on my property.’ I’m not quite that way, but there’s some of these old salty ranchers and they don’t want…

John- Sure. Of course, nobody likes change. It’s drastic.

Charlie- You may like it on your property, but what about your neighbor?

Martin- Exactly. That’s exactly the case. I’ve been speaking to a lot of different groups and whatnot, been on a few of these TV shows, and there’s been a few of our neighbors that say, ‘boy, why do you even say such things?’ ‘Tell them they ought to kill them all.’ There’s a big difference in somebody just across the fence, for sure.

(seen one in class, talk about the video they watched of him in class.)

(27:46) –As the crow flies how far are you from the park?

Martin- Right here we’re 50-plus miles. When you get up there to where our cows spend the summer, as a crow flies 12 to 15 miles from the park.

Brad- Wolf packs can go several miles, like 2-300 square miles for some wolf packs in Alaska. One of the things to address what you said about Nature Conservancy to pay on cattle, if wolves learn to prey on cattle and prey on cattle that’s a food source, they’ll keep hitting it. Taking wolves out that have learned that which is what they are trying to do in places now, that doesn’t allow it to be passed on as readily to all of the wolf population in the area. So it’s not as big a problem as if you just allowed it, potentially. That’s another side effect of doing something like you suggested.

(29:02) John- It would be easier to take a calf than an elk I assume.

-Brucellosis problem, I grew up on a really small farm, but I know there we used to break the animals up into groups, is it just the lack of area and fencing and stuff? It kind of seems as if you’re putting all of your eggs into one basket, to take an entire herd if one animal comes down with it. Does anybody break up their herds?

(29:46 Martin) Not necessarily. We’ve got ours right now in two different mountain pastures and then in the winter time they’re in separate pastures. Sooner or later they’re together at one time or another. That’s just the way it’s got to be.

--Would they take both of yours then?

(30:08 Martin) Yeah. If we had one that tested positive the whole herd would be gone.

--Both herds?

Yeah. Because they winter together. These are some younger cows, yearling heifers and younger cows we have in this pasture up here, but they’d all be taken.

--How is this brucellosis going to affect you?

(30:35 Martin) Not real sure yet. We do not sell breeding stock. The heifer calves and steer calves go for slaughter, that might not affect us too badly, however, what we worry about and the other ranchers in the area that these buyers from the Midwest will say, well you’re in the Yellowstone area, you have lost your brucellosis free status. Even though it doesn’t affect those steer calves, they’re probably not worth as much as they were last year. Pretty quick you’re getting less for the calves even though there’s nothing. They can use that as a bargaining chip and that’s what we’re concerned about.

(31:22 John) That’s an easy compensation thing. If people outside the zone are getting 50 cents more a pound than you are.

(31:32 Martin) Yeah. Right, that would be fairly easy, it’s true.

(Charlie) Has that happened at all in the recent past?

(Martin) Not that I’m aware of.

(Charlie) I was just thinking because of the closeness to Yellowstone whether there was an effect at all.

(31:49 Martin) Not that I know of, but I really don’t know. In Idaho a year ago where they had the problem I really don’t know if it affected their prices or not. I can’t answer that question.

(32:05 Charlie) Another aspect of being close to Yellowstone, we’ve been hearing some talk about a decision that might split the state relative to the brucellosis issue. Create kind of an inner circle around it. What’s your take on it? How is it going to affect you if it does come through?

(32:27 Martin) We feel that it would be terrible for us in this new little state, that would make our cattle worth nothing. Because then we really are targeted that we’re inside that imaginary, you’re in there. That’s why the producers in this area tried to be proactive and start herd plans and all of that to hopefully curb what did happen. We didn’t want to be separated from the rest of the state. Certainly it would be detrimental to the price we got for our stock.

--Do you think that will go through?

(33:24) I don’t know. Now that we have lost the status, I don’t understand why it would right now because the whole state’s gone anyhow now. I’m not sure. If they do get it cleaned up there’s a possibility that it might. It’s interesting to know that many of the state’s cattle producers don’t want it either, even though they’re living up by Great Falls or up towards Canada, they don’t want to see that happen either. You’d think if they were really concerned about their own cattle they would want to have us quarantined so to speak down here, but they aren’t.

(34:08 Brad) That’s got to make you feel good; they’re kind of taking a stand for everyone.

--How much competition is there between ranchers in this area as far as economics of everything and upper Montana also? Is there I can beat that rancher’s price or quality?

(Martin) Not so much.

--Do you have stock that goes unsold in the fall?

(34:42 Martin) No, no. You’re not really competing with your neighbor down the road. It’s all in the way you market your own cattle. If you want to load yours up and take them to the auction in Billings, you’ll get them all sold, sometimes you get a high market and sometimes you get a low market. Most all of us want to know what we’re getting before the calves leave and that means having a buyer come look at them and deciding on a price. Everyone’s cattle are different, quality is different and so just because the neighbor got a dime more it doesn’t mean that his are a lot better cattle. It just means the buyer likes his better whereas another buyer likes mine better. I don’t really think it is a competition factor.

--Do you have a lot of the same customers?

(35:42 Martin) Yeah. We’ve sold through the same guy for the last three years now. Some of the guys that he’s been buying from have been the last 10 years and that’s a good sign if a buyer keeps coming back for your calves. You know your calves are doing right for him back in Iowa.

--If you agree to a 600 pound weight and cows come in 100 pounds under, does that break a contract? Is he not any longer obligated to buy those at that weight, or does he pay you a lot less money for them?

(36:16 Martin) He grins a little bit. They’ve got a deal figured in selling those cattle on the side. If I tell him they’re going to weigh six and they come in weighing 625, they’ve got a 10-cent slide so that 25 pounds over they slide those pounds back 10 cents but on the other way when the calves come in lighter there is no such thing, so he pays us a lot less money if they’re lighter and he says he’s sorry to us.

--Can you agree not to sell at that price?

(36:59 Martin) If it’s in the contract, you’d be liable.

--How many years out do you have your contract? Just for the next season?

(Martin) Yeah. There’s a lot of calves that aren’t even contracted for this fall yet. I mean it happens almost at the time the calves coming out of the hills. You might not have a contract until two weeks before the calves go.

--Do you have a number of cattle on that contract as well?

(37:25 Martin) Correct, yeah. The weight, most of what we’re talking is the steer calves. The weight of the steer calves and X number of head. If there’s something else we didn’t get sold and then the cull cows, that’s the older cows that aren’t producing good enough or just plain aren’t having a calf anymore, and that kind of stuff, then those are culled and they just go to market.

(Charlie) Year to year changes of effects by wolves on your cattle. Have you been seeing consistent effects every year or have some years been what you thought were more detrimental years?

(39:11) Martin- Yes like last year the calves were pretty much normal weight, pretty nasty drought too. The calves were pretty much right there though. It was about three falls ago where they just went prrttt. Folks across the fence, it was another droughty year, they were down maybe a few pounds but we were really strong. The only thing that geography in our area up there where they dash down and wait them out. The neighbor across the fence has canyons and valleys where his cows don’t do that same reaction.

(40:02) John- I’m trained to see markets, is there weight insurance? Can you buy insurance on your cows?

Martin- I would doubt it. I know you can’t buy insurance right now for wolf kills, you can’t do that. I would doubt you could on the weight loss.

John- Farmers can buy yield insurance on crops, you can’t? I would think there would be a ready market there. If your calves come in at 550, collect so much from insurance.

Martin- I would guess that would be really hard because there again was it drought, was it wolves?

John- You just set them up there basically. It’s not like you could do something to hurt the insurance company by not doing something to them.

(40:54) Martin- Well, I’m just looking at how they would think of it with fraud. They…too many cows in too small a pasture and they didn’t have enough to eat. If they were managed wrong, you could lose weight purposefully if you wanted to for insurance reasons. I can’t imagine doing that but…

John- What would you be willing to pay for a premium if you contracted at 600 pounds and your calves came in at 550? What does that cost you per cow?

(42:13) Martin- At, a year ago it was close to 1.20$ a pound so there’s got to be some folks with a lot faster math than me.

-Are you pretty well maxed out on calves, we could say send over the hill or as far as what your land can sustain, do you think you’ve met that?

(43:32) Marin- Pretty much.

-You couldn’t continue to try and ad one or two a year?

Martin- Just a handful maybe, but as far as growing our herd, the ranch can run about 130 mamma cows, in other words each one of them have a calf too, the ranch can handle about that many. In that last 7 or 8 years of drought, with short grass and short hay supplies we’re down to about a hundred.

-When one of those aren’t producing anymore and you send it off to market, did one of the calves that they had step into its place?

(44:09) Martin- Correct. We call them replacement heifers. So every year you keep about 20 of the better heifer calves and you replace some of the cows that are gone. We’re pretty much maxed out right now. We have about 50 or 60 head of horses for our guide part if the business. Of course they eat a lot of grass and eat a lot of feed. If we didn’t have them, we’d be able to have a few more calves there, but they’re helping to pay the bills.

-Everything’s through artificial insemination?

Martin- No, no. All natural. My dad passed away a year ago in April and he always said you gotta hay, you gotta irrigate- that’s one thing you don’t gotta do. Just turn the bull out. (laughter). So we turn the bull out.

-Neighbors just visited do.

(45:26) Marin- There’s certainly a good amount. I would say half and half. It’s a way to get some expensive blood lines for sure.

-Is it your business or do you rent them?

Martin- They’re ours. We buy them from tried and true herds with good genetics. We purchase them.

Tape 22

(0:33) Martin- You know what’s interesting if you have twins, male and female, neither one are fertile. Two heifers and a bull calf, we talked to our vet and said because there are three. He said possibly. One of those heifers grew real well and was really nice. My dad was real excited, but when we pregnancy tested in the fall, she didn’t have the right parts.

-If same sex, are they ok?

Martin- Not if they’re the same sex you’re ok. She always had a bull and a heifer.

Charlie- In the grand scheme of things wolves are going to be around here for a bit, what would you like to see, best of all worlds, happen to the wolves?

(1:30) Martin- We need to be able to manage them and I’m not saying annihilate wolves. People think that’s what I’m saying right off the bat and that’s not what I’m saying at all. But we need to be able, those wolves that are bold, standing down there, bothering the cows and I’ve said it all along, if we could shoot one of those wolves tight there, the other wolves see that fallen comrade, they’re going to say wow, this isn’t a good place to be. I can’t help but think that’s going to help keep the wolves away. The way it is now, up until they were de-listed, the wolves get in your cows you call animal control folks. They say, yeah. Fish and Wildlife Service come, there’s a collard wolf in the pack. They decide yes they will have to take a wolf or two out. They come up a helicopter 5 days after the kill occurred and 5 miles away and kill 2 wolves. What’s that done? Just like your dog in the house when he walks up and takes a steak off the table, you don’t wait until the day after tomorrow to whack him in the living room, you do it right there. I can’t help but think that’s going to help. We’ve got to manage those wolves for numbers and just so we can…if they are hunted, if hunters are allowed to take them, any aggressive bold wolf will be gone. I can’t help but think that will be better for the wolves and the livestock and everyone else.

(3:24) –It seems like the issue with the bison is that there’s more in the park than the park can sustain and they migrate out. Do you think it’s kind of the same with the wolf? There’s not enough sustainability in the park so now they’re moving.

(3:37) Martin- No doubt. The wolf is. The park’s saturated right now. A wolf needs a certain amount of area for his pack and they won’t let another wolf into that area. They’ll actually kill other wolves that come into their neighborhood. Well all those neighborhoods are completely full so when the alphas of the pack decide to run another wolf away, there’s no place for him to go except out of the pack. That is what is happening right now. That’s why there’s more and more of the wolves coming out of the park. In my own thinking, even if we opened up hunting season like Wyoming did down there, predators doesn’t matter; you can kill a wolf on site. I think we’re going to have wolves. First thing is, they aren’t dumb. They get shot at two or three times, they’re real wise. The wolves in Canada and Alaska where hunting is allowed, that’s one of the hardest animals for a trophy hunter to get because they only hunt at night, that’s the only time they’re out there. They’re a really tough animal to get so coming them back here they’d get real wise, real fast and then we’ve got Yellowstone Park pumping wolves out all the time. Back when we dif get rid of them, a hundred years ago, they had all those terrible poisons they used then. We could never use those this day and age. I think that’s the only reason we got them back then because we had that stuff. I think we’ll always have wolves now, even if they’re totally unprotected.

-Would you be able to make the ones prone to be on your land a little more skittish by just shooting at them? Are you allowed to do that?

(5:36) Martin- Early on, way back in ’99 and 2000, they told us that we could do whatever we wanted to scale them out, chase them with my 4 wheeler, do whatever we wanted just do we didn’t hurt them. They got so used to gunfire.

(6:02) Come over a ridge. There’s a little bitty group of our cows, like 5 calves and 2 cows in a tight circle and a bunch of wolves around them. The rest of the cows broke the fence; the wolves had run them off the mountain. They were clear down on fishand game ground below us. That was about a mile away. I ran my saddle horse all the way down there. I had a hand gun with me and I started shooting and all the wolves left except the one big black wolf and he stood there and just kind of looked at me. I shot and I shot. Not until I started hitting really close, right under his belly. Kicking rocks at him did he finally decide to leave. We recognized him. We’d shot at him all summer so he did get used to that. They’ve given us in times past beanbags out of a shotgun that really can slap them and rubber bullets, if we’d gotten close enough to get one of those, that might have worked because it would have stung him. But you have to get real close. When we could get within 50 yards and that’s it whether you’re at a dead run with a saddle horse or stopped. Soon as you would stop, he would stop.

-Do they bother your horses at all?

(7:19) Martin- They haven’t ours that we know of. We have heard of other people that get horses running and run them through fences and get all cut up and what not. But we, this is a horse pasture behind the house right here. As far as we know they haven’t bothered the horses.

-They haven’t come by the horses or anything?

(7:40) Martin- We’ve had them real close here. My wife called the authorities. We had two of them right here outside the house. They chewed one of our dogs just a little bit. Our veterinarian and specialist said, she had just been spayed. She’s been in the heat the day before and we got her spayed and those wolves were trying to get her to join the pack is what they told us. She came back just lathered up with slobber and that apparently the wolves do that when they’re mating or whatever and was to…at least that’s what I was told by my veterinarian. They wanted that female to join the pack.

(8:45) Charlie- Let me ask you a similar question about bison and brucellosis, if you had the best of all the worlds, what do you think should be done with bison with brucellosis. Let’s throw in the elk just for the fun of it.

(8:54) Martin- Well, in many ways of thinking, the bison, we still call them buffalo, they gave brucellosis to the elk and it appears they’re giving it to the cattle now. We’ve got to get it cleaned up; we’ve got to get it out of those herds of wild animals. How’s that done? I’m not the professional to figure it out. When you start…you know some people say, why does the whole herd have to be taken out, why is that? Our veterinarian told us a story about a cow in Washington State, numerous years ago. I think when he was in Veterinary School. A Holstein cow had a calf. Then she was tested and she (was not positive for) brucellosis. She apparently had aborted a calf one year earlier. The cow was gone, she went into hamburger. They kept the calf around more or less just testing. Nine years that calf tested fine. Nine years later all of the sudden up it jumped. That’s why they have to take out your whole herd because you don’t know when it’s going to jump up again. With that said, with the wildlife that would mean they’d all have to go that can’t be.

(10:54) But it would sure seem test they’re doing right now, taking those buffalo and testing them and anything that tests positive goes and those that aren’t stay around for further tests down the road. I would think that has to be done. That’s what seems to me. it would be really interesting, a number of years ago a scientist, a biologist said, I’m sure I remember this, said that he thought that the elk were a dead-end host for brucellosis, if they didn’t keep contracting it from the bison. Now I haven’t heard that since, but it would be really nice to know if that was really true.

Charlie- So get the brucellosis out of the bison and that will clear up the elk ultimately through breeding.

(11:41) Martin- That’s right. That’s what this gentleman said. Now whether he knows what he was talking about, I don’t know.

Brad- Fladdery other things work to keep the wolves out of the cattle.

(12:29) Martin- Fladdery doesn’t work at all. The banners on the string like car lots have, that’s kind of what it’s like.

-Police lights?

Martin- I think that’s a real short term, band aid answer, is my opinion of that.

Brad- What about for sheep where they may be concentrated in smaller areas.

 Martin- I mentioned the 2 brothers over here that lost all their sheep. They got fence put up, defenders helped them do that. Every night they put the sheep in there, they’re able to do that. That had worked, they haven’t lost any sheep. Only thing is they used to be able to leave the sheep out, now they have to be home at night to put the sheep in. It’s still a little hardship for them. However it does keep their sheep safe at night. Those smaller groups of sheep something like that works. You start getting into the cattle and the mountain country that’s. of course any kind of fencing is totally prohibitive if you were going to try to make wolf proof fence in the mountains. Then all you’ve done there is limit any other kind of wildlife from crossing the fence too.

(14:51) –Is there any open range left?

Martin- No, not right here. I mean there are a few places it kind of is. If a road happens to go through, it’s not fenced; there may be 2 or 3 folks who have folks who have grazing rights on the property, it is more or less open range, but it is still limited to 2, 3, or 4 producers.

-In Montana?

(15:22) Martin- The one I’m familiar with is down in Wyoming. Not around here. I would guess there’s places in Montana that same way too. I know there is at grazing associations where humorous folks run their cattle together in large parcels but it’s till fenced on the outside, not really open range, but it kinda is.

Charlie- Would you ever consider giving up this place and turning it into real estate?

(16:06) Martin- Well, that has crossed our mind. What it’s worth we haven’t got a clue and you don’t want to know. Not until you go to sell it do you even want to know. The thing we’ve toyed with and it’s what a lot of neighbors have done is trade it for something in Eastern Montana or in the Dakotas where it’s not quite as pretty and we could get a place. Trade it for a place five times as big and we could run 1,000 head of cows or whatever on a place there with 10,000 acres. That certainly has crossed our minds. It gets to the point where pounding your herd against a wall and not really get anywhere. Try to hammer out a living. My son would really like to be here, but my brother and his son are here. I said we got into the outfitting business just to make ends meet anyhow. We just can’t afford to pay my son and can’t afford to have him here. He’s in oil fields in Colorado right now and making good money, but he’s sure like to be here. If we did go ahead and trade this for something else he could probably be back on the ranch then. That’s appealing to him ad me both. I can’t imagine living anywhere else, you know. We’ve been here since ’64. It’s certainly home, that’s for sure.

-Was this your father’s ranch initially?

(17:51) Martin- My mom and dad bought the ranch in ’64. We had a ranch in northeastern Colorado. I call that the ugly part of Colorado. It’s out in the plains, the sand hills of Colorado. They bought the ranch here in ’64…I pretty much grew up right here. I was born there in Colorado.

Brad- I know you’ve been talking out here about brucellosis. Have you been able to talk any others into not selling out, to keep the land open?

(18:34) Martin- I don’t know if there’s anything. When someone decides to go ahead and do something, I don’t know what the answer is to keep it in one piece. What we are seeing is like the neighbor down below us on the river here, he’s the guy who’s running the place. He’s about my age, running 300 head of cows and doing pretty good at it. The ranch is owned by a big money stockbroker on the east coast. That’s what’s happening. I guess in some of our eyes that’s better than being subdivided at least. At least whoever it is that buys these goes ahead and runs them like a ranch, doesn’t split it all. That said you can’t blame somebody for wanting a little piece of it out there, can’t blame them at all for wanting a place there. It sure pretty much wrecks it for, maybe that’s the wrong word, but it will never be the same once it’s got a house and roads built on it, it’ll never be the same again. When us ranchers are here that’s when we’ll still have the open space, that’s when there’s room for the wolves and wildlife and what not, if it stays open space.

(20:14) Charlie- It would seem to me that would be the incentive for all sides to get together to the table, whether you smoke that peace pipe or figure out some way of resolving the difference of opinion because the alternative is the property then becomes subdivided into little tracts and people put houses here and then there is no free corridor. Everybody, including the wildlife, may lose in a big way.

(20:37) Martin- That’s exactly right, exactly that’s for sure. That’s what was depicted on Wolves of Paradise with the Madison Ranchland group.

Brad- How many of these houses that we see do you remember being here?

(20:56) Martin- Oh my. Like the story I told before, my dad going out to check irrigating he could count eight yard lights in the valley. Now it’s like counting stars. It’s changed a bunch. Joke they talk about the contractor’s pickups heading back to town out number the tourists.

John- What do you think you could get on a hunting license for a wolf?

(22:15) Martin- What would one get for license or the hunt?

John- If the government gave you a license and you got a hunter in here, how much do you imagine you’d get?

(22:27) Martin- We charge $2,900 for a week for an elk and deer hunt right now. Some people go wow. That’s pretty much we take the guy- he has to have his own license- but we go up to our hunting camp and we stay up there for a week. There’s horseback and we feed him and take care of his game is he gets it and all that stuff. I would guess that the wolf hunt would be somewhere in that ballpark.

John- In Africa they’ve used copyright on certain animals in terms of tourism and camera as well as hunting. Because people can’t hunt wolves, if a few licenses were given out and they could hunt here instead of Alaska, would probably fetch a good amount.

Martin- Whatever the permit costs that’s a starting point- I have no idea what the state has come up with for the tag itself, but let’s say it starts at $1,000 affect what a person pays.

John- Yeah, but the license fee ought to go to the landowner.

Martin- That’s not how it’s done right now.

(23:49) John- But if there’s a change in to limited hunting rights for wolves and the land owner has a right to that, it would go to you, the government gives you one or two and you sell them to hunters, whatever the price market was.

Martin- That would be really good and like you said it could be, that might be that $25,000.

Brad- Didn’t someone say the other day, about $15.00 or $20.00 for a license to get a wolf, something really small?

-Yeah. Jenny Jones.

Brad- That would be a resident license of course.

John- That wouldn’t solve the problem.

(24:44) Martin- The same is kind of interesting is the resident elk tag, I haven’t bought one for a year or two, was $20-$25. The non-resident tag, we get for our clients, it’s a guaranteed tag, which means they don’t have to go through a drawing that costs them $1,500 for an elk tag this year. There’s a substantial difference between a resident and a non-resident.

-Elk you eat bison you can eat, right?

-Yep.

-Are you going to eat wolf?

-Probably not. They’d be after there for a hide or wolf rug or whatever, or a full mounted wolf.

(27:19) Charlie- What we’re finding out is there are not just two sides. This seems like such a complex issue, every different group that we’ve met had a position that was unlike the other groups whether it’s a chamber of commerce, whether it’s a rancher, whether it’s a service personnel or a common tourist. Everybody has a different viewpoint. This I think is fairly critical for the group we have here of teachers who’ll be teaching young people about these issues.