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700 Science

My Thoughts on How Wolves Change Rivers and Effect the Ecosystem

I never really understood the full meaning behind wolves. I mean, I don’t dislike them, don’t get me wrong, but I really thought they would only hunt, eat, and sleep. I never really saw the big picture behind them. When I received this assignment, I was quite dubious. I guess I was really taken back. I mean, wolves. I didn’t know much about them, and now people are saying they can change rivers?! Impossible. Ethically speaking, that just wasn’t possible! I just couldn’t believe it. I know what an ecosystem is, and the important factors like the tertiary producers, secondary producers, primary producers, and even producers like grass, but this?! It was going too far already. You can say that I’m stubborn or persistent, I get it, but it would take a lot to change my final statement.

When I first saw the video, I was stunned. No, scratch that. I was more than stunned. I was simply appalled. Shocked, taken back…words couldn’t describe the sensation I was encountering. With my own eyes, I saw the wolves really changing the rivers. I know. I couldn’t believe it myself. But what really fascinated me, was the behavior of the wolves. I really did underestimate them. When they were first brought to the Yellowstone National Park, I didn’t think they would affect anything big. Maybe change a little part of the ecosystem, but nothing bigger than that. However, the end results were by far, the most amazing results I’ve ever seen.

When the wolves had arrived, their population had increased rapidly. Because of this, they started to hunt more deer, taking control of their overpopulating population. The behavior of wolves started to alter the deer’s behavior, making them avoid many places like the valley and gorge because of its vulnerability. This caused these places to regenerate, allowing more grass to grow, and bloom. I’m not forgetting the other part. Not only did the grass grow back, but it took only 6 years for the height of the Aspen, Willow, and Cottonwood trees to quintuple. Due to these tall trees, it brought back many birds. The population of endangered bird species started to grow rapidly. Not only birds, but beavers! They like eating trees, and used the branches to create dams. This gives refugee to otters, muskrats, ducks, fish, reptiles and amphibians! Do you see how one little species grew into a large, impactful one, making change happen before our eyes? When the wolves killed more coyotes, the number of rabbits and mice started to increase, which made eagles, hawks, weasels, foxes, badgers, and ravens to feed on them! If this isn’t change, I don’t know what is anymore.

Now wait. We’re only seeing the change of the animal species and population, but what about the rivers we were talking about? Well, I’m getting there. Due to this drastic change, it also changes the behavior of the rivers. There was less erosion. The rivers narrowed, stabilizing the flow of the current. The change of the ecosystem led to the change of rivers. The regenerating forest just made the rivers more fixed in their course. Thanks to the wolves, they were able to control populations, give vegetation their recovery, and change rivers. Talk about change.

So all of this. Just think about it. This wasn’t possible, yet the wolves managed to accomplish it, and prove us wrong. The change that happened at the Yellowstone National Park is just really fascinating, and I believe that one little change can make a big difference. From trees, to animals, to vegetation recovery, there’s nothing that’s going to stop the wolves from doing what they want to do. And don’t stop them, because they’re doing just fine.