

Wolf Tales from the Timber Wolf Alliance

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Finding Common Ground

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Wolves sometimes injure or kill hunting dogs. So, when the caller identified himself as Charlie, a bear hunter who uses dogs, I was alarmed. My immediate fear was that wolves had killed one of his dogs. Instead, Charlie's call was a hopeful one. He wanted to see if we could work together to end unregulated commercial bear baiting. I was immediately confused. My mind flashed back to the many meetings attended, where houndsmen sat on one side of the room, "pro-wolf" folks on the other, and little more than glares were exchanged.

Now, Charlie's phone call was to suggest we work together?! I was not a hunter, knew little about baiting, and supported wolf recovery; yet, he thought we could help each other. Our dialogue began. As Charlie talked, I found myself agreeing with him. He patiently answered my questions, and we exchanged information. Following a Natural Resource meeting where we each spoke, we went for coffee. There, I met other bear hunters and by the end of the evening, we were playfully chiding each other. To my amazement, they invited me to join them for a day of bear hunting.

Driving the back roads, we looked for sign and found wolf, coyote and bear tracks. We laughed, told stories, shared concerns about the environment, and talked about dogs and wolves. We learned from each other and soon realized we aligned on many issues. We discovered equal pleasure at being outside on a crisp autumn day, we agreed on the importance of careful natural resource use, we share a deep respect for wildlife and care for protecting habitat, we both love our dogs, and we are dedicated to changing bear baiting laws in Michigan.

Although I can still say with certainty that I will never become a bear hunter, and it is a safe bet my newfound friends will never share my level of passion for wolves, our time together allowed us to develop mutual respect for each others' opinions. By focusing on what unites us, we discovered respect, dialogue, and even solutions, are possible.

Timber Wolf Alliance was founded in 1987 to promote and maintain a viable population of wolves in the western Great Lakes region.