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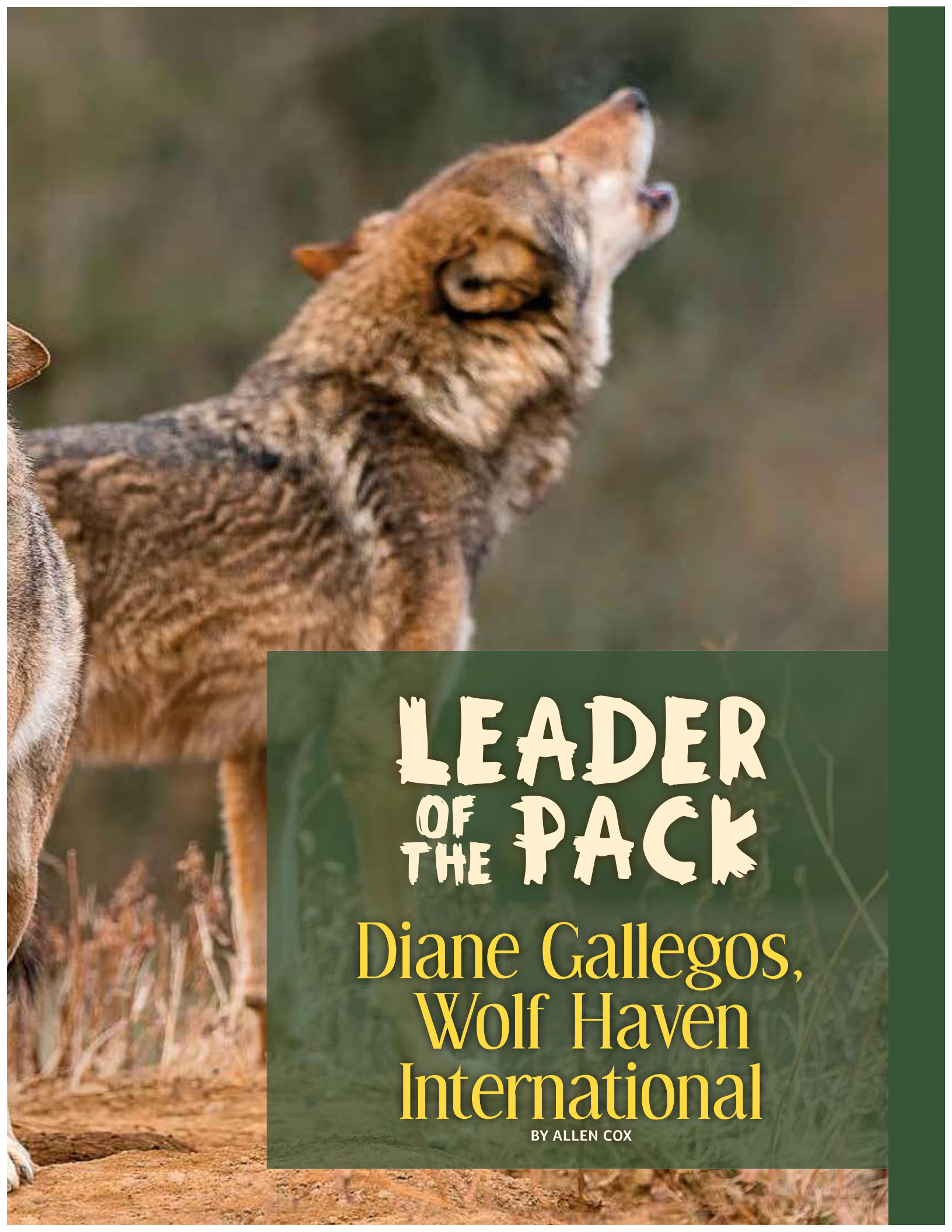


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# LEADER OF THE PACK

Diane Gallegos,  
Wolf Haven  
International

BY ALLEN COX



Diane Gallegos

Maybe it all started with “Little Red Riding Hood,” but wolves have a history of getting a bad rap. For a couple of centuries in North America, they have been perceived as a menace with which man cannot coexist and, by some measures, why shouldn’t they be? They are savage pack killers that prey on livestock. Unchecked, their numbers would multiply until no lamb or calf is safe. At least, that’s what the popular belief has been among many on one side of the issue. But, when it comes to wolves, belief systems are evolving, thanks to people like wildlife biologist Diane Gallegos, Wolf Haven International’s executive director.

As one might expect of a wildlife biologist, Gallegos’ heart lives in the outdoors. Whenever she gets the chance, she loves hiking and camping, activities she enjoys with her husband and two rescued golden retrievers. Just being in the majesty of Nature is ultimately satisfying to her, but she can’t avoid viewing the natural world through the lens of a scientist, a perspective that pervades her work at Wolf Haven and her endeavors as a conservationist.

## WOLVES ARE A KEYNOTE SPECIES

Wolves play a vital role in maintaining an ecological balance in their habitats. The absence of wolves causes habitats to change so drastically that they can no longer support many other species. For an interesting read about the ecological role of wolves, go to [defenders.org/ecological-role-wolves](http://defenders.org/ecological-role-wolves).







Mexican Gray Wolves







Gallegos is the first to attest that conservation of apex predators, or those at the top of the food chain, such as wolves, is far from simple. In her eight years at Wolf Haven International, located in Tenino, Washington, Gallegos had jumped head-first into the oft-murky issue of wolf conservation that has historically roiled in an emotionally charged and politically divided cauldron. In the process, she has worked alongside everyone with skin (and even fur) in the game—from fellow conservationists to ranchers, from government agencies to politicians—all to one end: preservation of this important keystone species.

In Washington State, the gray wolf population has increased over the last decade from a single pack that wandered into the northeastern corner of the state to 122 animals in 22 packs, at last count, and the actual number is likely much greater. That growth is because gray wolves are a protected species in the state, but convincing stakeholders of conservation versus extermination didn't come easy.

"Fish and Wildlife realized how deep the conflict runs," says Gallegos. "They brought in an expert on human-wildlife conflict. We have eighteen stakeholders on the team, all learning about the issues and the values of the other stakeholders. The outcome is to advise the Fish and Wildlife department on wolf management."

The team's challenges, according to Gallegos, have been to air concerns on all fronts and gain an understanding of underlying values. Those challenges have fortunately unearthed much common ground to build a path forward.

"My greatest joy in my work is making a difference for wolves, and for wildlife in general," Gallegos says. "I have been surrounded by people who have worked hard to find shared values for a common goal."

Gallegos began her career in the Southwest as a U.S. Fish and Wildlife biologist working in the field. Her job was to verify whether the Mexican gray wolf species was extinct. It turns out they were not, and thanks to captive breeding and release programs (in which Wolf Haven currently participates), there is hope for that species.

She then moved on to working for three different nonprofit organizations, including Habitat for Humanity. Her nonprofit work

## ADOPT A WOLF

Yes, you can adopt a wolf. Even better, you can sponsor a wolf. But, no, you can't take your wolf home. Sponsorship gets you a photo and bio of your wolf, a year membership at Wolf Haven, updates about your wolf and more. Most importantly, your adoption or sponsorship fees go toward supporting the wolves. Find out more at [store.wolfhaven.org](http://store.wolfhaven.org).

## WOLF HAVEN'S NATIVE PRAIRIE

Wolf Haven International is all about conservation, and that goes for flora as well as fauna. A 36-acre portion of Wolf Haven's property is a prairie habitat that they have restored. May is a great time to visit, when the prairie is a sea of blue with native camas lilies in bloom.

brought her to the Northwest, and she couldn't deny the call of the wild, so she signed on as a volunteer at Wolf Haven International. It was kismet that the organization was looking for a new executive director at the time.

Working in nonprofits, Gallegos found they are in a constant state of transition. And it is no different at Wolf Haven.

"We have to constantly evaluate our mission, goals and values," Gallegos says, "to be the best sanctuary we can be."

Since opening in 1982, Wolf Haven has rescued and provided a safe sanctuary for more than 250 animals. The organization recently acquired a wolf sanctuary in Montana, where 33 non-socialized wolves will be able to live out their lives.

For Gallegos, it's all about wolves and their wellbeing. Case in point, one of Wolf Haven's biggest fundraisers used to be their Howl-Ins, which drew hundreds of visitors. It was fun for the guests, but it turned out to be stressful for the animals. As a result, under Gallegos' leadership, Howl-Ins transitioned to smaller and quieter group experiences that are still fun and educational for the guests, but don't cause anxiety for the wolves.

Today, the visitor experience at Wolf Haven's sanctuary is interpretive. Reservations are required, and the number of visitors at any given time is tightly controlled for the wellbeing of the animals. Sanctuary tours last 50 minutes. The focus of the visit is education about these remarkable animals. Learn more and book your visit at [wolflhaven.org](http://wolflhaven.org). 🐾





