The Return of Wolves to Yellowstone Printable Reading Comprehension

Word Count: 262 | Lexile 1000

For much of the twentieth century, gray wolves were missing from Yellowstone National Park. By the 1920s, hunting, trapping, and poisoning had eliminated them from the region. Without wolves, elk populations grew very large. Elk browsed heavily on young trees near rivers and streams, which caused erosion and reduced habitat for beavers, songbirds, and fish. The ecosystem became unbalanced.

In 1995, wildlife managers reintroduced wolves to Yellowstone. Fourteen wolves from Canada were released into the park, followed by more the next year. The return of wolves quickly set off a chain reaction known as a “trophic cascade.” Wolves hunted elk, and as elk numbers and behavior changed, streamside vegetation like willow and aspen began to recover. With more trees, beavers built dams again, which created wetlands that supported fish, amphibians, and birds. Other predators, such as bears and coyotes, also adjusted their behavior in response to wolves.

The story of Yellowstone’s wolves is not without conflict. Some ranchers outside the park feared that wolves would kill livestock. Wildlife managers set up programs to compensate ranchers for losses and tracked wolf packs with radio collars. Debates continue, but many scientists and visitors see the return of wolves as a success for conservation and ecosystem health.

Today, Yellowstone is one of the best places in the world to watch wild wolves. Tourists come with spotting scopes, hoping to glimpse packs on the move across valleys or hear their howls echo through the mountains. The reintroduction shows how human decisions can shape ecosystems—for better or worse—and how carefully managed actions can sometimes repair past mistakes.

1. **What happened in Yellowstone after wolves were eliminated in the 1920s?**
   A. Elk numbers declined sharply
   B. Beavers built more dams
   C. Elk populations grew and damaged vegetation
   D. Songbirds increased in riverside areas

2. **What is a “trophic cascade” as described in the passage?**
   A. A new kind of river habitat
   B. A chain reaction in an ecosystem caused by predators
   C. The process of wolves traveling in packs
   D. A decline in elk numbers due to hunting

3. **Which change followed the recovery of streamside vegetation?**
   A. Beavers returned and built dams
   B. Elk numbers rose even higher
   C. Wolves stopped hunting elk
   D. Fish populations declined

4. **Why did some ranchers oppose the return of wolves?**
   A. They disliked tourists visiting Yellowstone
   B. They believed wolves would harm streams
   C. They feared wolves would reduce elk hunting
   D. They worried wolves would prey on livestock

5. **How did wildlife managers respond to ranchers’ concerns?**
   A. They banned wolf research in Yellowstone
   B. They removed wolves from the park each winter
   C. They compensated ranchers and tracked wolves
   D. They required ranchers to move livestock inside the park

6. **Which statement best describes the main idea of the passage?**
   A. Wolves make Yellowstone unsafe for tourists
   B. Reintroducing wolves changed Yellowstone’s ecosystem in powerful ways
   C. Elk are the most important animals in Yellowstone
   D. Ranchers always supported wolf recovery

7. **Why is Yellowstone considered a special place to view wolves today?**
   A. Tourists can often see wild packs and hear wolves howl
   B. Wolves are kept in enclosures for easy viewing
   C. Wolves only live in Yellowstone now
   D. Wolves never interact with other species

Answer Key

1. C
2. B
3. A
4. D
5. C
6. B
7. A