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A KEY TO LIFE: A NEW LOOK AT NATURE'S GREAT PREDATORS

LA GRANDE, Ore. – Birds, butterflies, beaver and antelope, wildflowers and frogs — could their survival possibly be connected to top predators like the wolf and cougar? For those who have seldom given thought to the great predators so often missing from the web of life, here is a world of reason to think again. Following in the footsteps of wolves and cougars, and the scientists working to understand their place in the rapidly changing world of nature, award-winning filmmakers Karen and Ralf Meyer of Green Fire Productions have captured the predators' ongoing drama in their new documentary, *Lords of Nature: Life in a Land of Great Predators*.

Lords of Nature is screening in communities nationwide, See www.lordsofnature.org for screening dates and details.

“This is an opportunity for people to learn about scientific discoveries we need to consider and incorporate into our decision-making on managing wildlife and public lands,” said Karen Meyer, director of Green Fire Productions.

Narrated by Peter Coyote, *Lords of Nature* journeys to the heart of predator country: the Yellowstone plateau; the canyons of Zion; the farm country of northern Minnesota and the rugged open range of central Idaho – all places now resettled by the great beasts society once banished.

Here scientists discover these top carnivores as revitalizing forces of nature, keystone species whose presence in sufficient numbers can dramatically reverse the slow decay of America's wild West.

In Yellowstone National Park, the filmmakers visit a land inhabited again by wolves after a 70-year absence, and find a chain of life once again flourishing since their return. From stream banks once again cloaked with willow and re-colonizing beavers and songbirds, to wolf leftovers

drawing record-setting gatherings of scavengers, scientists find the flowering of Yellowstone magically coinciding with the return of its wolves.

And in the canyons of Zion, scientists find more of the same, flowers and trees, butterflies, frogs and fish all flourishing under the guardian watch of the cougar.

But what about people, what about the societies who once have felt compelled to exterminate these powerful animals?

The filmmakers traveled to Minnesota, to a land harboring 3,000 wolves — more wolves than any state in the lower 48. Here they meet livestock producers raising sheep and cattle alongside their wild neighbors. They talked with deer hunters who view their fellow predators with caution and respect. In Idaho they found a groundbreaking collaboration among ranchers, wildlife managers and conservationists testing non-lethal predator control.

While venturing across pivotal crossroads of the American icons' return, *Lords of Nature* starts by tracing the path of legendary naturalist and writer, Aldo Leopold. What Leopold warned of seventy years ago, scientists from around the world now confirm: That a land lacking its top predators is a land subject to decay, and a land with the great beasts in sufficient numbers is a land far more diverse and resilient. “So one of the key points that we’re finding for maintaining ecosystems is to have the presence of a top predator in the system. Whether it’s cougar in a mule deer system like Zion, or whether it’s wolves in an elk system like Yellowstone National Park. The presence of that predator is crucial in maintaining that system through time,” said Robert Beschta, hydrologist and professor emeritus at Oregon State University and one of the scientists interviewed in the film.

Filmmaker Karen Meyer states, “What I learned while making *Lords of Nature* is that the importance of top predators goes beyond the impact they have on their prey. Top predators affect all wildlife and the entire landscape – they are a critical component to the health of our ecosystems. I was equally impressed with what ranchers and livestock producers are doing to adjust their operations and management practices in order to avoid conflicts with predators.”

Lords of Nature is a 60-minute film that will premiere in cities and towns across the country. These events are open to the public. The screenings will be followed by an audience Q & A session with a panel of experts. For a complete list of upcoming appearances and more information, go to www.lordsofnature.org

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