

To **Water Resources and Agricultural Review Committee**
From **Jeffrey Woodruff, Pitkin County Commissioner,**
 Commissioner District #4, Snowmass and Capitol Creek
RE **Discussion on the Status of the Wolf Reintroduction**
 Wolf Reintroduction: *The impact on Capitol Creek Ranches*
 June 30, 2025, 1:30PM, Panel #1, Old Supreme Court, State Capitol

Thank you Madam Chair, Committee Members and Staff

We appreciate the Committee's focus on the community aspect of the wolves introduction and specifically the impact on Capitol Creek Ranches in Old Snowmass

Pitkin County Ranching- unique connection to the land (East end of the valley)

While 84% of the land area in Pitkin County is federal and state land, we are home to 116 farms, with over 36,000 acres of agricultural land devoted to hay, grazing- cattle and sheep- with 4,100 cattle and calves and several hundred sheep.

In the Capitol Creek Valley, Brad has 450 mother cows and Mike has 250 mother cows. Mike, Brad and Josh's, grazing range includes Sopris and Capitol, up towards Haystack, and the Monastery.

This is not simply about me, I have raised industrial chickens and worked fields (avocados, oranges and cotton), moved irrigation pipes and hand weeded rows of fava beans. I love where we live and the people who care for the land. We live in a beautiful place.

Pitkin County Community Impact-

Pitkin County is concerned about the risk to our neighbors' lifestyle. Our ranchers livelihood is dependent on successfully caring for (their family,) their herd and the land, both private ranch land and through federal leases. Most of our land in the valley is surrounded by White River National Forest and BLM parcels.

The ranchers' goals include maintaining their livelihood and working the land where they live and preserving and protecting the land for their children and grandchildren. Brad and Mike and their family's wish to continue a ranching tradition for generations. (We are home to centennial farms and ranches. SunFire Ranch and we are about to add the Arbaney Family to the State Centennial Farm and Ranch Program).

County protects our ecosystem and biodiversity.

County zoning protects agricultural land and associated development. We protect "the beauty of the landscape and natural scenic characteristics, to protect and enhance wildlife habitat, air and water quality, and to conserve natural resources".

Our code protects production areas, principal feeding areas, summer and winter ranges and concentration areas and movement corridors. Our land use code contains buffer zones, for some species of wildlife intolerant to disturbance from human activities during portions of the year.

The value of ranching to our community

- Our ditches are maintained
- Our ranchers actively manage their water use efficiently and work to maintain in stream flows, both in Capitol and Snowmass creeks
- Water is returned via draws to recharge our creeks
- Our fields are producing feed for our livestock (and horses)

Colorado Parks and Wildlife partnership

County Commissioners work with CPW on every (large) land use approval, to ensure consistency with CPW's management plan and mapping. County commissioners work in quasi judicial hearings, in conjunction with detailed referral comments from our colleagues at CPW.

Concerns we have as a ranching community from the wolf reintroduction. Are we made whole by Option 1 and Option 2? In terms of financial compensation:

Option 1 Compensation Options- As per management plan Basic Compensation -

While we are compensated from depredation losses, the Colorado Wolf Restoration and Management Plan Stakeholder Advisory Group, "conflict minimization program must be robustly and consistently funded for success".

And as per **the Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) Desired** "outcomes of a livestock compensation plan, Livestock owners are fairly compensated for losses and are not financially harmed".

Option 2. Itemized Production Losses- rancher must provide baseline documentation (3 years of records) to prove losses.

Decreased cattle weight gains.

Decreased cattle conception rates. Does the introduction of more humans (range riders) and wolves mean lower conception rates?

What is not covered in the compensation?

What about the health and safety of the cattle? When cattle are stressed and chased they face injuries and death. The range riders are there to protect the cattle overnight, but what does the human and wolf presence mean for the cattle's resting patterns? When the calf was fine in the evening, but limps the next morning we do not have a sustainable solution for the calf or the rancher's operations.

What about the lifestyle of ranchers? And the impact on their families?

4. CPW to follow the 2023 Wolf Plan Final, regarding Animal reputation (Bonnie covered)

A. The alternatives "not known to be a depredator," "wolves that have been around livestock without conflict," and "wolves that have not been present around livestock at all" all have technical merit as factors for sourcing donors; "known depredator" has technical merit as a criterion for exclusion from sourcing.

B. Sourcing donor populations not known to be depredators (whether present around livestock or not) was preferential to sourcing populations not exposed to livestock, if possible. However, it is important to consider that most wolves overlap areas with livestock, and there is not a way to know the degree of interaction they have had with humans.

C. No wolf should be translocated that has a known history of chronic depredation, and sourcing from geographic areas with chronic depredation events should not occur. (Wolf Plan Appendix B-4)

Impact on business- There is an emotional and physical toll on the ranchers.

We work the land year round. We gather as a community in the spring for branding day. From ditch work, to managing head gates and irrigation and walking the return draw, to patching fences, to feeding we are here to raise calves.

(For inclement and uncooperative springs, Brad has indoor calving capability, a barn relocated from old Camp Hale 10th Mountain Division). We are facing extremely dry conditions on the land, with shorter grasses and lower groundwater tables (depletion). (For the committee's

information, our streamflows last week in the Roaring Fork River were currently flowing at 28-48% of normal)

We want to do this. We want to run cattle on this land. We do not want to be run out of business. We manage thousands of acres and agricultural leases throughout the valley. There is a balance struck from the economics of raising cattle, with the care of the land. This is Colorado, this is actively managing the habitat for livestock and our way of life.

Final Report on Gray Wolf # 2405

We appreciate the balance in the post action report. We played by the rules set out in the management plan. We appreciate the actions taken on behalf of the ranchers and cattle to date. And as per the CO Wolf Plan, we share the plans goals in maintaining the “public trust in CPW for the actions taken during restoration and management”.

As the committee heard this morning on the value of land-

Value is based on the earnings potential of that land or productive capacity of that land over reasonable period of time.

In closing

As per the CPW Wolf Stakeholder Advisory Group, *“Livestock owners are fairly compensated for losses and are not financially harmed”*. My ask to you as our representatives is to update the management plan to allow for reimbursements and go beyond simply loss of life, for all of our reasons above.

We all acknowledge the Colorado’s current budget situation, so we recognize you may not be able to act on this request financially in the immediate term, but by updating the management plan and creating the mechanism for compensation, it will be ready when the funding is.

Thank you Madam Chair, Committee members and Staff, from our Ranchers in Old Snowmass

APPENDIX, B ROLL

Pitkin County, through our land use code and Open Space and Trails protect critical habitat.

Pitkin County Comprehensive Plan goals for the rural portions of the County, includes preservation of agricultural/ranch lands and open space; conservation of natural resources, including wildlife habitat, scenic quality, water quality and quantity, and air quality; and protection of historic resources.

Conservation partnerships- Value to our neighbors

We are surrounded by conservation easements. We work with partners like Open Space and Trails and Aspen Valley Land Trust to find economic ways to further the working of the land. We work to keep the land in agricultural uses in perpetuity. We have public access to the Snowmass Maroon Bells Wilderness through our lands.

Federal losses, as some of our land is leased (BLM and USFS)

WRNF had approximately 146 permanent employees at the end of CY 24. The WRNF currently has approximately 102 employees. 37 of the 44 employees that are included in the change in staffing levels held red cards. ASRD – 28 employees at the end of CY 24. Now 17 employees in May/June 2025. I share these figures, as we are stressed as a community- wolf management plans aside- and no hiring locally will cover our need to protect our land and our visitors to the valley.

Impact on wildlife

What does it mean for the community when we do not see deer or elk, due to the presence of wolves. No mule deer or elk traversing the terrain to Hay Park. Are they dispersed in the forest, where the herd has packed up? Are the mule deer more comfortable moving to steeper slopes and outside of their native habitat?