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TOP STORY

## Colorado ranchers and commissioners urge halt on wolf ballot measure, seek better management plan from state

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1 of 3



While they might agree on the problem, a group of Western Slope county commissioners and agricultural groups is asking proponents of a ballot measure to repeal Proposition 114, which allowed the reintroduction of wolves in Colorado, to back off.

In a March 17 letter sent to Patrick Davis, who heads Colorado Advocates for Smart Wolf Policy, several county commissioners and wool growers suggested that ranchers and county officials opposed to the reintroduction program are willing to work within the system, utilizing the state's wolf management plan as a means of addressing the problems caused by wolves, rather than putting another measure before voters on the statewide election ballot.

Colorado Advocates for Smart Wolf Policy supports the repeal measure.

The writers — county commissioners from Garfield, Grand, Mesa, Moffat, Montrose and Rio Blanco and four county-based wool growers associations — said they share the frustration with the Polis administration's approach to implementing Proposition 114. They want to see a pause in any more reintroductions of wolves "until adequate programs and resources are provided to landowners to manage wolf and livestock interactions more appropriately," they said.

However, they also expressed worries about the proposed repeal measure and asked that it be put on hold in favor of fixing what's already in place.

Davis and former El Paso County Commissioner Stan VanderWerf filed the proposed repeal measure in January. The original language sought to reverse Proposition 114. Still, it was later amended to end any further introductions as of Dec. 31, 2026 and to add working dogs as "livestock protection animals" that could be eligible for compensation if killed by a wolf. The amended measure also prohibits the importation of wolves from outside Colorado.

Davis told Colorado Politics those changes were made to protect two wolf compensation funds.

There is no requirement in the measure to remove existing wolves that have been brought to the state from Oregon and, most recently, Canada.

The news in January that the ballot measure had been filed came as a surprise to ranchers and others in the agricultural community.

A March 10 column in Colorado Politics from the Fence Post's Rachel Gabel also pointed out the rift. Calling the repeal a "moot point," Gabel wrote that the ballot proposal was conceived without input or even familiarity with the stakeholders.

"There is no support for a repeal from the stakeholder groups, especially one borne at the ballot box," she wrote.

That March 17 letter said the effort to end the gray wolf reintroduction was initiated without consulting the primary stakeholder groups and constituencies most affected by the reintroduction of wolves. As a result, this approach is at "odds with the strategy and policy outcomes that our coalition is working on," they wrote.

ADVERTISING



"Rather than pushing forward without the support of this coalition, which has significant credibility, influence and outreach across the state, we ask that you allow those of us directly impacted to work through the pathways already in front of us," they said.

The groups also raised concerns about the ability to raise the necessary resources needed to succeed and warned that a failed effort could impact policy efforts currently underway, as well as "undermine recent public opinion support that the landowner community has received."

"It doesn't bode well for a successful campaign when key stakeholders are not unified," the letter said.

Davis is firing back. He said the letter was a "surprise," given that he said he has been meeting with ranchers, hunters and other groups, including some of the signatories, since December.

He initially told Colorado Politics he did not want to see drama over the rift, stating, "Nothing kills a campaign more than drama."

He said he has met, texted, or held Zoom meetings with some of the signatories and groups, including Tom Harrington of the Colorado Cattlemen's Association and a more recent meeting with Jackson County ranchers and hunters.

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Davis noted that Harrington had told Davis he would not support the ballot measure. Davis also cited conversations from December with several Garfield County commissioners, including Commissioner Perry Will, who he said was supportive of a repeal measure. However, Will is a signatory of the March 17 letter.

"I'll talk to anybody," Davis said.

While Davis isn't well-known in the ranching community, he has a long history of political advocacy, both in Colorado and in other states, including serving as Colorado state director for the 2016 Trump campaign.

The letter did not appear to deter the repeal effort, as fundraising emails were sent this week. The measure, now known as Initiative #35, has an initial hearing scheduled for April 2 with the title board. The first report on the campaign's fundraising is due April 15.

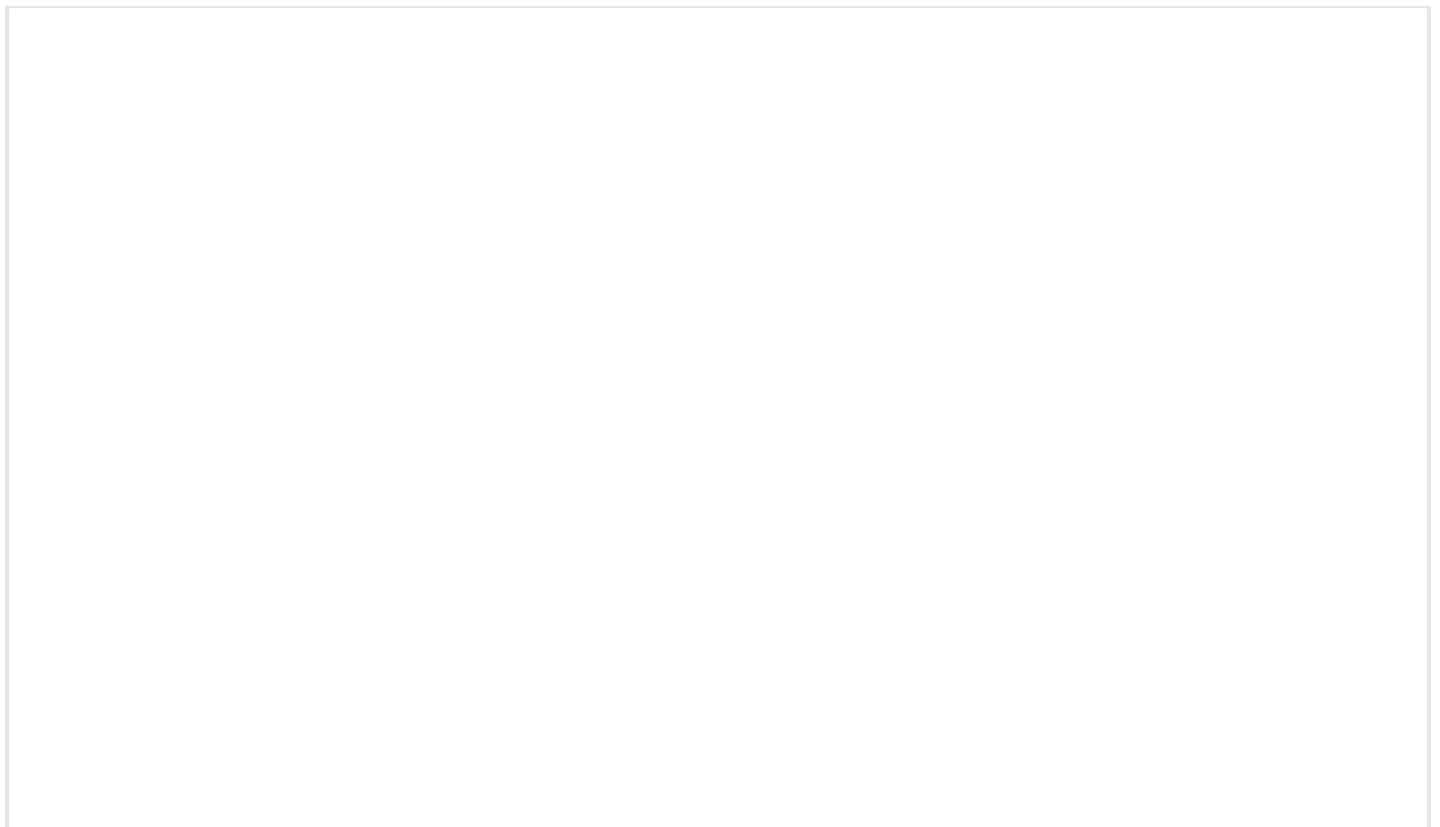
In 2020, animal rights groups pushed Proposition 114 to bring in wolves to west of the Continental Divide. The measure passed by a narrow margin, with almost all Western Slope counties, where wolves have been placed, voting overwhelmingly against it.

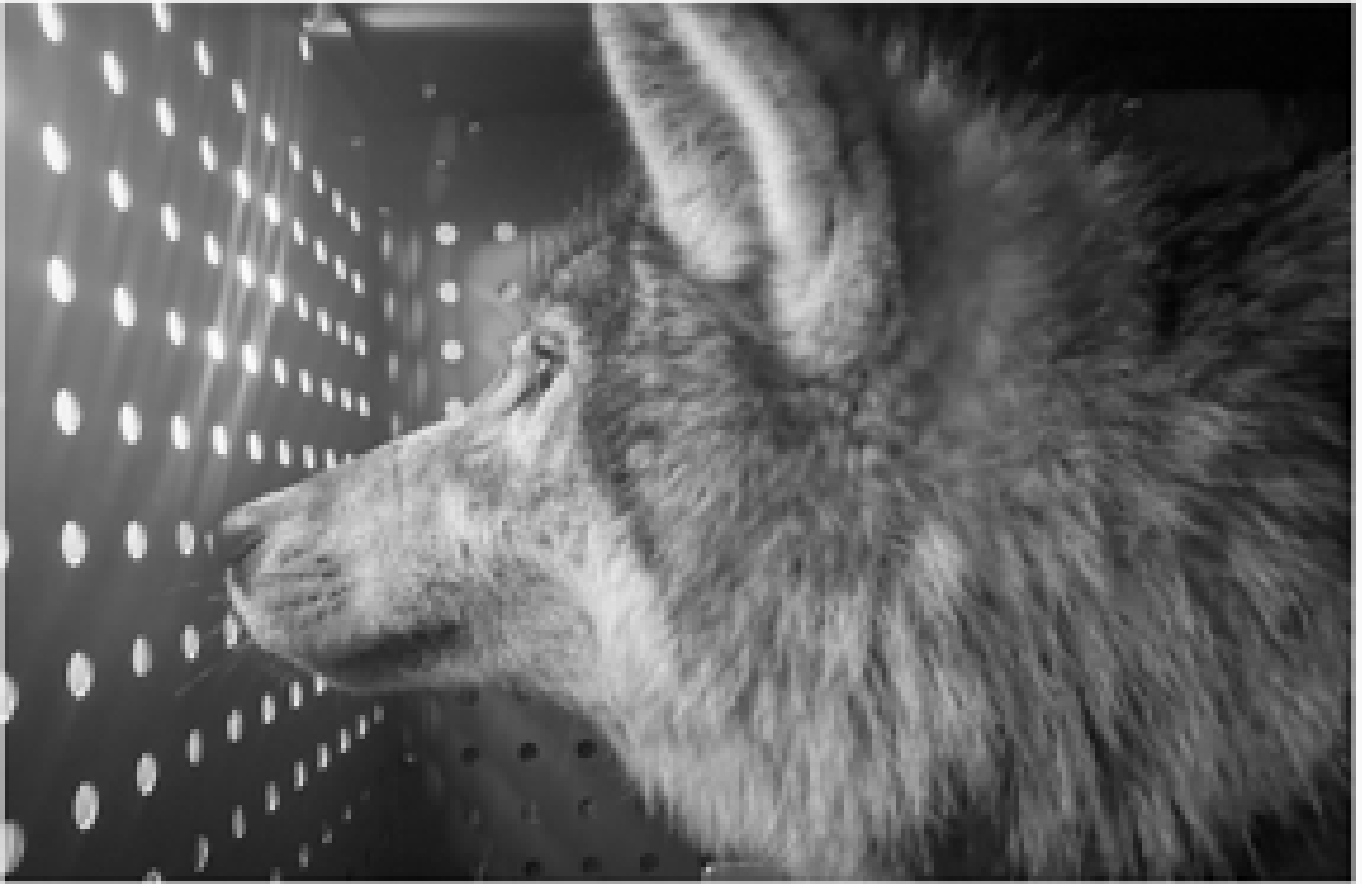
Since then, wolves have killed dozens of livestock in multiple counties, including most recent reports that wolves imported from British Columbia in January killed sheep in Wyoming and at least one pregnant cow in Pitkin County. The latter is under investigation by Colorado Parks and Wildlife and has not been confirmed by the agency.

The cost to the state just for the first batch of 10 wolves, some that came with a pack history of killing livestock in Oregon, has far exceeded what the state's wolf compensation fund can support. Two claims totaling \$581,000 were filed in December; another for \$100,000 is expected to be reviewed by the Wildlife Commission at an upcoming meeting.

The wolf compensation fund receives \$350,000 per year. However, the ballot measure requires ranchers to be compensated for losses, not just for dead livestock, and other CPW funds will be tapped to cover those losses.

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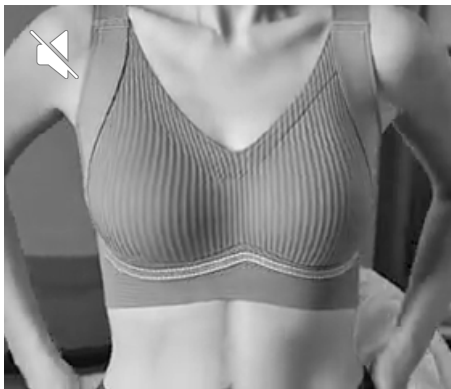
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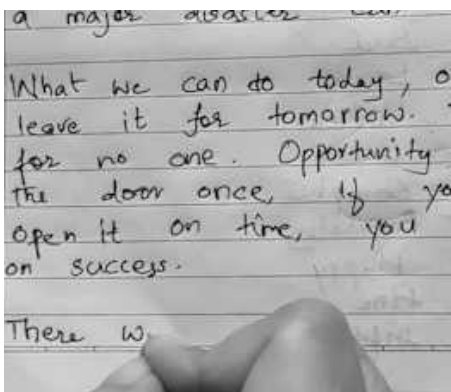
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