ASSOCIATED GOVERNMENTS OF NORTHWEST COLORADO

October 14, 2026

Jared Polis
Governor, State of Colorado

Dan Gibbs
Executive Director, Colorado Department of Natural Resources

Laura Clellan
Director, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Members of the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission

Re: Wildlife Management, Public Trust, and the September 30 Suspension of the Chronic Depredation Directive

Governor Polis, Director Gibbs, Director Clellan, and Members of the Commission:

There is a fundamental principle of representative government that should require no explanation: government exists to serve the people, and those entrusted with governmental authority remain accountable to them. When government stops listening to the people it serves, the people have a duty to hold it accountable.

For years, Northwest Colorado's local governments have chosen to work with the State in good faith. AGNC represents Mesa, Moffat, Rio Blanco, and Garfield Counties, with Delta, Montrose, and Grand Counties as associate members. Our counties have testified, submitted comments, shared local knowledge, and worked directly with CPW professionals because we believe cooperation among governments should be the rule.

Our agricultural communities have done the same. Producers have spent years participating in stakeholder processes, implementing nonlethal measures, documenting losses, and working directly with CPW while bearing the consequences of wolf-livestock conflict on the ground. We stand with them and join Colorado Farm Bureau, Colorado Cattlemen's Association, Colorado Livestock Association, Colorado Wool Growers Association, and Rocky Mountain Farmers Union in condemning CPW's September 30 decision to suspend the chronic-depredation directive.

Colorado asked the federal government for the Section 10(j) designation to provide greater management flexibility. CPW then established a chronic-depredation framework with a deliberately high threshold, and producers relied on it. Now, as Colorado is experiencing the worst wolf depredation we have seen since reintroduction began, CPW has suspended the very framework established to deal with repeated depredation.

The timing is difficult to understand.

P.O. Box 593, Grand Junction, CO 81502 Phone: 970-665-1095

Compensation is important, but compensation is not wildlife management. Nonlethal measures are important, and producers have used them, but there has to be an answer when they fail. Why did Colorado ask for management flexibility if it is unwilling to use it when management becomes difficult?

Unfortunately, the September 30 decision does not stand alone. We have watched a broader breakdown in the State's wildlife decision-making process. Affected communities have continued to show up and participate while increasingly questioning whether their input can actually change anything. Our county commissioners were not consulted about the suspension. They were notified of the decision only hours before the press release was issued. Local governments should not have to fight their own State simply to be heard, especially when these decisions directly affect the people we represent and the responsibilities county governments are charged with carrying out.

The September Commission meeting was a clear example. Commissioner John Le Coq stated the outcome he wanted on the prairie-dog issue while Deputy Director Reid DeWalt cautioned against a "predecisional" commitment and Southeast Regional Manager Frank McGee warned that the accelerated timeline meant "we will not be doing much of a stakeholder process."

Commissioner Rebecca Niemiec then explained:

"There's really two types of stakeholder engagement. There's engagement to inform rule making … and inform governance decisions and then there's stakeholder engagement … to inform implementation of rules. And so that implementation stakeholder engagement there will be plenty of time to do that once the rule is already made."

That gets to the heart of the problem. Stakeholder engagement after a rule is made cannot replace engagement while people still have an opportunity to influence the decision. By then, government is not asking affected communities what they think. It is telling them how they will live with what has already been decided. That is not meaningful participation, and it is not how representative government is supposed to work.

Colorado has built a nationally respected wildlife agency staffed by accomplished biologists, researchers, and wildlife managers with decades of experience. They have earned the trust of our communities through their work on the ground. What we do not understand is why the State employs professionals of this caliber only to disregard their expertise and recommendations in favor of the policy preferences of politically appointed activists serving on the Commission.

We trust CPW's professionals. Does the Commission?

We also cannot ignore the question of political influence. John Swartout has warned the Commission that partnerships with landowners and rural communities were at "extreme risk" because of "political interference by this administration in the wildlife commission." Then, while arguing for an accelerated timeline, Commissioner Le Coq expressly raised the approaching change in administration and the possibility that commissioners could "flop seats" as a reason to

move the issue forward while he would still have the opportunity to vote, after he had already stated the outcome he wanted.

A change in administration is not a reason to rush a public process so a particular commissioner can vote before he expects he will lose his seat.

All of this makes the September 30 decision even more important to understand. Who made it? What role, if any, did the Governor's Office or the Department of Natural Resources play? What did CPW's professional staff recommend? What changed that justified suspending the framework during the worst depredation we have experienced since reintroduction began? Under what statutory or administrative authority was the directive suspended? Did the Director exercise any authority of the Commission pursuant to C.R.S. § 33-9-103(3), and if so, when will that action be presented to the Commission for ratification? Is the suspension consistent with the Colorado Wolf Restoration and Management Plan adopted by the Commission, including its impact-based management framework and its express recognition that lethal take may be necessary to reduce livestock depredation?

The people of Colorado should not need a public records request to find out who made a government decision and why.

We expect answers from the State. We expect a clear and predictable framework for chronic depredation, meaningful stakeholder engagement before decisions are made, and an actual management response when repeated depredation continues despite appropriate nonlethal measures.

But we are no longer willing to rely on the State to do the right thing.

Governor Polis, this is the legacy your administration is leaving behind in rural Colorado. For 8 years, rural communities have watched the State seize more control over matters fundamental to our economies and our way of life while increasingly dismissing the knowledge, experience, and authority of the communities themselves. Your administration has governed as though rural Colorado cannot be trusted to understand its own communities, manage its own affairs, or know what is best for the people who live here. Rather than work with us as partners, your administration has increasingly dictated the outcome and expected rural Colorado to fall in line. We have repeatedly tried to work with your administration. Too often, we have been dismissed, overruled, or simply ignored.

The damage is bigger than any single policy or decision. Your administration has fundamentally changed the relationship between rural Colorado and its State government. You have broken trust that took generations to build and left rural communities with little reason to believe their participation will matter when the Governor who would be king has already decided what he wants. **That damage will outlast your administration.**

The handling of wolf management did not create that distrust. It is one more example of why it exists.

AGNC will pursue the avenues available to us and support our member counties as they determine how to exercise the authorities available to them. We will engage the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding Colorado's implementation of Section 10(j), CPW's responsibilities under the December 12, 2023 Memorandum of Agreement, and the federal oversight provided for in that agreement. We will further engage USDA APHIS Wildlife Services regarding expanded use of its services in our counties and opportunities to strengthen its role in addressing wolf-livestock conflict. We will seek congressional oversight. We will also identify the statutory powers and other remedies available to our member counties so each elected governing body can determine what action is appropriate. We will preserve the record, and if that record gives us reason to pursue further action within federal jurisdiction, we will.

Our communities will not go unheard simply because the State has chosen not to listen.

On behalf of the members of the Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado,

Cody Davis
AGNC Chair
Mesa County Commissioner

Doug Overton
AGNC Vice-Chair
Rio Blanco County Commissioner

cc:

Brian Nesvik, Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Sallie Clark, Colorado State Director, USDA Rural Development

Representative Jeff Hurd, CD-3
Representative Lauren Boebert, CD-4
Representative Jeff Crank, CD-5
Representative Gabe Evans, CD-8
Representative Harriet Hageman, WY-AL

Senator Mike Lee, Utah

Representative Meghan Lukens, HD-26
Representative Matt Soper, HD-54
Representative Rick Taggart, HD-55
Senator Dylan Roberts, SD-8
Senator Janice Rich, SD-7
Senator Marc Catlin, SD-5