



February 5, 2024

Senator Dylan Roberts, Chair
Senate Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee
Colorado State Senate
200 East Colfax Avenue
Denver, CO 80203

Dear Chair Roberts,

The Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado (AGNC) is the council of governments for Colorado Planning and Management Region 11, representing Garfield, Mesa, Moffat, and Rio Blanco Counties and all the municipalities therein. AGNC has associate members in Delta, Grand, and Montrose Counties. The organization also serves as the Northwest Colorado Enterprise Zone Administrator for eight (8) counties and the Economic Development District for five (5) counties. We write to express our deep concerns regarding the upcoming appointments to the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission (CPW). These appointments, scheduled for confirmation by your esteemed committee, have raised serious issues concerning conflicts of interest and a distinct lack of relevant experience. As staunch advocates for responsible governance and the protection of our valued public lands, we urge you to scrutinize these appointments closely, as they could have adverse consequences for the well-being of Northwest Colorado.

Our region, known for its rich ranching heritage and diverse natural landscapes, has been significantly impacted by CPW's decisions, especially the implementation of the controversial wolf reintroduction. CPW refused to allow for a local elected official working group to keep local electeds informed and involved in the process of releasing this apex predator onto the lands where they are held accountable for the safety of their citizens. Additionally, CPW entangled AGNC into an investigation regarding former Northwest Regional Manager JT Romatzke, making various false claims in the media about the organization and our intentions. These allegations were not found to be legitimate, as they were absurd, but no retraction of those claims against AGNC have been made. AGNC's membership is made up of counties and municipalities in Northwest Colorado with a board of local county commissioners and local city/town council representatives – the organization is a reflection of our members. These efforts resulted in a release of known, problem wolves in a predominantly ranching area, without adequate consultation and consideration of the local community's needs, that has not only disrupted our local communities but also eroded trust in CPW.

Given these dynamics, it's paramount that the CPW Commission appointments be individuals who can navigate these complex issues with a balanced approach, respecting both the ecological and economic realities of our region. Appointing commissioners with potential conflicts of interest or a narrow focus on wildlife conservation without consideration of broader land use and economic impacts could exacerbate existing tensions and further erode trust in CPW. Therefore, we would like to express our concerns regarding the following appointees:

Jack Murphy: Appointed to represent Outdoor Recreation and Parks Utilization. While Mr. Murphy's dedication to wildlife preservation is admirable, his qualifications for this position are questionable. His background in wildlife advocacy and humane trapping does not align with the requirements of managing parks and outdoor recreation areas effectively.

Gary Skiba: Appointed to represent Sportspersons as a West Slope representative. Mr. Skiba's extensive career as a wildlife biologist is impressive, but his vocal support for the controversial wolf reintroduction in the state raises concerns. This support not only creates a potential conflict of interest but also calls into question his impartiality in decision-making.

Jess Beaulieu: Appointed to represent Outdoor Recreation and Parks Utilization. While Ms. Beaulieu's legal expertise is noteworthy, her lack of direct experience in parks management and her advocacy for a "pro-animal social change agenda" raise doubts about her ability to fairly represent the diverse interests of Northwest Colorado.

While we acknowledge the commendable backgrounds of the appointees in wildlife advocacy and conservation, their experiences seem to be narrowly focused on wildlife protection, with less emphasis on the broader aspects of land management and outdoor recreation. This raises several critical issues:

1. **Lack of Parks Experience:** The appointees predominantly represent wildlife conservation perspectives. Their lack of experience in managing parks and outdoor recreation is concerning, as it could lead to decisions that do not fully consider the multifaceted nature of land use. Our region relies heavily on economic activities like hunting and fishing, and it's essential that these aspects are not overlooked.
2. **Potential Bias Towards Preservation:** Given their strong backgrounds in wildlife advocacy, there's apprehension that these appointees might prioritize preservation over other uses of public lands. Public lands are meant for multiple purposes, and a balanced approach to management is crucial for meeting the diverse needs of our communities.
3. **Collaboration and Representation of Diverse Interests:** Effective management of public lands requires collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, including local governments, hunters, anglers, and conservationists. It's critical that the CPW Commission can engage constructively with various perspectives, especially those that may differ from a conservation- or preservation-focused viewpoint.
4. **Economic and Community Impact:** The decisions made by the CPW Commission directly affect the economies and communities in our region. Therefore, it's imperative that Commission members have a comprehensive understanding of and respect for the economic implications of land management decisions.

These conflicts of interest are not hypothetical; they are glaring and demand attention. Public officials must adhere to the principle that they should not only avoid actual conflicts of interest but also the appearance of conflicts. The affiliations and backgrounds of these nominees could potentially compromise their ability to make impartial decisions that consider the intricate balance of land use, economic activities, and wildlife conservation in our region.

Let us emphasize the significance of the CPW-managed lands in Northwest Colorado. These lands are not just empty spaces; they are central to our communities. They serve as the backdrop

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for our culture and economy. Consider the economic impact of hunting alone. In our region, hunting is not just a pastime; it is a cornerstone of our heritage and a significant economic driver. The revenue generated from hunting licenses and associated expenditures sustains both CPW's funding and the local economies in our region. Prioritizing conservation over other vital land uses could jeopardize our local economies and our way of life.

Furthermore, these lands hold immense cultural and recreational value. They are more than just locations for outdoor activities; they are integral to our identity and well-being. Our communities depend on these lands for cultural enrichment, physical and mental health, and educational opportunities. They serve as natural classrooms that allow our residents, particularly our younger generation, to connect with nature and develop a sense of responsibility toward the environment.

The recent wolf reintroduction carried out by CPW has stirred controversy, not only among our residents but also within the CPW Commission itself. This glaring disconnect has led to a breach of trust between CPW and rural communities, particularly since local officials and even some CPW staff were not privy to information regarding the wolf releases. The wolf reintroduction underscores a critical need for CPW commissioners who can foster open, honest communication and collaborate effectively with local governments and communities.

In light of these concerns, and the recent embarrassment and backlash from the wolf release incident, we urge the Committee to critically assess the suitability of the current nominees for their roles in the CPW Commission. It's essential for the future of our region that the Commission is composed of individuals who possess a holistic understanding of the varied uses and significance of our public lands and who can judiciously balance the competing interests at play.

The CPW needs to rebuild trust and repair its image following the controversial decisions it has made. This requires commissioners who are knowledgeable, skilled in transparent communication, and empathetic to the concerns of all affected parties, ensuring a balanced and inclusive approach to managing our cherished natural resources.

Thank you for considering our concerns. We trust that the Committee will make decisions that reflect the diverse needs and values of Northwest Colorado.

Sincerely,



Cody Davis
Chairman



Chris Nichols
Vice-Chairman