



March 13, 2026

Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission
6060 Broadway
Denver, CO 80216

Re: March 4–5, 2026 Meeting – Open Meetings Law Violations and the Real Cost to Trust in Colorado

Commissioners:

The Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado (AGNC), the Council of Governments for Region 11, writes to put on the record that what occurred at your March 4–5 meeting on the furbearer petition was not simply “inelegant,” as Commissioner Tutchtton described it. It was the latest example of a pattern, serious violations of Colorado’s Open Meetings Law, that is burning bridges with landowners, county governments, and the hunters and anglers who pay for CPW’s work.

AGNC and our member counties were generally opposed to the fur-sales petition based on the same science your own staff and Director relied on: there was no demonstrated conservation need. This letter is not about relitigating that science or the policy outcome. It is about whether this Commission can conduct a meeting that is lawful, intelligible, and fair—following Colorado law and your own rules. We categorically reject the March 5 suggestion that people are merely “upset” about the result and that everyone “knows what we voted on.”

Colorado’s Open Meetings Law is plain: the formation of public policy is public business and may not be conducted in secret. Your posted agenda framed a straightforward yes-or-no decision on the Director’s written recommendation. Instead, Commissioner Beaulieu offered a motion to approve the “spirit of the petition” with undefined “exceptions.” That choice is even more troubling given that Commissioner Beaulieu is a former employee of the Center for Biological Diversity, the organization that brought the fur-sales petition; by neither disclosing that relationship nor recusing, and then offering the motion, she created an avoidable appearance that the Commission was advancing her former employer’s agenda rather than exercising independent judgment. The motion bore little resemblance to the noticed action, and its meaning was so unclear that commissioners and staff immediately struggled on the record to explain what had been adopted and what it did.

On March 5, while that confusion persisted, the Commission recessed during the furbearer item, left the public record, replayed the March 4 audio, and then returned to announce that the action was clear and that you would move on. Clarifying the substance of a central decision off-record and then presenting that private understanding back to the public as final is not a minor process flaw; it is exactly the kind of conduct the Open Meetings Law is meant to prevent.

Commissioner Tutchton characterized the situation this way: “I would concede yesterday (March 4) was inelegant... I do think people know what we voted on... they’re upset, but I don’t think it’s because they don’t know what we did. I think we essentially granted the petition and initiated rulemaking,” with the Chair indicating agreement. Phrases like “essentially” and “spirit of the petition” are not operative legal standards. For the county officials, landowners, and sportsmen who watched the confusion unfold, the claim that “people know what we voted on” did not address the Open Meetings violation; it dismissed their good-faith concern that the Commission did not, in fact, take a clear, noticed vote. That dismissal was, frankly, offensive.

Commissioners Beaulieu and Murphy recently settled an Open Meetings Law lawsuit brought by Sportsmen’s Alliance Foundation and Safari Club International over serial back-channel communications and joint advocacy while relevant business was before the Commission. That case ended with a payment by the state, mandatory Open Meetings training, and public assurances that the Commission would comply going forward. The March 4–5 proceedings demonstrate those assurances have not been honored. From our vantage point, this begins to look like lawfare: the Commission can treat repeat Open Meetings problems as a cost of doing ideological business, because its legal fees and settlements are paid out of state funds—including license and tag revenues from the very hunters and anglers who are being shut out of lawful, transparent decision-making.

Your own counsel repeatedly assured you that the vague motion, the evident confusion, and the off-record repair were “legally fine” and equivalent to granting the petition and initiating rulemaking. It raises serious questions about whether anyone advising this Commission treats Colorado’s Open Meetings requirements as binding law rather than as obstacles to be worked around.

The Commission describes itself as “science-based,” yet it set aside a written recommendation that found no conservation need and, as Commissioner Tutchton explained, voted on personal “values” about commerce in wildlife. When personal ideology and outside pressure override agency expertise, staff recommendations, state law, and basic openness, the result is not science-based wildlife management.

The way the Commission treated the public must be addressed. On March 4, individual comments were limited to one minute. Commissioner May requested roughly 20 additional minutes so the 16 remaining speakers, many who had driven hours, could be heard; the Commission refused. Some people who signed up to speak were not even on the list used in the room. Opponents of the fur-sales petition clearly outnumbered supporters in the room, yet the Commission spoke as if they were only considering the supporters concerns. On March 5, you took items out of the posted order and reshuffled public comment in ways that undercut the expectations you set for when and how people could be heard. For county commissioners and residents who left work, families, and ranches to participate, that experience did not feel like

meaningful public engagement; it felt like a procedural box you were required to check after the essential decisions had already been made.

CPW staff presented the draft 10-year strategic plan on March 4 and emphasized five core values: integrity, stewardship, transparency, communication, and trust—“upholding accountability and building strong relationships with the public and our partners.” By the end of that same meeting, the Commission had undercut *every single one*:

- **integrity**, by discarding staff science and the Director’s recommendation without contrary biological evidence;
- **stewardship**, by allowing short-term ideological pressure to override long-term, evidence-based management;
- **transparency and communication**, by adopting a vague, improvised motion that no one could clearly explain and then telling the public after the fact that you had “essentially” granted the petition and begun rulemaking; and
- **trust**, by disregarding landowners, local elected officials, and CPW staff.

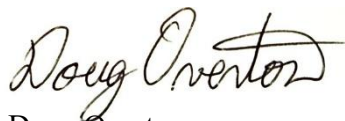
AGNC is not asking for courtesy and we will not pretend the March 4–5 debacle can be excused as “inelegant”. We are demanding that the Commission cure this. That requires acknowledging, on the record, that the March 4–5 handling of the fur-sales petition violated Colorado’s Open Meetings Law and your own standards for clear, noticed action, and taking concrete corrective steps, including revisiting and re-taking the fur-sales petition action in a properly noticed, plainly stated, on-the-record vote, and committing that future business will be conducted on clear notice, clear motions, and in full public view.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife is a cornerstone institution in Colorado, and rural communities have worked with your officers and biologists across many generations to care for the state’s land and wildlife. CPW’s field staff and biologists are relied on and respected in our towns, woven into daily life as neighbors, partners, and trusted professionals in that shared work. That is precisely why this Commission’s repeated disregard for clear rules, staff expertise, and lawful, transparent process is untenable: it is actively undermining the trust and partnership that CPW and rural Colorado have spent generations building, and that damage will outlast any of your individual terms.

In service to the communities we represent,



Cody Davis
AGNC Chair
Mesa County Commissioner



Doug Overton
AGNC Vice-Chair
Rio Blanco County Commissioner