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Letter: Cattlemen object to fast-tracking wolf reintroduction process

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Once again, out-of-state special interests have funded a ballot initiative — Proposition 114: wolf introduction — to manage wildlife that is neither scientific nor in the best interest of wildlife or the citizens of Colorado. The spring bear hunt ballot measure, passed in the 1980s, resulted in disastrous consequences for the bears and wildlife managers. We risk a similar outcome with Proposition 114.

It is concerning to hear wildlife commission members advocating to fast-track wolf introduction, foregoing the adequate time needed to develop a comprehensive science-based management plan. Proposition 114 requires Colorado Parks and Wildlife to “takes steps necessary to begin reintroduction of gray wolves by Dec. 31, 2023.”

Cattlemen here and statewide strongly object to any efforts to short-circuit or abandon the planning provided by Proposition 114 that interferes with public input, transparency and jeopardizes the safety of our communities and economies.

Our Routt County voters were opposed to the introduction of wolves — 66% against and 34% in support. Routt Cattlemen are in support of the Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado’s submission of a Colorado Open Records Act request to determine if CPW and the Governor’s Office are working to accelerate or bypass the development of this important plan and circumvent public and stakeholder input.

Proposition 114, passed by a narrow less than 2% margin in November, states the General Assembly, “shall make such appropriations as are necessary to fund the programs authorized and obligations, including fair compensation for livestock losses ... but cannot be paid from moneys in the wildlife cash fund.” Our state budget is already strained. It’s going to take a considerable amount of time to identify and allocate funding to pay for the implementation of wolf management. Wolves have been naturally migrating into Colorado for some time, but now we will spend millions of dollars at the expense of education, transportation, health care and many other more vital state priorities.

Hunting licenses substantially support the entire wildlife programs for the state, including the Endangered Species Fund. Each wolf will take approximately 22 ungulates each year just to survive, which could lead to radical reductions in available funds for all wildlife programs.

Ranchers, recreationalists and all who enjoy Routt’s wilderness need time to plan for wolf impacts. The ballot measure calls for statewide hearings to gather information — scientific, economic and social — needed to develop a plan for reintroduction.

The Cattlemen join elected officials across Colorado calling on the governor, his administration and CPW to engage in a robust, transparent and effective discussion through public hearings across the state to develop a plan that will accomplish the directives of Proposition 114.

Justin Warren, chair of Routt County Cattlemen

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Doug Monger, former Routt County commissioner