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## **OPINION: Commissioners have concerns with wolf reintroduction**

Guest Column

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Keith Caddy, Sue Hansen and Roger Rash

Once again, out-of-state special interests have funded a ballot initiative (Proposition 114-wolf introduction) to manage wildlife in a manner that is neither scientific nor in the best interest of wildlife or the citizens of Colorado. As you may recall the spring bear hunt ballot measure has resulted in disastrous consequences for the bears, as well as the wildlife experts that manage bears, the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW).

Now, we are doing it all over again with wolves. It creates grave concerns when we hear wildlife commission members advocating to fast-track wolf introduction (releasing wolves in 2021); foregoing adequate time to develop a comprehensive management plan. Proposition 114 requires CPW to “take steps necessary to begin reintroduction of gray wolves by Dec. 31, 2023.”

Our county strongly objects to any efforts to short-circuit or abandon the planning window provided by Prop 114 that interferes with public input, transparency, and that jeopardizes the safety of our communities and economies.

Montrose County is in support of the Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado (AGNC) submission of a Colorado Open Records Act (CORA) request to determine if, indeed, CPW and the Governor's office are working to accelerate the development of a plan and limit public and stakeholder input on this important matter.

Proposition 114, requiring the reintroduction of gray wolves on designated lands in Colorado WEST of the continental divide, passed by a narrow ;2% margin in November.

It is not hard for urban voters to support such a measure when it doesn't impact them. The measure 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..." Because our state budget is already strained, it is going to take a considerable amount of time to identify and allocate funding to pay for the implementation and ongoing costs of wolf management.

Wolves have been naturally migrating into Colorado for some time, but now we will spend millions of dollars on an unnecessary recovery program at the expense of education, transportation, health care and any number of State priorities.

Hunting licenses, particularly in the northwest portion of the state, substantially support the entire wildlife program for the State. Each wolf will take approximately 22 ungulates each year just to survive which could lead to radical reductions in hunting licenses, ergo radical reductions

in available funds for all wildlife programs.

As elected officials, we are charged with the health, safety, and welfare of our constituents as well as visitors to our communities. The language passed by voters in Proposition 114 indicates a lengthy planning period to address concerns. The ballot measure calls for statewide hearings to gather information needed to develop a plan for reintroduction. Information to be gathered includes scientific, economic, and social considerations as stated in the ballot language.

We call 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 directive of Proposition 114. This planning process should not be rushed.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Colorado's wildlife specialists, should thoughtfully, and inclusively, lead this planning effort as they led the development of the current wolf migration plan. We ask our citizens to join us in demanding an open and robust process providing the opportunity to address the concerns this initiative invokes. Our residents voted against this measure and as stakeholders as well as the people in Colorado most directly impacted by wolf introductions, we should be very involved in the development of a plan that will have far reaching and long-lasting consequences to our citizens, communities, wildlife, and economies.

### **Montrose County Board of Commissioners**

*Keith Caddy, Chair District 1*

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