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Colorado Chapter

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March 14th, 2022

Dear Governor Polis, Senators and Representatives of the State of Colorado,

Considering the ongoing controversy that has erupted over gray wolves currently near the town of Walden, Colorado, and the additional wolves which will be released by the end of 2023 pursuant to Colorado Revised Statutes 33-2-105.8, I am writing this letter to inform you of a method that will allow livestock and wolves to share the lands in Colorado in a way that supports both. This can be done by creating safe boundaries that protect livestock yet allows for wolves to traverse the countryside. This would be based on non-lethal conflict avoidance as documented by best available scientific information.

As an example of this approach, the Snow Leopard Trust in Central Asia has been operating a successful non-lethal conflict avoidance "stewardship" program for more than twenty years. The Trust has partnered with livestock producers using methods that could be incorporated with the wolf reintroduction program in Colorado. The Trust developed their program through what it terms the "PARTNERS" Principles. "PARTNERS" is an acronym that stands for Presence, Aptness, Respect, Transparency, Negotiation, Empathy, Responsiveness, and Strategic Support. The livestock producers in snow leopard habitat are now good stewards of the land in a way that protects their herds while also allowing snow leopards to remain in their habitat.

One way to incorporate a successful stewardship program in Colorado would be to establish a livestock protection program where an exclusive wildlife zone would be created for the wolves once they are released into the wild. These locations would be identified as those locations where humans and livestock rarely interact. Potential locations are sites such as the Maroon Bells, Grand Mesa, the Flat Tops, the San Juans, and Zapata Ranch. Part of the relocation would be through working with current and expired BLM and National Forest leases to identify who may be willing to voluntarily give up their grazing leases to open the wilderness for the wolves and other native wildlife. Wild native prey like deer and elk could be relocated and protected in these areas. Increased density of wild prey would assist with livestock protection by providing a natural food alternative.

Another strategy could increase state revenue to support livestock protection by creating ecotourism locations along the western slope where tourists could observe wolves in the wild. Yellowstone National Park is highly successful with receiving ecotourism funds. In Colorado, one of the observation points could also be a mini-ranch that would show visitors the predator prevention techniques available to ranchers like range riders, fladry, carcass removal, guard animals, flashing lights, and corrals. The mini-ranch could also have replacement animals for livestock lost to predation. Ecotourism dollars would make this a sustainable program.

In addition to the allocation of state funding, other funding sources could come from GoCo Lottery funds to establish overlooks at the mini-ranch, philanthropists' seed money, tax deductible donations, and NGO funding. Once established, a non-profit and a trust could be created to ensure sustainability of the program.

Even more revenue could be created through a state operated livestock predator insurance program. With over 20,000 livestock producers in the state, if each one was to contribute \$100 to initiate this program, then \$2,000,000 would be realized from the outset. Future premiums could be reduced by incentivizing producers to incorporate predator prevention techniques as mentioned above. Enhanced livestock protection further reduces the risk of a predator attack.

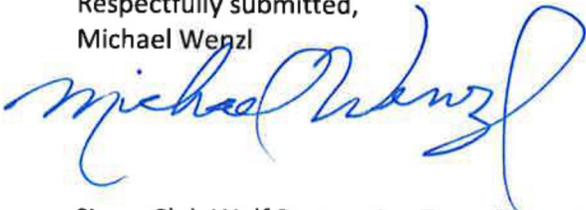
A high school grant program could be established with any surplus funds. These programs would be based on non-lethal conflict avoidance as documented by best science. This money would support local 4-H projects, local Future Farmers of America, and local conservation internships. Any remaining funds could be distributed as deemed necessary in support of livestock protection

Groceries are now selling "predator friendly meat." This tells the consumer that the meat they are buying came from an environment where the producer has an established livestock protection program which allows for predators to safely cross the property without harm to the livestock or to the predator. Producers are reveling in this program as they are receiving a higher price per pound when selling their livestock.

On an unfortunate note, the wolf reintroduction program established by the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commissioners is proving to be biased against a non-lethal reintroduction management plan. The Commissioners established the Stakeholders Advisory Group (SAG) early in 2021, to seek public comment for the best way to assist with the reintroduction. In brief, SAG has made it difficult for the public to provide comments. Members of the public are given only three minutes to speak, in two half hour sessions, meaning only about ten people can be heard at each session. Additionally, their comments are not recorded, but are only briefly and often inaccurately summarized. As a result, much of the public input is lost. To make matters worse, Bob Chastain, a SAG member and CEO of the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, recently sent an email to the other SAG members describing how he mutes public input in support of wolves, as he feels all of their input is the same information. This is reprehensible and shows the depth of the bias that SAG members employ.

To summarize, the purpose of this letter is to establish a program which allows livestock and wolves to share the lands in Colorado in a way that supports both. This can be done by creating safe boundaries that protects livestock yet allows for wolves to traverse the countryside. This would also be based on non-lethal conflict avoidance as documented by best science. An established stewardship program made up of livestock producers is essential to be successful. All that is needed is the will to do it.

Respectfully submitted,
Michael Wenzl



Sierra Club Wolf Restoration Team Representative
Sangre de Cristo Group