

# SPECIAL REPORT: WOLVES

## STATE OF EMERGENCY

*Depredations and dangers explode in states where wolves are managed more like pets than apex predators. By Marjorie Haun*



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GRAPHIC IMAGE BY MARJORIE HAUN

Show me a self-replicating biological weapon that is intelligent, highly adaptable, stealthy, vicious and effective at killing.

Show me a biological weapon that was nearly eradicated from the landscape but has been brought back by a pseudo-religious movement that worships its “beauty” and “wildness.”

Show me a biological weapon with a federal “endangered” status.

Show me a biological weapon with legal protections in many states where, if one attempts to defend life or property against it, they may be persecuted, prosecuted and imprisoned.

Show me a biological weapon wiping out wild game species, large and small, which stalks and kills livestock in increasing numbers, and has grown bold in the presence of human habitations.

Show me a biological weapon introduced into settled landscapes for the unspoken purpose of driving ranchers and big game hunters off public lands, and I will show you a wolf.

### States of Emergency

At least seven counties in three states have declared states of emergency where wolf populations are mushrooming in both numbers

and range. These counties are home to rural communities, largely dependent on livestock, hunting or both. Because they are located in “blue” states, these counties have little recourse where both state and federal constraints prevent wildlife agencies and citizens



JESSICA VIGIL, DIXIE VALLEY RANCH

*Young livestock suffer worst, and wolves will often take calves during the very process of birth.*

*ABOVE: Most western states have populations of gray wolves due to natural migrations or artificial introductions. Counties in the “blue” states of California, Oregon and New Mexico have declared states of emergency due to dramatic upticks in depredations and direct threats to humans.*

alike from managing the predators with little other than dubious nonlethal measures.

### Oregon

In February 2025, Lake County declared a state of emergency due to repeated livestock depredations by a single gray wolf. This wolf—OR158—was responsible for five con-

firmed calf kills and three probable kills in less than 10 days in Lake County alone. OR158 has a history of depredations across multiple counties, including Crook, Harney and Klamath, and showed no fear of drones or other nonlethal deterrents.

Ranchers, including Tom and Elise Flynn, reported significant losses, and the wolf’s boldness and broad range have alarmed locals. Elise Flynn says: “Our family, as well as our neighbors, have been living a nightmare for the last two weeks. OR158, has terrorized numerous families. We have a family-run cattle ranch outside of Lakeview. My husband and father-in-law run the family ranch, and I’m a veterinarian and have a clinic on the same property. On January 30, my husband went to feed the cowherd and saw fresh and obvious wolf tracks in the road to the feed ground. As he arrived, he found the wolf, sure enough, near a freshly killed calf and bawling mother cow. As he drove closer in the tractor, the wolf never ran off and wasn’t afraid. Tom got within 50 yards of the wolf and realizing it was collared, he called the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife to ask permission to shoot it—assuming permission would be granted due to the obvious evidence of predation.”

Instead of giving the go-ahead to shoot, ODFW warned that doing so could result in a

long prison sentence, and the agency suggested the Flynns try to scare it away instead. “It has killed at least eight calves, but presumably more at this point,” Elise says. “My husband came upon it another time as it was trying to attack a calf while the mother cow was doing her best to defend her newborn. Tom was able to run the wolf off with gunshots, but again it didn’t run away. Its collar pinged and we have its tracks within 100 yards of our home and veterinary clinic.”

Despite OR158’s history of depredation and audacity, the Flynns are helpless to intercede. “Our hands are tied by the law and nobody seems to be able to do anything to help,” says Elise. “Our hearts ache for the suffering of the ones it kills, and for the mothers that have to watch the slaughter in fear and defeat. And our heads spin—desperate to stop the devastation but not able to do anything of real significance. This wolf is breaking us physically, mentally and emotionally. It’s hard enough keeping animals alive in severe winter conditions—adding a predatory wolf isn’t a fair game to our animals or us. I also fear for my children’s safety—our home used to be a safe place and they had freedom to explore outside. How long will they have to stay in the house and be afraid of their own backyard? How long before it brings a mate here and starts a pack that is taught to prey on livestock and not be afraid of people? How long before it starts harming our horses and dogs and the animals here for veterinary care?”

### Northern California

On March 13, 2025, the Modoc County Board of Supervisors declared a local emergency in response to burgeoning wolf depredations, citing a California Department of Fish & Wildlife report documenting 19 cattle deaths between October and December 2024 across several counties, including theirs. In a letter to CDFW, Sheriff Tex Dowdy states: “The presence of wolves in Modoc County that prey on cattle significantly increases the likelihood of human contact. While infrequent, documented instances exist of wolves attacking humans. At present, no procedure exists for a local law enforcement agency to remove or take wolves deemed an ‘imminent’ threat to human health or safety.... A significant number of livestock producers and their ranch workers reside on these properties, and a considerable proportion of them have young children who frequently engage with cattle and pets on the ranches.”

Following Modoc’s lead, Sierra County declared a state of emergency due to the regional uptick in wolf incidents, and on April 15, 2025, Plumas County considered an emergency resolution due to a “significant threat” to public safety and livestock from gray wolves, particularly the Lassen Pack, first identified in 2017. Ranchers reported three confirmed depredations in March 2025, the highest monthly total on record, and at least four kills in January and February, with three additional possible kills under investigation.

Jessica Vigil manages Lassen County’s Dixie Valley Ranch, a remote 12,000-acre spread 45 minutes outside McArthur. She is painfully familiar with wolf depredations in the region. “Last fall we had five yearlings killed within a month,” Jessica says. “The most recent kill was a set of twins and it was actually

**“Our family as well as our neighbors, have been living a nightmare.”**



COURTESY JESSICA VIGIL



COURTESY MEGAN RICHARDSON

*AT TOP: Jessica Vigil attends a public meeting with CDFW addressing the surge in livestock depredation in Lassen and nearby counties. BELOW: Megan Richardson gives scale to a wolf track found near a freshly killed cow on her family-owned Slash Ranch.*

the day I had a meeting with CDFW and the local sheriff. Unfortunately, we didn’t find it in time to say, ‘Hey, this is happening right under your noses.’”

Jessica says they can’t haze the wolves, so they’re not able to condition them to avoid humans. “CDPW tells us the wolves came down from Oregon naturally, but they seem used to human presence. We have a dogfood bin the wolves got into and it seems strange that a predator like that would know the smell

of dog food and go after it. We suspect that the agencies protecting these animals may also be feeding them.”

Like other ranchers, Jessica fears the impact of wolves on livestock will go far beyond depredation. “Not long ago in Modoc County, the Forest Service announced they might limit grazing permissions if there is a den, or as they call it a ‘rendezvous site’ on a certain permit. I submitted a letter explaining that wolves’ lives are not threatened by cattle—quite the opposite—and it makes no sense to limit grazing. Wildfires in California are terrible. Without grazing we can’t do anything to mitigate wildfires.”

Suffering similar depredations on livestock, threats to public safety and a lack of reasonable tools to manage growing wolf populations, Shasta County Board of Supervisors called a state of emergency on May 13, 2025. A recent study conducted by the University of California, Davis, revealed that, aside from depredation, the indirect cost to ranchers per wolf can range from \$69,000 to \$162,000 due to reduced growth and fewer pregnancies.

### Catron County, New Mexico

Catron County borders Arizona and has been at odds with Mexican wolf reintroductions since the 1990s. Already strained by drought, ranchers argue that wolves threaten their livelihoods. Compensation programs are difficult to access due to an extremely high burden of proof in confirming wolf kills.

On April 3, 2025, Catron County commissioners unanimously declared a state of emergency due to Mexican gray wolves killing livestock and pets and showing little fear of humans. Ranchers and locals reported wolves approaching homes and attacking animals near populated areas, including a wolf that approached a man within two feet and another standing near the front door of a 92-year-old resident.

Nonlethal methods like hazing and guard dogs are ineffective. Folks have expressed fear for their safety, and the sheriff went so far as to post deputies near schools to protect children from wandering wolves. The problem is not new. In 2013 it was widely reported that Catron County had erected a number of “wolf cages” at bus stops in which children could safely wait to be picked up. At that time the estimated number of Mexican gray wolves in New Mexico was 75. Today that number is nearing 300.

Rancher and Catron County Commis-



State	Introduction/ Dispersal Year	Estimated Cattle Losses using the 1:6 ratio	Time Period
Washington	Early 2000s	780	2008-2025
Oregon	1999	4,680	1999-2025
California	2011	420	2011-2025
Idaho	1995	7,200	1995-2025
Wyoming	1995	5,400	1995-2025
Montana	1986	9,360	1986-2025
Colorado	2023	250	2023-2025
New Mexico	1998	8,100	1998-2025
Arizona	1998	6,480	1998-2025

## 1:6 Ratio

In 1985 a study conducted by R.R. Bjorge and J.R. Gunson, titled “Evaluation of Wolf Control to Reduce Cattle Predation in Alberta” was published in the *Journal of Wildlife Management* (Vol. 49, No. 1, 1985). The study examined wolf depredation on cattle in this Canadian province, focusing on public grazing lands. By analyzing confirmed kills (those with physical evidence like bite marks or hemorrhaging) and estimating unconfirmed losses (based on missing livestock, rancher reports and ecological factors), the researchers estimated that for every confirmed wolf kill, approximately six additional kills go undetected.—MH

sioner, Audrey McQueen, helped craft the emergency resolution, and she brings a poignant perspective: “My 16-year-old daughter had a phenomenal little six-year-old mare named Pickles that she used for high school rodeo. One evening last November, Pickles was out with the other horses in the pasture and the next morning when the ranch hand went out, Pickles was lying there dead. There were no visible bite marks. The investigators came out and shaved her down and she had numerous wolf bites which measured up to those of a Mexican gray wolf. She also had deep tissue hemorrhaging in the throat. That’s how they proved she was killed by wolves, and was not just being scavenged on like the wolf advocates will tell you. The hemorrhaging caused her to die a horrible death.”

But having a confirmed wolf kill is no guarantee of fair compensation from the state. Audrey explains: “Pickles was a confirmed wolf kill, and she was worth well over \$20,000. I told them if they would give me \$15,000, I would take the loss. The wolf board is now considering \$12,000 for a prized barrel horse, which is a slap in the face.”

Pickles was not the first. “In 2019 my daughter had a little horse named Splash that was attacked right in the headquarters pasture. We got up that morning and the horse had been bit everywhere. I ran it to the vet and we had a couple thousand dollars into it. It lived about a month but it had so much



### NEW STUDY FINDS

- One wolf can cause between \$69k and \$162k in direct and indirect losses.
- Total indirect losses range from \$1.4 million to \$3.4 million.
- 72% of wolf scat samples tested contained cattle DNA.
- Hair cortisol levels were elevated in cattle, indicating an increase in stress.

infection she eventually died.” She continues: “People’s dogs are getting eaten off their front porches. Dogs are our best friends, so we’re trying to come up with a county ordinance to address the issue of wolves taking pets.”

As a single mom and rancher, Audrey is also struggling against the depredation of her herd. “From January first until now, I’ve got seven confirmed wolf kills. They’ve killed six cows that were all bred. They ripped the calf out on one that we were able to confirm. The other calves were just gone...eaten. So, all I will get paid on is that one cow. I’m not going to get paid on the calf they ate. I won’t get paid on the calves she would have had. It’s un-American what they’re doing to us.”

Immediately north of Catron County is Cibola County. Keri Garcia is a young but very experienced ranch manager who runs a historic ranch with the help of her husband and three-year-old daughter. Keri says: “We have been told that the male wolf that has killed some of our cows was the same one that was on Audrey McQueen’s place and killed her barrel horse. He’s a known killer that had multiple kills on his record before he came up here.”

Keri has witnessed changes in the behavior of cows. “We bought a group of cows out of Quemado that had been exposed to wolves,” she explains. “The owner warned us not to have our dogs around them when they were calving because the cows have become

extremely aggressive. That helps keep their babies alive, but it can be dangerous because we use dogs to herd the cattle.”

The worst development for Keri is how close to home the problem has come: “The last four kills have been within 800 yards of my house. I was calving out my first calf heifers close to my house. The first three killed were heifers so they didn’t even get to experience motherhood for the first time. It’s a bad thing to have wolves coming this close to the house especially with my little daughter who likes to play outside.”

And now it appears that at least one wolf is denning on Keri’s ranch. “I got a text update from the Forest Service on May 14 saying the collared female that is denned on our northern pasture has found the food cache and is eating on it,” says Keri. “The next day, while driving around with

my husband and daughter I spotted something red at the base of a tree, hoping it was just one of our last cows calving. Seconds later, a bunch of birds flew up and my heart sank into my stomach because I knew it was something dead. We walked a hundred yards to see a big, beautiful December-born heifer with her rear end eaten apart. Her mother was standing on the opposite side of the fence, unable to help her calf, and most likely watched her get ripped apart while still alive.”

Megan Richardson is the owner of the historic Slash Ranch in southwestern New Mexico. She and her husband run the ranch along with their three boys ages 10, 12 and 13. Slash Ranch is ground zero for Mexican wolf introduction efforts. Federal and state agencies, often with wolf advocates in tow, come and go on her ranch as they please.

“We’ve seen a substantial increase in wolf activity in the last year,” she says, “and they bring new wolves to dump on our land pretty regularly, but we’re not allowed to be a part of that process. They come by once a week, and they have all these volunteers driving our ranch roads with their telemetry and GPS trying to track these wolves. They have a full-time biologist on their payroll. I’d like to see their budget and where they’re getting all this money.”

Unlike other wolf programs, the Mexican grays are not trapped and transported from other states, but are bred in captivity, raised in

cages and provided with food caches once they're released. Many come from the Sevilleta Wolf Management Facility near Socorro. "If these programs stopped breeding and feeding the wolves, they wouldn't survive," Megan says. "There's not enough wild prey to sustain this population naturally."

### Colorado's Woke Wolf Politics

Colorado's governor, Jared Polis, is married to Marlon Reis, a fervent animal rights activist. Beyond liberal politics-as-usual, this first couple have moved the state into realms of extremism. Since Polis took the helm, several citizen propositions and local ordinances touting animal rights have come down the pike, including Denver's fur ban, a ballot initiative that would define animal husbandry practices as sexual assault, a ban on mountain lion hunting, and animal confinement standards. Of these, only the wolf initiative and "cage-free eggs" legislation made it into law.

The wolf initiative passed with a less than a one-percent margin of victory, with the vast majority of "for" votes coming from the Boulder-Denver axis which lies east of the Continental Divide. Notably, one provision in the wolf program directs all wolf releases to occur west of the Continental Divide. This is a classic case of urban voters passing a proposal that will impact only rural counties.

Don Gittleson is living proof that Colorado's wolf introduction was unnecessary from the start. More than two years before the release of the first "ballot box biology" wolves, the predators were migrating from Wyoming onto his ranch. Beginning in December of 2021, a single wolf killed seven of Gittleson's cows and calves. During that time period a different wolf destroyed several cows, sheep and working dogs on neighboring ranches. Wolves were in the state well before Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW) released 10 Oregon wolves in Grand and Summit counties in December 2023, followed by the January 2025 release into Eagle and Pitkin counties of 15 wolves taken from British Columbia.

Having more experience with wolves than other Colorado ranchers, Gittleson's losses have decreased somewhat. Don says: "The state's deterrents are not really deterrents. The fladry [a fence-mounted wolf deterrent] will

work for only a short time. They're not useful for anything over 40 acres."

He describes his tactics: "I had two males and two females going over to the east side of my ranch. I made it seem like my place wasn't a good place to be. I set up a shooting range where I practice with my high-powered rifles. Then I started burning the old tires and used oil and wood in a pit. I would burn it in the evening when the wind was blowing in the direction the wolves were looking for a den. When I started burning stuff they would usu-

**Unfortunately, recent attempts to correct what some deem a biological wrong from the past has not produced a right, but another wrong of disastrous proportions.**

COURTESY JOSH WAMBOLDT



COURTESY SIERRA COUNTY SHERIFF



COURTESY JOSH WAMBOLDT

*FROM TOP: Josh Wamboldt leads elk hunters on an excursion near the epicenter of Colorado's wolf introduction efforts. ► Fladry marks the perimeter of a livestock pasture on the ranch managed by Keri Garcia in New Mexico. Fladry is generally ineffective after a few weeks as predators become inured to its presence. ► Remains of a cow elk killed by wolves on a homeowner's front porch.*

ally move off."

Managing cattle, however, has taken on an entirely different flavor. "Another thing that is going to be a problem with the ranchers is cows' behavior," Don says. "My first batch that got harassed by wolves were yearling heifers. We have trouble with them breeding back on time."

He goes on: "Those wolf-harassed cows are the hardest thing for us to deal with. I can work with them fine when they don't have a calf, but when they have a calf it's a whole different deal. Every one of these cows is aggressive, and if you turn your back and walk away, they will come after you and there's no bluff. Some of them would go after their own calf, and it would take us getting them into a chute so the calf could nurse and she would settle down. But then it would be the same thing all

over again the next year."

In an attempt to reduce wolf/livestock conflicts, Colorado recently initiated a program assigning 12 range riders to patrol cattle herds in eight western slope counties. The range riders can use only hazing and non-lethal deterrents to keep wolves off livestock.

Bonnie Brown-Eddy is the executive director of the Colorado Woolgrowers Association and familiar with the concept. "My inherent problem with the range rider program is that CPW and the wolf advocates are

overselling its efficacy," she says. "The chances of having a range rider at the right place at the right time are pretty low, especially when CPW refuses to be forthcoming with location data on the wolves. Most depredation typically occurs at night and that's not when range riders are out in the woods or pastures. The only advantage might be that they find a carcass sooner making it easier to prove depredation so you could get compensation."

Although sheep are easier prey than cattle, the large wool growing operations in Colorado employ hired hands to oversee their herds at all times. "The cattlemen are in a different boat than the woolgrowers because we've been herding sheep for a hundred years and there is always a hired hand out there with them," Bonnie says. "The cow-

boys can't afford to be out with their livestock on the range to that degree unless they're prepared for a huge additional expense."

Colorado's new wolf population is designated both nonessential and experimental, which under Section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act, gives CPW the option to use lethal force to remove killer wolves, but the governor has banned such measures. "Polis refuses to allow CPW to destroy depredating wolves," she adds, "and it's the farmers and ranchers who are left with the financial losses and burdens of trying to protect their livestock."

As the wolf footprint grows, the odds decrease of ranchers ever being compensated for their losses. Bonnie concludes: "Right now there's funding coming from CPW and the wolf NGOs for the range riders, but it's not



going to be enough, and I think we can expect that to dry up sooner than later. When the ballot measure passed in 2020 it was estimated the program would cost \$300,000 for the first year and \$500,000 for the second year, but by end the first year it was already up to \$4.8 million.”

Despite the expense, the plan has failed to protect ranchers. In September 2024 several Colorado livestock groups presented a petition to CPW asking for a pause in the release of additional wolves until the program is recalibrated to reality. CPW snubbed the petition and is set to continue releasing wolves through 2026.

Of efforts to halt or postpone further introductions, Don Gittleston says, “It’s too late. We have the wolves here and I bet we have 20 pups this year. There are the same number of adults on the ground right now. By this fall the pups will weigh in the range of 70 to 80 pounds. Realistically, we have a sustainable population without additional introductions. We’ll have close to 50 by the end of the year and they will double their population in two years.”

### The Outfitters

One metric that may never be tallied is the collateral damage to big game species and local businesses that rely on robust deer, elk, antelope and moose populations. Josh Wamboldt is a volunteer range rider for CPW and owns Avalanche Outfitters near Redstone, Colo. He uses pack horses and mules for his hunting expeditions.

“I’ve heard reports of behavioral changes in elk, pushing them from their usual winter-feeding grounds up into the higher altitudes and forests which in turn causes the cow elk to spontaneously abort because they simply aren’t getting sufficient nourishment,” Josh says. “It’s better for her to slough her calf and survive than for both of them to die.”

And with the sudden presence of a new and unknown predator, the ungulates are highly vulnerable. “Consider that in Colorado—until the introduction—there was not a single elk alive that had ever seen a wolf. People thought that the elk would naturally understand what they had to do, but when you don’t know what a predator is, you don’t have a defensive instinct until it’s out there

ripping out your hamstrings. That’s probably why there’s a lot of elk getting killed right now because they’re used to the presence of people walking their dogs, so they’re less likely to bolt when a wolf goes after them.”

The ideological leanings of Denver’s ruling class have left many businesses hanging in the balance. “I’m honestly scared for my hunting business,” Josh says. “I can only tell hunters for so long that we have a healthy elk



*The remains of a Dixie Valley Ranch heifer in Northern California. Last fall they had five yearlings killed in a month. The most recent was a set of twins and it was actually the day of a meeting with CDFW and the local sheriff. “Unfortunately, we didn’t find it in time to say, ‘Hey, this is happening right under your noses.’”*

population. If hunters come out on a week-long hunt and nobody kills anything, how many years are they going to pay me to do that? My bookings are down already this year because when folks find out that I have wolves 20 miles away, some will just hang up on me.”

### An Exercise In Cruelty

As of this writing, four of the 15 wolves imported from British Columbia and one from the Oregon pack have died, and in May, CPW lethally removed a wolf following several depredations in Pitkin County. A solitary female from B.C. was reported to have walked 1,230 miles between January and April of 2025. Bonnie Brown-Eddy surmises: “This poor damn wolf was just trying to get home or find another wolf. The fact is that she is displaced and at some point, will start killing livestock because that requires the least

amount of energy to get a meal. It’s a tragic story of animal cruelty. These animals should be in British Columbia chasing caribou, but CPW went to Canada and jerked these wolves out of their home habitat and dumped them out in a completely unfamiliar environment.”

The narrative that wolves restore habitats to a more natural state falls flat in light of Colorado’s wildlife management history. Launched in 1978, Colorado’s moose program is considered a species recovery success story with the population growing from zero to 3,500 in a span of 35 years. Though exact figures are not available, the program has cost millions of dollars over that time but has also increased revenue through hunting licenses and tourism in the high country. The wolf program now puts this four-decade effort into question. Yellowstone National Park is often touted as the model wolf introduction program, but moose numbered around 1,000 at the time of the initial wolf release in 1995, and 30 years later they have declined to around 150.

As transplanted wolves now range through almost every environ and altitude in western Colorado, native sage grouse will most certainly be imperiled by their presence. Building their nests in low-lying, brushy areas, the Gunnison sage grouse is on the federal endangered species list. Since 2000, Colorado has invested at least \$40 million into additional layers of protection for the Gunnison and greater sage-grouse subspecies. Although wolves are not cited as a primary predator of sage grouse, it cannot be argued that as a large canid, wolves will not find sage grouse easy prey.

### Where Does It End?

The effort to sweep wolves from the lower 48 states began in the 1800s and continued for a century until the large predators were virtually nonexistent. Eradication was necessary due in no small part to conflicts with livestock, the decimation of big game species, and uncurbed attacks on humans. Unfortunately, recent attempts to correct what some deem a biological wrong from the past has not produced a right, but another wrong of disastrous proportions.

With wolves largely vanished from the wild, ecosystems and wildlife adapted and struck a reasonable balance, and cogent management by state wildlife agencies helped maintain that balance. But 30 years of experimental wolf introductions have proven to be a Pandora’s box of unintended—or covertly

intended—consequences.

Will Colorado's wildlife success stories such as those of moose and sage grouse be hollowed out by invasive wolves ripped from their native habitats? Will ranchers in California, Oregon, Washington, New Mexico and Colorado be able to bear costs of ineffective nonlethal deterrents while their herds and working dogs are decimated? Will ranching

and hunting in "blue" states (where wolves are managed more like pets than apex predators) be lost, while ranching and hunting in "red" states (where hunting and trapping of wolves is allowed) thrive?

Like all large predators, wolves must be carefully managed, and in states where radical ideologies stand in the way of good science and common sense, ranching families,

hunters and big game are now the endangered species. ■

*Marjorie Haun is a freelance journalist who specializes in farming, ranching and resource development. She lives with her husband and assorted critters in southeastern Utah, near the Colorado state line where she watches for misplaced, bewildered, hungry wolves looking to find an easy meal.*

## A Daily Nightmare

By Crystal Emsoff

NOTE: FRANK AND CRYSTAL EMSOFF OWN THE SHEEP AND CATTLE OUTFIT CALLED EMSOFF LIVE-STOCK COMPANY IN NORTHEASTERN CALIFORNIA. CRYSTAL HAS A DEGREE IN ANIMAL SCIENCE AND WORKED FOR SEVERAL YEARS AS A RANGE TECHNICIAN ON THE TAHOE NATIONAL FOREST, OVERSEEING THE GRAZING OF HUNDREDS OF CATTLE AND THOUSANDS OF SHEEP.—MH

**W**e are not "anti-wolf." We simply want honesty and transparency from those hired to manage the wolves and believe ranchers and local law enforcement should have the legal right to protect life and property from those individual wolves that become habituated livestock killers. In May I attended a community meeting on wolves presented by California Department of Fish & Wildlife. I went into the meeting feeling optimistic and hopeful (that's my default), but I left with a sense of doom and dread. Following are some highlights of the meeting. (Lowlights may be more appropriate.)

(1) It's our fault, whether residents in town or ranchers, for any conflict we have with the wolves. If you are in town, it's because you are feeding the deer. (This is not actually occurring.) If you are a rancher, you have bone piles to attract the wolves (never mind that they are killing newborn calves far from bone piles and that California, in its infinite tyrannical wisdom doesn't allow the composting of dead livestock). You also are not doing enough to haze the wolves. It doesn't matter that you are watching your cattle 24 hours a day or chasing them to the neighbors on a four-wheeler. You should be using scare boxes: aka big jack-in-a-boxes that pop out and scare the wolves if they get too close. I am dead serious. Oh, and pyrotechnic guns that shoot flames and make a loud noise. I'm sure that will go over well in the woods during fire season. We can't buy or use fireworks in California due to wildfire risk. Are pyrotechnic guns even legal? And you should be using fladry (red ribbons tied on a fence wire) and

fox lights (lights that flash at random times). CDFW readily admits that these things only work for a couple of months at best until the wolves get used to them.

(2) As outlined in the California Wolf Recovery Plan, once there were eight breeding pairs of wolves we entered Phase 2. That phase allows for the use of nonlethal projectiles to haze wolves. But we cannot actually shoot wolves with rubber bullets or beanbags because it might kill one. It doesn't matter if they are actively killing a calf. Or your dog for that matter. And the weapons only have a range of 40 to 75 feet.

(3) There is a \$100,000 fine and jail time for killing a wolf. The only time you can shoot one is if it is posing an immediate threat to human life. "If you shoot one, you are considered guilty until proven innocent." These were the exact words of the CDFW law enforcement officer. They do not have to prove that you are guilty. You have to prove that you shot the wolf in self-defense. How exactly does one go about proving a wolf was about to attack? I guess we all better start wearing body cams any time we step out our front doors considering these wolves have killed deer in fenced backyards and elk right on the doorstep of a home.

(4) Phase 2 was entered when there were eight breeding pairs of wolves for two consecutive years. "We will enter Phase 3, which may allow lethal removal of problem wolves when there are? breeding pairs of wolves for two consecutive years." No, that isn't a typo. It was literally a question mark on CDFW's slide. They have no idea how many wolves it will take before they remove them from the Endangered Species List in California. There is no target number in their Wolf Recovery Plan. Which means they can carry on business as usual indefinitely.

(5) The deer herd in our region is declining. Of course, this has nothing to do with wolves or other predators. It's because they are getting hit by cars and drought. (We have not

been in a drought the last two years.) CDFW has not actually counted the deer population since 2018. The best data they have to estimate rise or fall in the deer population are filled deer tags. Prior to 2023 over 30 tags a year were filled. Filled tags have declined rapidly as wolf numbers have increased. Last year it was just 16, indicating a sharply declining deer population.

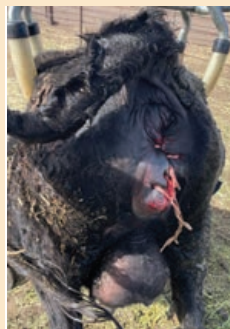
(6) Both UC Davis and CDFW's own data has shown that cattle make up the majority of the diet of wolves in California. CDFW does not deny this. When asked if they are considering the availability of natural prey (deer and elk) to arrive at their elusive Phase 3 recovered number, no one had an answer. Not the biologist. Not the regional manager. Not her supervisor. It was, "I don't know if they are considering prey base."

In other words, the powers that be are counting on ranchers to grow this wolf population on their cattle.

(7) When pressed to say when the wolves would be removed from the Endangered Species List, the answer was when they are no longer at risk of extinction. There are 65,000 gray wolves in North America. That fact apparently is irrelevant in determining the status of grays in California. They are endangered in California no matter how many there are in the rest of the world. And, of course, we don't know how many there has to be before they are no longer at risk of extinction.

Wolves in the Sierra Valley have killed dozens of cattle in just the last two months. CDFW is behind in releasing their depredation reports. (I suspect they simply can't keep up with them all.) Two more were killed in just the last two days. And there is nothing that will be done to stop them. These problem wolves will be allowed to continue killing as many cattle as they want for as long as they want. Period.

There is no light at the end of the tunnel. There is no silver lining. Our mountain paradise has become our daily nightmare and there is nothing that we can do about it. ■



WOUNDED CALF BY MEGAN RICHARDSON