

# The Impact of Gray Wolf Introduction on Colorado Ranching

## Personal Account: Life After Wolf Reintroduction

Since the introduction of Gray Wolves into Colorado in 2023, my life—and that of all my neighbors—has become, quite literally, a living hell.

### Background

My name is Susan Nottingham. I own and operate one of the largest cattle ranches in the state. As a fourth generation rancher, my ranch provides 20,000 acres of privately owned habitat for elk, deer, antelope, moose, bighorn sheep, and a wide variety of other species. For decades, we have coexisted harmoniously. I have maintained a positive working relationship with Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) for many years—until the wolves arrived.

### The Arrival and Expansion of Wolves

The wolves were released just 75 miles from my community and soon made their way here. A breeding pair established a den on private property, which I believed was prohibited under the CPW management plan. In the spring of 2024, they had four pups, forming what would become the King Mountain Pack.

During the summer of 2024, I suspected several wolf-related depredations, but CPW refused to confirm them. My cattle spend the summer on a Forest Service allotment governed by a specific grazing management plan. Due to the presence of wolves, I was unable to keep the cattle in their designated pastures, disrupting the plan entirely. It became a challenge simply to keep track of the herd, and by fall, I was 60 calves short—an economic loss of \$180,000 in today's market. CPW's response was minimal: they provided a rider for the summer, but one inexperienced person equipped only with a camera was ineffective. The riding program operates from May through October, leaving ranchers without support afterward.

### Depredation and Permit Challenges

Within 30 days in October 2024, I experienced three confirmed depredations. I applied for a chronic depredation lethal kill permit, which was denied due to a CPW issue with a

historic trash dump used by my outfitter during hunting season. Despite spending tens of thousands of dollars on an appeal, it was denied again—this time, the wildlife commission spent only three minutes considering it. Aside from the summer rider and a depredation specialist for necropsies, CPW has offered no further assistance.

CPW set up a trapping operation, presumably to capture and collar the pups, on my Forest permit without notifying me or the U.S. Forest Service. When I confronted them, the district manager asserted, “We do not need permission from anyone to do this.” Such disregard for courtesy was deeply offensive.

## Impact on the Ranch and Legal Issues

In the fall of 2024, CPW killed the father male of the pack in an attempt to re-collar him, leaving the female and four pups on their own. They moved into my hay meadows where I calve out 1,100 cows. This is not suitable habitat for Gray Wolves. I lost three calves, which CPW would not confirm as depredation. One of my employees ended up shooting the mother female. The investigation is still ongoing and extremely stressful, costing me tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees to protect myself and my employee from facing criminal charges.

## Management Concerns and Broader Impacts

We did not request this situation. It was forced upon us with little to no help from CPW. Their management strategies are severely lacking. Colorado is not an appropriate habitat for Gray Wolves—it is not Yellowstone Park. Every mountain valley not occupied by development or recreation is used for cattle or sheep ranching. CPW cannot effectively manage the wolf population and maintain ranching on the landscape.

## Animal Welfare and Emotional Toll

This is also an incredibly cruel situation for the animals involved. The wolves are not at fault; they simply do not belong here and cannot survive. Meanwhile, the emotional and financial stress on ranchers is immense and ongoing.

Susan Nottingham

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