

## RESOLUTION NO. 2021-06

### A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF RIO BLANCO COUNTY, COLORADO, REAFFIRMING RIO BLANCO COUNTY'S OPPOSITION TO THE REINTRODUCTION OF WOLVES GENERALLY, AND SPECIFICALLY ESTABLISHING RIO BLANCO COUNTY AS A WOLF REINTRODUCTION SANCTUARY COUNTY

**WHEREAS**, in the November 3rd, 2020 Colorado election, Proposition 114, the ballot measure to require the artificial introduction of Canadian Gray Wolves into the State, the voters of Colorado narrowly approved the measure by a vote of 1,590,299 for and 1,533,313 against, while the voters of Rio Blanco County overwhelmingly rejected the measure voting 3164 against and 439 for; and

**WHEREAS**, Proposition 114 received an affirmative vote in only 5 western slope counties, including Pitkin, Summit, San Miguel, San Juan, and La Plata Counties; and

**WHEREAS**, gray wolves were extirpated from the County and the State nearly 80 years ago because of their predation on cattle and sheep; and

**WHEREAS**, the economy of Rio Blanco County is highly dependent on agriculture, in the form of cattle and sheep ranching, and on big game, with both hunting and outfitting; and

**WHEREAS**, Rio Blanco County is central to both the largest elk herd and largest mule deer herd in the State and Nation; and

**WHEREAS**, wolf reintroductions in other states have caused significant reductions in big game herd numbers requiring reduced opportunities for hunters and other wildlife enthusiasts; and

**WHEREAS**, wolf reintroductions in other states have included a provision for "fair compensation" for livestock losses due to wolf predation, however, in practical application, this has proven from difficult to unattainable for affected livestock producers; and

**WHEREAS**, Rio Blanco County is part of the Northwest region as defined by Colorado Parks & Wildlife. According to *The 2017 Economic Contributions of Outdoor Recreation in Colorado*,<sup>1</sup> the Northwest region included the largest amount of outdoor recreation spending at \$10.3 billion. Rio Blanco County is the fourth largest contributor with respect to big game hunting and associated activities within the Northwest region; and

**WHEREAS**, Rio Blanco County maintains a 18.8 million dollar agriculture industry from cattle,

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<sup>1</sup> The 2017 Economic Contributions of Outdoor Recreation in Colorado, A regional and county level analysis. Colorado SCORP, Colorado Parks & Wildlife, and Southwick Associates, [https://cpw.state.co.us/Documents/Trails/SCORP/2017EconomicContributions\\_SCORP.pdf](https://cpw.state.co.us/Documents/Trails/SCORP/2017EconomicContributions_SCORP.pdf), July 23, 2018, page 3, (accessed 03/12/2021)

sheep and hay production, according to the Colorado Department of Agriculture<sup>2</sup>; and

**WHEREAS**, gray wolves have naturally returned to the State over the last decade with confirmed sightings of both individuals and packs in Jackson, Routt, Rio Blanco, and Moffat counties; and

**WHEREAS**, given the biology and social habits of wolf populations, it is reasonable to assume migration by Canadian gray wolves will continue into the northern portion of Colorado and Mexican gray wolves will continue into the southern portion of the state; and

**WHEREAS**, given the nature of wolf behavior, the presence of artificially introduced wolf populations will reduce or eliminate the recolonization by natural migration; and

**WHEREAS**, 76% of Rio Blanco County is Federal Land, including US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management property; and

**WHEREAS**, the ecological benefits of re-established wolf populations can be achieved by natural migration and reproduction; and

**WHEREAS**, the adoption of this Resolution is necessary and proper to provide for the safety, preserve the health, promote the prosperity, and improve the order, comfort, welfare, and convenience of the County and the inhabitants thereof;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the Board of County Commissioners of Rio Blanco County as follows:

1. **Rio Blanco County is declared to be a Wolf Reintroduction Sanctuary County**, allowing only for the natural migration and repopulation of Gray Wolves without the competition from artificially introduced wolves;
2. "Designated Lands", for artificial reintroduction of wolves as defined in the ballot Proposition, must not include Rio Blanco County or any other County in the State that adopts the Sanctuary County Designation.
3. This decision is predicated on the following:
  - a) A rapid artificial repopulation of wolves into Rio Blanco County will cause significant economic harm in a time in which County revenues are already depressed.
  - b) A slow, extensively monitored and managed, natural restoration of wolves will facilitate a fuller understanding of regional and localized wolf behavior and of social impacts and will allow for increased temporal directed adaptive management.
  - c) Adaptive management strategies must include take as an appropriate tool as

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<sup>2</sup>U. S. Census Bureau, (2017), United States Department of Agriculture, Glimpse of Colorado Agricultural Production Map, <https://ag.colorado.gov/sites/ag/files/2019%20Glimpse%20of%20CO%20Agriculture%20Map.jpg>, accessed March 12, 2021.

warranted.

d) Wolves should be artificially reintroduced only in those Colorado Counties that received an affirmative vote on Proposition 114 in the 2020 election. This will allow for comparative study of impacts, both positive and negative, of different reintroduction strategies. In other Counties, including Rio Blanco County, wolves should be allowed to naturally repopulate through migration and reproduction only.

e) Individual wolves or packs that migrate from the original release counties must be removed from the Sanctuary County so as not to compete with or displace natural reestablishment.

f) Funding should be robust enough to closely monitor both naturally occurring and reintroduced wolves and the detailed effects on prey animals. Funding should be limited to the State General Fund as to not effect already limited Game Cash Funds and not encumber Sportsmen's dollars to this effort.

g) In that a high percentage of land within the County is Federally owned, planning and management of the wolves should be closely coordinated with the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management.

9. The above listed approach, in large part, follows the recommendations of the Colorado Wolf Management Plan established by the working group in December 2004.

0 DULY MOVED, SECONDED, AND PASSED ON A VOTE OF 3 FOR AND AGAINST THIS 16th DAY OF MARCH 2021.

OF  
COLORADO

ATTEST:



  
Boots M. Campbell, Clerk & Recorder

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
RIO BLANCO COUNTY,

  
Gary Moyer, Chairman

  
Jeff Rector, Commissioner

  
Ty Gates, Commissioner