



Contacts:
Kristin Combs
307.413.4116
Kim Bean
970.412.0905

Press Release

Wildlife Advocates Press for More Action Despite Receiving Cold Shoulder During Wyoming Legislative Hearings in Casper

Wyoming Wildlife Advocates Executive Director Kristin Combs and Wolves of the Rockies President Kim Bean remotely attended the July 9 & 10 Joint Travel, Recreation, Wildlife, and Cultural Resources Committee hearings in Casper, Wyoming with the hopes of speaking about prevention of wildlife cruelty changes they believe Wyoming needs to put in place. Despite being online and ready to speak both days they were not called upon by either Co-Chairs.

Combs and Bean had prepared statements for the Treatment of Predators Working Group portion of the TRW's Tuesday afternoon meeting. The Working Group on Predators was put together to develop solutions to the wolf torture incident in Daniel, WY that went viral this spring. Seventy-five percent of Wyoming citizens polled in April said they believed the behaviors were animal cruelty.

Despite Combs and Bean having separate confirmations from the Legislative Service Office and being online with digital hands raised, Co-Chair, Representative Sandy Newsome, did not call on them and moved on Tuesday to close public comment.

"I wasn't sure what had happened, but I was a little stunned. The meeting was lightly attended all day, so I knew time was not an issue at all. But despite that, as soon as the Working Group public comment section began, the Co-Chair, Representative Sandy Newsome, made it clear anyone speaking would have only 2 minutes and she got out a

timer. That was not a stipulation of any other public comment times that morning or afternoon.”

Bean, a Wyoming native living in Colorado, said she had hoped she wouldn't see this kind of behavior in Wyoming, “It seems as if they are using a tactic from the Montana playbook, and that's unfortunate. Wyoming is a small state, we all know each other, and this kind of thing shouldn't happen here.”

Combs and Bean wanted to highlight the need for more action by the Working Group and the entire TRW committee.

“Since the wolf torture case in Daniel, the TRW committee has not actually had a substantive conversation for the public to witness and participate in. The May meeting in Cody was tightly controlled by Representative Newsome, who simply assigned a Working Group and gave them a narrow focus,” Bean noted. “They really are projecting to all of us out here watching that the chairs do not want to do anything about this.”

“We have been patiently waiting and watching for the state to act. I know of followers from all over the globe that have been watching and waiting for Wyoming to lead on this. We have been telling them to give the legislature time to do its job. This kind of thing is just making it worse,” said Combs.

Combs reached out to the LSO Tuesday afternoon and asked again to speak during public comment portions of Wednesday afternoon's agenda items. An LSO staffer responded late morning on Wednesday, giving no real direction on when they would be allowed to speak but instead saying in an email, “The Chairwomen are aware of your request to testify. Please raise your virtual hand and I will promote you at the pertinent time. Thank you.”

“We got online again at 1pm and waited for an hour and a half,” Combs explains, “and then, at the end, nothing. They ended the meeting with us sitting online. The testimony I didn't get to deliver in this public meeting would have pointed out that many wildlife advocacy groups like mine, despite not being asked to the table to discuss, have been waiting patiently for a collaborative process to unfold. The actions Tuesday and Wednesday really punctuates the problem – we aren't welcome. It doesn't feel like these folks want to listen and come up with collaborative solutions outside of the few hand-picked groups. Perhaps there was some technical reason for not being allowed to speak, but I will be very dubious of that happening both days.”

“We're going to keep pushing,” Bean said, “to get Wyoming to a place where it's citizen's values about animal cruelty are reflected in the law. Wyomingites don't want to see another Cody Roberts incident in this state, and we will keep pushing lawmakers until they do the right thing.”

Currently the Working Group has only brought forward one recommendation to add broad language to statutes that would require predators to be killed “quick and humane.”

“We are going to keep asking the working group and the TRW committee to address the entire cruelty and torture issue and to take a deep dive into vehicular killing of wildlife - something they have not even touched - because it is inherently wrong and Wyoming citizens know it. It is not hunting, it is not predator control, it is cruelty plain and simple. Wyoming has a reputation to repair. So far the legislature seems blind to that reality,” Combs said Wednesday after the TRW meeting.

Combs and Bean’s undelivered statements are attached below.

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Kristin Combs, 307.413.4116

Madam Chairwoman and legislative members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Kristin Combs, I am the Executive Director of Wyoming Wildlife Advocates. We were present yesterday on Zoom but didn’t get a chance to speak so thank you for letting us speak at today’s meeting. Let me remind everyone of why we are discussing this topic and why we are here today. Cody Roberts, a resident of Daniel, Wyoming ran over a young wolf, severely injured her, taped her mouth shut, put a shock collar and muzzle on her, took her to a bar and continued to torture and torment her while she lay dying until he finally killed her in an unknown manner.

- Wyoming laws allowed this to happen without an appropriate level of consequences and chasing an animal to exhaustion and then running it over without killing it is torture in itself. But in Wyoming, that isn’t a crime. It wasn’t even the focus on the investigation conducted by the WGFD wardens because it is legal.
- We have been patiently waiting and watching for the state to take action
 - The world has been watching and waiting for Wyoming to lead on this. We have been telling them to give the legislature time to do its job
- We have been willing to collaborate and work together to find solutions but were not invited to do so in any meaningful way. We believe we have much to offer to this discussion.
- Currently there are no wildlife advocates on the working group, nor law enforcement officials
 - WWF is a hunting and trapping advocacy group representing sportspeople, which is only one part of all those who advocate for wildlife.

- We thank the TRW committee for designating the working group to discuss this issue and look for ways to fix our laws to protect those most vulnerable in our society
- The message that needs to be sent from the legislature is that if you do these horrific things, you will suffer severe and real consequences
- The proposed legislation doesn't do enough to solve this problem and close the gap between what is legal and what is a reflection of Wyoming residents' values
- Torture is torture and should be outlawed wherever it is found
- Doug Miyamoto, Jess Johnson, Brian Nesvik and others have stated that what happened in Daniel has nothing to do with predator control or hunting – we couldn't agree more
 - Protecting livestock or hunting shouldn't involve torture EVER
- Mr. Miyamoto said, "there's an appropriate response to this...we can prevent this from happening again and still maintain our appropriate and well-thought out predator control programs that we have here in the state of Wyoming"
 - Running over animals with snowmobiles or other vehicles is not a component of any well-thought out program – let's make sure it is outlawed and help to fix Wyoming's reputation as a leader in wildlife management – because right now, it is pretty broken
 - Governor Gordon even supports this and was quoted at a recent event saying, "I don't think there's any reason why people need to run over animals." And you know what? He's right. The people of Wyoming agree with him. Over ¾ of Wyomingites polled said that killing an animal with a snowmobile is considered cruelty.
 - If it isn't allowed for deer and elk, it shouldn't be allowed for any species at any time
- We would encourage the working group and the TRW committee to continue to address the cruelty issue as well as taking a deep dive into vehicular killing of wildlife because it is inherently wrong and Wyoming citizens know it. It is not hunting, it is not predator control, it is cruelty plain and simple.
- We strongly urge this committee to continue the pursuit against cruelty to wildlife. Wyoming is a law and order state and right now our laws are permitting those who would violate our wildlife, held in trust for all of us, to commit heinous acts and suffer no consequences. Let's fix that.

Kim Bean, 970.412.0905

Madame Chair and legislative members of the committee - thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Kim Bean, President of Wolves of the Rockies.

As the legislation moves forward, we feel it imperative to set the record straight on some misinformation from the June meeting.

A statement was made by Director Nesvick that Wyoming doesn't have the habitat for human/agriculture coexistence – this is fundamentally untrue.

Ranchers like Joe Englehart from the wilds of Alberta Canada have been ranching successfully in predator rich country and haven't killed a wolf in over 20 years.

The Anderson Family thrive in the heart of wild country outside of Yellowstone National Park in the Tom Miner Basin area of Montana. Hilary Anderson spearheaded the first range riding program in the area and has successfully implemented non-lethal measures - also without incident.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention The Blackfoot Challenge that has been very successful coexistence in predator rich country in Montana.

This is only a small example of ranchers that choose to coexist with wolves and other predators

Not because they necessarily like these animals or that it's always easy but because they recognize these animals are part of the landscape ranchers conduct business on.

We personally work with ranchers - providing them with non-lethal tools such as fox lights, light collars, and noise boxes to name a few that they implement in their daily workload - with this implementation they have had no conflict.

I want to be clear - none of these ranchers utilize motor-vehicles to run down or kill predators as a management tool.

While we appreciate that the committee is taking measures here – these efforts are simply not enough to repair the tarnished reputation that Wyoming now has and are not enough to calm the outrage across Wyoming as well as the US and beyond. Wyoming hosts millions of visitors from all over the globe who reacted in horror at these actions.

As it stands – the dust will never settle until Wyoming does the right thing.