April 23, 2024

Tracy Stone-Manning  
Director, Bureau of Land Management  
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Dear Director Stone-Manning,

On behalf of the undersigned wildlife and animal protection organizations, we ask you to prohibit running down wildlife with snowmobiles or other vehicles on lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (“BLM”).

Our request is spurred by the disturbing, recent revelation that Cody Roberts of Sublette County, Wyoming, used his snowmobile in late February to run over a young female wolf – a hunting practice that is legal in Wyoming and Idaho.1

Media reports indicate that instead of immediately shooting the injured wolf, he took the wolf home where he strapped her mouth shut with duct-tape, posed next to her for a photo, and let his hunting dogs harass her. Next, he transported the suffering wolf to a local bar, where he tormented her further, then took her behind the tavern where he either shot or bludgeoned her to death.2

An eyewitness reported the hideous event to Wyoming Department of Fish & Game, which subsequently cited Roberts for possessing live wildlife, a misdemeanor violation.3 He received merely a $250 fine.4

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1 WY Stat § 23-3-103(a) (providing with limited exceptions that predatory animals like wolves “may be taken without a license in any manner and at any time”); Idaho Code § 36-1101(b) (prohibiting the hunting of “game animals,” but not predatory wildlife like wolves, “from or by the use of any motorized vehicle”); Idaho Code § 36-201(2) (“In addition, any method utilized for the take of any wild canine in Idaho shall be available for the taking of wolves.”). While Montana prohibits hunting “game animals” by running them down with vehicles, MCA 87-6-405, it does not prohibit this practice for “predatory animals,” such as coyotes.


3 WY Code of Rules 10-11 (prohibiting possession of a live wolf); WY Stat § 23-3-402 (providing that violation of a commission order is a low misdemeanor).

The incident has sparked widespread outrage from people citing to the ethical code of fair chase hunting and condemning his brutal treatment of the wolf. The state wildlife agency and Wyoming’s governor have now given statements condemning Roberts’ actions.⁵

Information has not yet been made public of exactly where Roberts was when he ran over the wolf with his snowmobile, other than that it occurred in Wyoming’s “predator zone.”⁶ Wyoming allows virtually any method of maiming or killing wolves and other “predatory animals” in this area, which contains vast amounts of federal land.⁷

While we do not know where Roberts ran down the wolf, we do know that such abhorrent treatment of these ecologically important animals has no place on our federal lands. We are unaware of any federal law that would have prohibited his actions on BLM lands. That is unacceptable.

The BLM must act because the states will not. When one Wyoming state lawmaker in 2019 proposed state legislation to ban the use of snowmobiles to kill or injure predatory animals, the bill did not even receive a hearing.⁸

Thus, in the name of responsible management of our federal public lands, we urge the BLM to use its legal authority to prohibit chasing and running down wildlife with snowmobiles or other motorized vehicles on the federal lands under its management.

The high-speed chase creates a dangerous situation and the purposeful collision and injuring of the animal would be highly objectionable to other users of BLM lands, including outdoor recreationists. As such, continuing to allow this practice violates the BLM’s multiple use mandate, which requires “the management of the public lands and their various resource values so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the present and future needs of the American people.” 43 U.S.C. § 1702(c).⁹

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⁶ Per the Wyoming Gray Wolf Management Plan, in 15% of the state, wolves are deemed “trophy game” and in that region wolf hunting is allowed seasonally with license requirements, bag limits and defined methods. The Plan designated the remaining 85% of the state as a “predator zone” in which wolves may be killed at any time of year, anywhere, by any means, with no license requirements and no other limitations placed on their killing. Wyoming Game & Fish Dept., Wyoming Gray Wolf Management Plan (Sept. 14, 2011), https://wgfd.wyo.gov/WGFD/media/content/PDF/Wildlife/Large%20Carnivore/WYWOLF_MANAGEMENT_PLAN_FINAL.pdf.

⁷ Federal lands in Wyoming comprise at a minimum 29,137,722 acres, which is 46.7% of the state. Congressional Research Service, Federal Land Ownership: Overview and Data (Feb. 21, 2020) at pp. 8-9, https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R42346. Wyoming’s “predator zone” includes at least 23,968,160 acres of federal lands, which is 82% of the federal lands within the state. See Wyoming Game & Fish Dept., Wyoming Game and Fish Open Data: Wolf Hunt Areas (Nov. 29, 2021), https://wyoming-wgfd.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/ec5bbacd1a244ce6aa182a63963c80b8_0/about.


⁹ Stewardship of BLM lands is guided by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (“FLPMA”), 43 U.S.C. §§ 1701–1785. The Secretary of the Interior has the authority, under FLPMA, to
Running down wildlife with vehicles is only one of many hunting practices authorized by state wildlife management agencies that have no place on our federal public lands. That said, prohibiting this egregious practice would be a good start towards improving management of federal public lands for wolves and other wildlife.

As a federal land managing institution with legal obligations to steward our natural resources, you have the authority to act. Moreover, you have an opportunity to make clear that the brutality toward wildlife exhibited in Wyoming has no place on our federal public lands. We urge you -- seize the moment.

Sincerely,

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promulgate implementing regulations necessary “to carry out the purposes” of the Act. 43 U.S.C. § 1740; see also 43 C.F.R. § 24.4(c). Furthermore, Section 303 of FLPMA authorizes the BLM to promulgate and enforce regulations and establishes the penalties for violations of the regulations. 43 U.S.C. § 1733; see also 18 U.S.C. § 3571.

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