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Indian and Tibetan wolves found to have important, ancient genetics

Rachel Leeson | Rice University News | May 13, 2026

Wolves in India, like the pack that raised Mowgli in "The Jungle Book," can often feel disconnected from both the research and storytelling of wolves. Rice University professor Lauren Hennelly is working to change that. Her research uncovers the stories that these grey wolves, along with the nearby Tibetan wolves, carry in their DNA.

"I had previously led work showing that Indian and Tibetan wolves were the two oldest evolutionary lineages of the grey wolf," said Hennelly, an assistant professor of biosciences. "When we expanded our work to sequence wolves from across Asia, we found even more hidden stories in their DNA."

Hennelly and her team, which includes scientists from 11 countries, collected and analyzed DNA from wolves across Asia.

Lauren Hennelly. Credit Jared Jones/Rice University.

They discovered that the DNA of wolves in southern regions of Asia contained an unexpectedly large amount of unique genetic variation, making them an important reservoir of global wolf genetic diversity. This work, published in Communications Biology, establishes southern Asia as a hotbed for grey wolf diversity —– an evolutionarily important location that contains information about wolves' past and hope for their future.

Unusually distinct lineages

Wolves are traveling animals with reported journeys reaching over 500 miles. These travels often result in genetic mixing, making it easy to find traces of one wolf population mixed into the DNA of other populations. For example, wolf populations across the vast areas of northern Asia and North America are genetically very similar due to this genetic mixing, or gene flow. However, that was not the case for wolves in southern Asia. Hennelly's data showed sharply defined geographical boundaries between the three main lineages, or populations, that split long ago with little gene flow between the different populations.

In fact, Hennelly's team found that the ancient Indian and Tibetan wolf lineages were isolated from other wolves for over 100,000 years. There likely were past climatic factors such as habitat changes due to previous glacial cycles that led to this separation, but the distinction has remained through to current days, when the breaks between the populations have disappeared.

An Indian wolf. Credit: Mihir Godbole/The Grasslands Trust.

"We found that Pakistan is the global hotspot of gray wolf diversity. That is because this location is where all three major lineages of wolves — Indian, Tibetan and Holarctic — come together," Hennelly said. "How and why these different types of wolves remain genetically distinct despite living so close to each other is a question that could help us understand fundamental questions in evolutionary biology, like the early stages of speciation."

Conservation implications

Conservationists have classified the grey wolf species as stable overall, but this dive into the genetics of Indian wolves made it clear that they needed to be considered separately from the wolves living in Europe and North America. Hennelly co-led a working group that estimates the Indian wolf population contains around 3,000 individuals with a high risk of extinction in the foreseeable future. Under the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the Indian wolf, like the Tibetan wolf, is now classified as threatened.

"Only through genetics could we understand that these are unique wolves found nowhere else," Hennelly said. "These hotspots of wolf diversity in southern Asia are where grey wolves are most threatened, with wolves in the Indian subcontinent facing immense pressures. Our work not only informs the conservation status and taxonomy of these wolves but highlights the importance of conserving these two evolutionarily distinct populations, and preserving the full spectrum of wolf genetic diversity, before it's too late."

This work was funded by the National Science Foundation Postdoctoral Research Fellowship (2208950), the Norwegian Environment Agency (18088069), Fondation Segré and the Sigrid Rausing Trust.

'The last ... to truly roam freely': Wolf makes rare crossing through US-Mexico border for first time in decades

Hope Nguyen | The Cool Down | May 11, 2026

A Mexican gray wolf named Cedar has accomplished something no radio-collared wolf has done in decades: He crossed from the United States into Mexico on his own, slipping through a rare unfenced stretch of the border in New Mexico's remote Bootheel region, Taos News reported.

Cedar's journey offers hope for one of North America's most endangered mammals while also serving as a stark reminder of what could soon be lost.

Cedar, an adult male born in Arizona to the Rocky Prairie Pack, traveled south through Hidalgo County into Chihuahua last week.

The crossing is significant because Mexican gray wolves, also known as lobos, need room to roam in order to find prey, establish territory, and, perhaps most importantly, find mates.

Mexico reintroduced wolves in 2011, meaning Cedar now has an opportunity to connect with that growing population.

For a species suffering from critically low genetic diversity, this kind of movement could strengthen the long-term future of wolves on both sides of the border.

The development is especially notable because the opening Cedar used may not remain accessible much longer.

According to Taos News, U.S. Customs and Border Protection has begun extending the wall in the same area, potentially closing off one of the last pathways wildlife can still use to move between the two countries.

The Trump administration's "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" set aside $46.5 billion for border security infrastructure, and Rep. Gabe Vasquez said in January that the Department of Homeland Security had issued a $1.6 billion contract to construct 49 miles of wall in a remote stretch of the Bootheel.

The federal government's southern border security strategy has also shifted toward what U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement calls a "Smart Wall," combining steel bollard barriers with patrol roads, cameras, lights, and other surveillance technology.

"Cedar could be the last lobo to truly roam freely if Trump completes his destructive border wall," conservation advocate Michael Robinson said in a press release, per Taos News. "Since time immemorial, wolves effortlessly loped through these borderless desert grasslands with eyes open for deer and jackrabbits and snouts sniffing for other wolves. Sealing off the Bootheel would isolate wolves and other rare mammals like jaguars and ultimately make them all less likely to survive."

For the public, the issue goes beyond a single charismatic animal.

Wildlife movement supports healthier ecosystems, helping keep landscapes more resilient for nearby communities, ranchlands, and water resources. The tension between securing the border and conservation has been ongoing for decades.

"It is so exciting to know that Cedar was able to find his way south into Mexico in search of the things he needs to thrive," said Cyndi Tuell, the Arizona and New Mexico director at Western Watersheds Project, per Taos News.

Home on the Range No More: Trump Wants Bison Gone

Jack Healy | The New York Times | May 4, 2026

American Prairie has identified the northern grasslands of Montana as the only place left in the United States to restore an entire prairie ecosystem. Photo: John Stember

Crazy Alice, a half-ton bison, likes to feast on grass and roll in the dirt, but her deepest attachment might be to a certain corner of the Montana prairie — when her handlers once moved her herd to a different pasture, she tried to break out and go back.

Now, the Trump administration wants to evict Crazy Alice and hundreds of other bison from that home on the range, and replace them with cattle. The resulting clash on the prairie has pitted ranchers and Republican leaders against a furry, snorting symbol of the American West.

“This is a part of our country’s heritage,” said Alison Fox, executive director of American Prairie, a deep-pocketed nonprofit that has spent two decades buying ranches and grazing leases on public land in northern Montana to create the newly embattled home for bison.

The conflict centers on 900 bison owned by the group, which was allowed by multiple administrations, including President Trump’s first, to graze on federal lands, much to the consternation of politically conservative ranchers who wanted the land for cattle.

This winter, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management reversed course and canceled the bison grazing permits. Citing the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, the agency said the federal grasslands where the animals grazed should go to livestock being raised for food, not bison largely enjoying their right to roam. The agency deemed the bison to be wildlife, not production livestock.

Conservation groups condemned the decision, as did Native American tribes, who say the anti-bison effort threatens their own herds as they try to revive bison populations that were hunted to near extinction by 19th-century settlers.

But Montana ranchers like Perri Jacobs celebrated. She said the federal government, a perennial boogeyman for Western conservatives, finally seemed to be on her side.

“These lands are here for food,” said Ms. Jacobs, whose family has raised cows in northern Montana for nearly 110 years. “We have to understand that progress and time march forward. Bison just don’t fit on the landscape anymore.”

Ranchers like Ms. Jacobs could give the Trump administration some sorely needed support in farm country, where Democrats and independents are trying to capitalize on anger over tariffs and the cost of diesel and fertilizer to flip Republican seats in this year’s midterm elections. Phillips County, where the beef over bison centers, is in Montana’s Second Congressional District, a Republican-held seat not on any forecaster’s battlefield map. In the western part of the state, though, Montana’s First District could very much be in play.

And the bison fight fits squarely in a larger war over the West, as the Trump administration pushes to open more public land to oil drilling, mining and logging.

Pro-bison environmental groups accused the Trump administration of bowing to pressure from Gov. Greg Gianforte of Montana and ranching groups that had pressed the administration to rule against bison grazing.

“I don’t think it’s actually about the bison,” said Ryan Busse, a Democrat running in a primary in Montana’s First District. “Gianforte is fine with oil companies doing whatever the hell they want on public lands. But some bison walking around and eating grass is a threat?”

The state’s powerful land board — which includes Mr. Gianforte and other high-ranking Republican elected officials — is also taking steps toward kicking bison off Montana state trust lands.

“We must ensure that public lands remain accessible and productive, rather than being locked away for the vision of special interests,” Mr. Gianforte said after the federal permits were canceled.

American Prairie argues that cows and bison can coexist, and is trying to undo the Bureau of Land Management’s decision. The bureau, it said, scrapped decades of successful land policies by arbitrarily redefining what constitutes “livestock” in the American West.

If the final decision goes into effect — potentially later this spring — American Prairie says it will have to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to alter fence lines and haul bison away from lands where they belong.

That argument falls flat with many ranchers along the rolling plains of Phillips County, which is larger than Connecticut and stretches south from the Canadian border to the Missouri River Breaks. Signs along cattle gates and wire fences declare, “Save the Cowboy, Stop American Prairie.”

American Prairie’s goal is to create a 3.2 million acre preserve, a fully functioning ecosystem, by linking together private and adjacent public land.

First-time visitors John Stacey and Lauren McGarvey, who were hoping to see buffalo calves, wrap up dinner and prepare for bed at a camp on American Prairie land. “This wall to wall landscape is pretty spectacular,” Mr. Stacey said.

The enmity began when American Prairie began buying ranch land and the accompanying grazing leases more than 20 years ago, with the aim of building one of the largest nature reserves in the country. Its property and grazing lands have grown to about

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Kendall Koss leases land from American Prairie for his cattle and shares a border with its bison, but he disagrees with its mission. Above, he holds a photo of his ancestors and works the land with the help of Kelly, his son. Photo: John Stember

double the size of Los Angeles.

The resentment has sharpened since the Covid-19 pandemic, as wealthy out-of-staters drove up land prices with dreams of snagging their slice of a state that's been called "The Last Best Place." Phillips County may lie a world apart from the ski chalets of Big Sky or the mansions on Flathead Lake to the west, but even there ranches now sell for $1 million or more, beyond the reach of locals in a county where the median household income is $53,000 a year.

American Prairie has far more buying power. The group took in more than $43 million in contributions in 2024, according to its tax returns, and its board is stocked with corporate executives and investors, including Jacqueline Badger Mars of the Mars candy fortune. It valued its total assets at nearly $207 million.

The group says it tries to be a good neighbor. Its bison are tagged and vaccinated, and kept behind well-maintained electrified fences to keep them from traipsing into cattle fields. It leases land not occupied by bison to local cattle ranchers, and has opened up public access through much of its land. It sends live bison to help tribes expand and diversify their herds, and donates meat to local food pantries.

"We're following all the rules," Ms. Fox said.

One sunny spring morning, Scott Heidebrink, American Prairie's director of landscape stewardship, a bison skull tattoo on his right arm, bumped in his truck along dirt paths where herds of bison were grazing. Meadowlarks flitted through the grass, and female bison had just begun to give birth to the year's calves.

"By any definition, those animals are livestock," he said, pointing to a cluster who clomped away at the sound of his pickup.

Usually, conservative ranchers and farmers are the ones who gripe about federal meddling. But Mr. Heidebrink said the land bureau's decision showed that under Mr. Trump, big government was now coming for them.

"They don't go to our neighbors and say, 'What are you going to do with that cow?'" he said.

On the edges of American Prairie's holdings, Kendall Koss, 26, was torn about the bison's presence on land his family has ranched for more than a century.

He leases some land from American Prairie for his cows and said he got along with the group's local workers. But he resented outsiders who have driven up the price of Montana land, making it nearly impossible for a young rancher like him to grow his own operation.

With beef prices soaring and cattle populations near record lows, Mr. Koss said it had never been more important to put America's prairies to work feeding people.

"I have nothing against the buffalo," he said. "They're a cool animal. I just don't agree with what they're doing."

The value of South Africa's wildlife shouldn't be in the hands of wealthy foreign hunters (commentary)

Stephanie Klarmann | Mongabay | April 30, 2026

Gemsbok (Oryx gazella), also known as the South African oryx, is one of the more frequently hunted antelope species in South Africa. This one is shown in a mixed herd of herbivores in one of the nation's private reserves, Tswalu. Image by John Cannon/Mongabay.

South Africa's conservation debate is too often anchored within the blunt slogan, "If it pays, it stays."

At face value, this appears pragmatic, even responsible. But there's a troubling premise underneath it: the survival of South Africa's wildlife depends on its ability to generate an enormous income for a select group of wealthy farmers and professional hunters from an even wealthier foreign clientele.

According to this logic, wildlife is protected not because it is ecologically vital, culturally significant, or ethically deserving of life, but purely because it can be killed for a hefty price. When conservation is built on the premise that wildlife must pay its way to exist, we should ask not only who benefits, but what is being lost, and at whose expense.

Each year I examine the professional hunting statistics provided to the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) to demand transparency regarding how South Africa's wildlife is being utilized for financial gain. The most recently available statistics (for 2024) show a substantial increase of 17%: 7,756 visitors killed 40,508 wild animals (if one includes indigenous mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and exotic mammals also killed). For proponents of the euphemistically termed "sustainable use," this will naturally look like a significant success. But can we continue to justify the continuous intensification and

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amplification of commercial wildlife use on ecological and ethical grounds?

'If it pays, it stays'

Superficially, this phrase sounds like a pragmatic, "real world" solution. But digging deeper, it reveals an ideology intent on reducing wildlife and ecosystems to financial assets alone. There's a concerning thought process within this assumption that the only way to safeguard wildlife is through assigning it economic value and effectively disregarding intrinsic value, ecological roles and intergenerational justice. Moreover, it entrenches the idea that wild animals are valuable in their deaths and limits reimagining and investing in a way forward that explores nonlethal and progressive conservation models. We cannot ignore the risk of making conservation contingent on the notion of continuous profitability and the desires of wealthy foreign hunters. Creating a dependency on such a narrow revenue stream and outsourcing our wildlife conservation to markets not fully in South Africa's control is precarious and economically fragile.

We need only look to the COVID-19 pandemic to see that placing a financial value on wildlife conservation has devastating consequences. We cannot ignore the risk of travel bans and warnings, as well as reputational damage, as a result of changing social norms. Despite a push to ramp up the commercial use of wildlife, global opinion regarding sport hunting and the captive lion breeding industry puts South Africa at risk of a tarnished reputation as both a tourism and conservation destination.

Recent scientific research led by World Animal Protection confirms that international tourists would be willing to pay a "lion levy" to replace trophy hunting revenue, and that communities living along the Kruger National Park border themselves want to see wildlife-friendly options over killing animals as a means to earn a living.

The very basis of this economic conservation model is designed for an elite group of wealthy, primarily foreign, hunters, while the impact of extensive hunting is felt at a local level: among ecosystems, local communities and species dynamics. There's a glaring imbalance of power in which foreign hunters, outfitters and landowners almost exclusively shape the conservation of wildlife more than rural communities who already bear the brunt of historical marginalization and exclusion, or even the broader South African public. This colonial legacy of managing wildlife reinforces existing global inequities in which the biodiversity of the Global South is commodified for leisure purposes and consumption by the Global North. South Africa's wildlife does not only belong to those who can monetize it.

It has become a narrative all too often taken for granted that local communities living near game reserves and protected areas benefit immensely from trophy hunting. But in reality, such narratives only invoke local communities rhetorically and do not actually grant them meaningful decision-making powers without the disruption of elite capture and shaping attitudes through tokenistic, superficial involvement. "Trickle down" income from hunting is limited and demonstrates little meaningful change on the ground. Ultimately, such biased industry involvement risks shaping policy narratives and positioning the idea of sustainable use as a panacea and the only viable way forward.

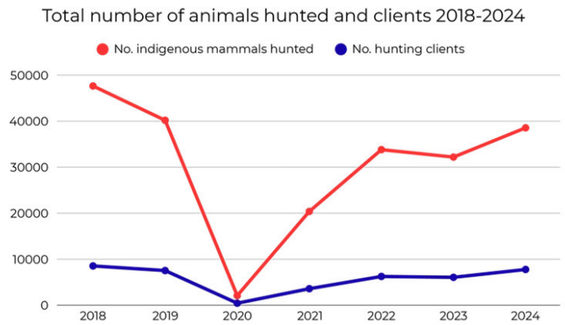
Protection versus production

The 2024 statistics show a clear alignment and significant shift toward wildlife ranching, blurring the line between wildlife conservation and farming. Thousands of the animals hunted as trophies were fenced, bred and killed based on market demands rather than ecological need. Maximizing the availability of "huntable" animals further legitimizes using techniques such as artificial breeding, genetic manipulation and intensive management practices that can no longer be considered genuine ecosystem management for the greater environmental good. Ultimately, if the use of wildlife is set not to be maintained but ramped up, wildlife numbers will be based on maximizing extraction and not on restoring functioning ecosystems.

Year on year, trophy-hunted lions have increased substantially, with only 2020 — the onset of the pandemic — as an exception. The vast majority of these lions are captive-bred and hunted in "ranched" or captive hunts (colloquially known as canned hunting). Industry role players have stated several times that canned hunting is considered illegal in South Africa, but the reality is more complex than the industry wants us to believe. Regardless of the terminology used, captive, ranched or "canned" hunts involve killing a captive-bred animal that has become reliant on people for sustenance and shelter its whole life.

These hunts take place in fenced-off areas of about 1,000 hectares (almost 2,500 acres), where the lions are shot, often from the back of a vehicle, with no chance of fair chase or escape. Minimum release times in North West province are 96 hours and in Limpopo province a mere 24 hours: that's a single day until a lion is considered "wild enough" to be hunted at close range.

According to the South African Biodiversity Management Plan for the African lion, there are three categories of lions: Wild lions are considered part of fully functioning ecosystems such as Kruger National Park or Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. Managed lions occur on smaller fenced



Number of animals hunted and hunting clients in South Africa, 2018-2024. Table provided by the author.

reserves and require a level of management to monitor population growth and genetic diversity. And then there are captive lions, which are bred purely for commercial gain at every life stage, from birth through death.

The captive-lion industry is simply playing with semantics by claiming that "canned" hunting is illegal and that they only utilize "ranched lions" for hunting, a term that is not in our legislation. Regardless of the terminology, a recent video published by an organization I work for, Blood Lions, captures the brutality of these hunts, with a fenced-in lion walking right up to a vehicle before being shot by a laughing hunter at close range.

If indigenous wildlife conservation and land restoration are reliant on the promotion of trophy hunting, then critical questions need to be asked regarding the trophy hunting of exotic species — including predators — happening within South Africa. While numbers are comparatively small, it is unclear how shooting a barbary sheep, fallow deer, or even a tiger could be considered a genuine conservation effort.

Likewise, thousands of antelope were trophy-hunted, but notably the color variants stand out. Black springbok and golden wildebeest need to be specifically bred and serve no conservation value to their species as a whole. The popularity of shooting an animal based on its color is a telling sign that rarities and unnatural variations trump real conservation and habitat restoration.

The sheer number of animals bred and kept for private ownership and economic gain further undermines any notions of a shared African natural heritage. Once again, industry narratives promoting African heritage can no longer be taken at face value and must be critically examined for what they are: greenwashing and exploiting local heritage for financial gain.

The false binary

There's a false binary evident in the argument that wildlife can only survive through economic value or face certain extinction. Through this framing alone, we risk ignoring a wide spectrum of potential viable alternatives, including, but not limited to, photographic tourism (not without its own risks, but which nevertheless takes a least-harm approach); ecological restoration; public funding mechanisms; and community-led stewardship, which remains underexplored and underutilized. We're stifling any opportunities for transformation when we treat hunting and economic value as default solutions.

South Africa stands at a crossroads with regard to how we envision managing wildlife and protecting biodiversity. On the one hand, we can continue to defend a conservation model that ties the fate of our wildlife, small and iconic, to the spending habits of wealthy foreign hunters. Or we can explore a way forward that recognizes wildlife for its ecological and intrinsic value, not as a private commodity. Wildlife should not have to earn its right to exist through death, nor should our conservation policies be dictated by markets that are ever-changing, unequal and increasingly out of touch with global values. Conservation needs to move beyond the taken-for-granted logic of extraction and shift toward approaches that embrace justice and ethics.

For South Africa to become a global leader in protecting wildlife and our biodiversity at large, we must stop outsourcing the value of our wildlife to those who can afford to kill it.

A lion in Kruger National Park. Image courtesy of the Endangered Wildlife Trust.

The repeal of the Biden-era rule affects roughly 245 million acres of public lands, mostly in the American West, about one-tenth of the country. Photo: Daniel Brenner for The New York Times

Trump Administration to Scrap Rule That Elevated Land Conservation

Maxine Joselow | The New York Times | May 11, 2026

The Trump administration on Monday said it would repeal a Biden-era rule that allowed public lands to be leased for conservation purposes, abandoning an effort to protect millions of acres from both industrial development and the effects of climate change.

The rule, issued by the Bureau of Land Management, had prioritized the use of federal lands for conservation, recreation and renewable energy development. Since returning to office, though, President Trump has championed their use for oil and gas drilling, coal mining, logging and livestock grazing.

The regulation applied to roughly 245 million acres of public lands overseen by the bureau, which make up about one-tenth of the country. It did not apply to national parks, which are overseen by the National Park Service.

In a notice in the Federal Register on Monday, the B.L.M. said the rollback would be finalized on Tuesday. Representatives for the Interior Department, which includes the B.L.M., did not immediately provide a comment from Secretary Doug Burgum.

The B.L.M., sometimes called the country's largest landlord, has for decades offered leases for the development of public lands, including for oil drilling and cattle ranching. But some of those activities have fragmented wildlife habitat and contaminated watersheds. At the same time, climate change has fueled more frequent and more severe wildfires and drought across the West.

The Biden-era rule, finalized in April 2024, sought to put conservation on equal footing with development for the first time since the B.L.M. was established in 1946. It allowed the agency to offer two new types of leases for restoring degraded ecosystems and for offsetting environmental damage, though none of the new leases were awarded before the rule was wiped off the books.

Several Republican-led states and industry groups had assailed the rule as a land grab and challenged it in federal court. On Monday, they applauded the Trump administration's move to scrap the regulation.

"Today, the Trump administration is embracing energy production on public lands because the resources Americans collectively own can be used for our nation's economic benefits," Melissa Simpson, the president of the Western Energy Alliance, a Denver-based trade group that represents oil and gas companies, said in a statement.

Ms. Simpson said the oil and gas industry supported a different conservation effort: the Great American Outdoors Act, a bipartisan law that Mr. Trump signed during his first term. The law provided up to $9.5 billion over five years to help clear up maintenance backlogs at national parks, wildlife refuges and other public lands. Much of that money came from revenue from drilling and mining on public lands and in federal waters.

Conservation groups sharply criticized the rollback.

"By rolling back the public lands rule, the administration is admitting loudly and clearly that they think public lands are just there for corporations and for their donors to profit from," said Tracy Stone-Manning, the president of the Wilderness Society, who served as the B.L.M. director during the Biden administration.

Athan Manuel, the director of the Lands Protection Program at the Sierra Club, said it was "very frustrating" that the rule was being scrapped before it could have a significant impact. It would have "restored some balance to a bureau that we used to call the Bureau of Logging and Mining or the Bureau of Leasing and Minerals," he said.

After proposing to rescind the rule in September, the Trump administration solicited public comments for 60 days. Of the 43,746 public comments it received, nearly 98 percent were opposed to rolling back the regulation, according to an analysis by the Center for Western Priorities, an advocacy group.

For instance, tribes in northwest Alaska wrote that the move "threatens to fragment habitat" for salmon, caribou and other species that they rely on for hunting and fishing. And Mike Mershon, the president of the Montana Wildlife Federation, wrote that the proposal would leave federal lands in the state more vulnerable to drought, floods, wildfires and invasive species.

Still, some public comments were supportive of rolling back the rule. Janet VanCamp, then the chair of the Board of Commissioners in White Pine County, Nev., a Republican-leaning area, wrote that the rule would have hindered efforts to thin forests to prevent wildfires. And Leslie Tanner, a fifth-generation rancher and farmer in Wyoming, wrote that "it's been a source of infuriating frustration to witness the infestation of conservation lunatics take control of our lands."

The Senate is scheduled to vote late Monday to confirm Steve Pearce, Mr. Trump's pick to lead the B.L.M. Mr. Pearce, a former Republican congressman from New Mexico, has faced scrutiny over his past statements about selling off public lands to reduce the national debt.

At his confirmation hearing in February, Mr. Pearce did not disavow those comments. But he also pledged that he would not try to sell "large swaths of land," saying the law does not allow such sales.

House Cricket (Acheta domesticus). mani_raab/iNaturalist, CC BY-NC

370 billion crickets are farmed for food every year. Scientists have discovered they may feel pain

Laura Paddison | The Conversation | May 12, 2026

You're cooking dinner, distracted, and your hand brushes a hot pan. Nerve signals race to your spinal cord and back to yank your arm away in a fraction of a second, with no thought required.

Then comes the pain. A sharp, spreading sting gives way to a pulsing ache, and you cradle your hand and run it under cold water until it subsides. That felt experience is distinct from the reflex that preceded it. While the reflex moved your body out of danger, pain drives you to protect the wound, recover, and learn to avoid similar mistakes in the future.

We readily accept that other people feel pain by reading cues in their behaviour, like the inspection and nursing of an injury. We extend this to some animals too – a dog licking its paw or a cat favouring a limb rightly stir our sympathies. But what happens when we turn that lens on animals far less like us?

In our new study, published in Proceedings of the Royal Society B, we searched for behavioural signs of pain in house crickets, one of the most widely farmed insects. After applying heat to an antenna, we found that crickets didn't just reflexively flinch and recover. They nursed the harm, returning again and again to groom the affected site, much as we rub a burned hand.

The frontiers of feeling

French philosopher René Descartes considered animals unfeeling biological machines, and for centuries the circle of moral concern barely extended beyond our own species.

But the boundaries have steadily crept outward. Recognition that mammals experience pain came first, followed by birds. Fish too, once assumed to lack the necessary brain structures, are now widely accepted as capable of pain-like states.

The leap into invertebrates has been greater and more contentious. Their nervous systems bear little resemblance to our own, so arguments from brain anatomy alone don't carry us far. Instead, we look to behaviour. Does the animal respond to harm in ways that go beyond reflex, ways that are flexible, persistent, and sensitive to context?

Over the past decade, testable indicators for pain in non-humans have been developed and are increasingly accepted. These include learning from unpleasant events, trading off harms against rewards, and actively protecting the site of injury. Evidence meeting these criteria helped crabs and lobsters gain legal recognition as sentient under United Kingdom law in 2022.

Among insects, the evidence has been accumulating fast. Yet most of this evidence comes from bees. Bumblebees weigh the risk of harm against the richness of a food reward, and groom the site of an injury. Honeybees learn to associate particular smells with harmful stimuli and avoid them.

A cricket farm in Thailand. Photo: Afton Halloran

Far less attention has been paid to Orthoptera, the group that includes grasshoppers, locusts and crickets. That gap matters, because the house cricket (Acheta domesticus) is the world's most widely farmed insect, with more than 370 billion reared annually.

Do crickets feel pain?

We tested 40 male and 40 female crickets, each experiencing three conditions in random order: a hot probe to a single antenna (65°C, to activate damage receptors but not cause lasting injury), the same probe unheated, or no contact at all.

We filmed their behaviour for ten minutes. Observers scoring the footage did not know which treatment any animal had received.

The results were clear. After the hot probe, crickets were more than twice as likely to groom the affected antenna compared to controls, and spent roughly four times longer doing so.

Could this simply reflect general disturbance rather than targeted care? Unlikely: grooming was directed specifically at the heated side, not spread evenly across both antennae as it was after gentle touch or no contact.

And the behaviour wasn't a brief, reflexive reaction. It was elevated from the outset and tapered gradually over minutes, much like rubbing a burned hand as the felt sting slowly fades.

Small minds, big feelings

Subjective experience cannot be directly observed in any animal, not even humans.

But we have shown crickets respond to harm in a way that satisfies a key criterion many scientists and philosophers use to infer pain: flexible, directed self-protection. Combined with the knowledge that crickets possess damage receptors, can learn to avoid harms, and respond less to injury under morphine, the weight of evidence for an inner life is growing.

The practical stakes are real. Hundreds of billions of farmed insects are slaughtered each year by freezing, boiling and baking. Pesticides kill trillions more, optimised for lethality with no consideration of potential suffering.

If we take a precautionary approach, credible evidence of suffering should motivate proportionate protections well before we are certain.

Insects have been around for more than 400 million years and are far more behaviourally and cognitively sophisticated than once assumed. The question, then, may not be whether some insects feel, but why we ever assumed they couldn't.

With just one slaughter plant remaining in Canada, and none in the U.S., we must mount a discharge petition to shut down live horse exports to Mexico for slaughter

Canadian Slaughter Plant That Butchered U.S. Horses Shuts Down

Wayne Pacelle | Center for a Humane Economy | May 11, 2026

Bouvry Exports—the Alberta-based horse slaughter operation long fed a supply of kidnapped American horses to be butchered, with the cuts of meat then exported from Canada to Japan—has been shuttered. That leaves just one remaining horse slaughter plant in Canada: Viande Richelieu in Quebec.

This is one more poleaxe blow to the rickety and disreputable trade in equines killed for a small handful of diners in Japan. The horse meat trade has just one-tenth the volume it did 40 years ago, yet the trafficking of horses from the United States to Canada and Mexico persists.

But one horse butchered for this obscure meat trade is too many, and it's time we closed the book on U.S. involvement in it. Testifying about the Vietnam War in 1971, future U.S. senator John Kerry asked a congressional committee, "how do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?" In the same spirit, we might ask how we can justify the slaughter of one more beautiful equine to serve a dying industry.

For years, Animal Wellness Action, working alongside Animals' Angels and other allies, has investigated and exposed the realities of the horse slaughter pipeline.

These are not animals raised for food production. They were born into the world for horse show competition, horse racing, law enforcement, and other non-lethal pursuits, yet they are discarded by their owners or kidnapped by "kill buyers" and jammed into open-cab trucks for a dangerous and harrowing passage that may exceed 40 hours without sustenance or offloading.

This is a betrayal of our bond with horses, burros, and other equines. Horses helped settle the continent, powered agriculture and transportation, carried soldiers into battle, and today continue to serve in sport, ranching, recreation, therapy, and law enforcement. They are not throwaway items. They deserve better than to be funneled into the horse slaughter pipeline.

> *"This is a betrayal of our bond with horses, burros, and other equines...They are not throwaway items."*

Because more people all over the world understand these arguments, the trends are moving in our direction. The number of American horses sent to slaughter has fallen from nearly 400,000 annually in 1990 to roughly 25,000 today.

And the sky-is-falling claptrap from the horse-slaughter crowd that justifies this predatory business—"if we don't slaughter horses, people will abandon them"—has proved meritless. With the horse slaughter trade down 90 percent, there's been no uptick in abandonment or cruelty cases.

Despite this fact pattern and the features of this ruthless trade, U.S. House Agriculture Committee Chairman Glenn Thompson, R-Penn., recently blocked efforts led by Reps. Vern Buchanan, R-Fla., Jan Schakowsky, D-Ill., and more than 225 other members of Congress to include a provision in the Farm Bill that would permanently prohibit the slaughter of American horses and their export for slaughter abroad

We are calling on the Senate to include the SAFE Act, S. 775, led by Sens. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., and Ben Ray Luján, D-N.M., in its version of the Farm Bill. And it's time to send a signal to Chairman Thompson that he cannot singlehandedly control the national debate over animal welfare and thwart a House supermajority to stop various forms of animal cruelty. We are calling on the House of Representatives to approve a discharge petition to bring the SAFE Act to the floor for a vote.

I am confident that nearly all Democrats will sign it, and it's my hope that plenty of Republicans will join this humane effort demanded by the American public.

Closing Down Cruel and Archaic Industries

The fight to wipe out horse slaughter in North America is part of a broader strategy to dismantle various forms of animal exploitation that provide no meaningful social benefits or economic value to our nation. Cockfighting and greyhound racing fall into the same bucket as horse slaughter as enterprises that do no good for society.

During consideration of the Farm Bill earlier this year, Chairman Thompson not only denied the House a fair vote on the SAFE Act, he also blocked consideration of the FIGHT Act—bipartisan legislation supported by nearly 500 American law enforcement groups to stamp out dogfighting and cockfighting tied to organized crime and other forms of violence.

We'd have won a vote on the anti-animal fighting amendment led by Rep. Troy Nehls, R-Texas, in a landslide. And as with horse slaughter and the shuttering of Bouvry, we saw a private industry action that highlights our progress and signals to congressional leaders that they must get on the right side of history on this issue.

Korean Air adopted a new policy to stop shipping fighting birds from the United States to the Philippines, one of the world's largest cockfighting hubs. For years, traffickers exploited commercial airline cargo systems under the guise of shipments of "breeding birds" while fueling a barbaric international bloodsport tied to gambling, narcotics trafficking, and violence.

This corporate reform effort from Korean Air closes off the biggest artery in the global trade of cockfighting birds.

Delaware North—the Buffalo-based food service, hospitality, and gaming company that owns the last two operational greyhound tracks in the United States—is quietly working in favor of the Greyhound Protection Act. The company itself has acknowledged that commercial dog racing is no longer a viable business model. But under West Virginia law, the state still requires continued greyhound racing operations as a condition for maintaining casino licenses tied to the facilities.

In other words, the races continue not because of public demand, but because of outdated state government mandates propping up a declining industry built on the exploitation of dogs.

Whether confronting horse slaughter, cockfighting, or greyhound racing, our approach is the same: investigations, legislation, corporate engagement, coalition-building, litigation strategies, media exposure, and grassroots activism aimed at closing down obsolete industries rooted in systematic cruelty.

The closure of Bouvry, the new policy by Korean Air to stop shipping roosters to the Philippines, and the movement against greyhound racing by Delaware North are harbingers of what's ahead. The resistance of backward-looking politicians will crumble as the American public loudly rejects these cruel enterprises that offer no redeeming social or economic value to our communities.

We will continue to hammer away until we succeed.

Tell your legislators that you want to end this cruel abuse of America's beloved equines.

TAKE ACTION

The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is a plastic trash nightmare. It could also be part of a much bigger, hidden problem

Laura Paddison | CNN Climate | May 4, 2026

Tiny fragments of plastic are able to become airborne and, once in our atmosphere, they may be having a worrying impact on global warming. Peter Dazeley/Getty Images

Out in the Pacific Ocean, between Hawaii and California, is the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a swirl of plastic trash more than twice the size of Texas. As pieces of plastic tumble against each other, they break down into particles tiny enough to be borne aloft on the wind. Once in the air, they have a climate impact that could affect us all, according to new research.

The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is a significant source of airborne microplastics and nanoplastics, but there are many other places where tiny plastic particles can be whipped up into the skies, including from landfills, roadside litter and car tires.

A team of scientists from China and the US have studied the makeup and behavior of these plastics, and found they are contributing to global heating, according to the study published Monday in the journal Nature Climate Change.

Most microplastics research has focused on their health and environmental dangers, but this report "reveals a long overlooked link between plastic pollution and climate change," said Hongbo Fu, a study author and an atmospheric scientist at Fudan University in Shanghai.

The scientists zoomed in on microplastics, usually the size of a pencil eraser or smaller, and nanoplastics, which are the tiniest particles, many times smaller than the width of a human hair. They analyzed color, size and chemistry to understand more about how they interact with sunlight.

They wanted to know whether particles scattered sunlight back into space — meaning they would have a cooling influence on the planet — or whether they absorbed sunlight, which would have a warming impact.

Previous research has suggested microplastics' contribution to global warming was negligible, but analyses have often assumed particles were clear, the report scientists said. What they found was a rainbow of colors.

Colored plastics, especially red, yellow, blue and black, absorbed around 75 times more light than pristine, non-pigmented plastics, the study found. They "act like black T-shirt; they soak up heat," Fu said.

Size is also a factor, although to a lesser extent. The smaller the particle, the more sunlight it was able to absorb, the report found. "Nanoplastics are tiny but powerful. They stay in the air longer and, for the same mass, they absorb much more sunlight than microplastics," Fu said.

The scientists also found the plastics' warming impact could change over time. They artificially aged them in the lab using ultraviolet lamps and found that white particles tended to yellow, meaning they absorbed more sunlight. Red particles, on the other hand, sometimes bleached, meaning they scattered more light.

Plastic floats in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. Photo: The Ocean Cleanup

Most particles are darker, either because they start that way or darken as they float around the atmosphere and age, said Drew Shindell, a study author and a professor of Earth science at Duke University. The big advance of the paper, is that "we can pin down that the net effect is that almost all of these particles are warming more than cooling," he said.

The warming effect may be small at a global level but it's not insignificant, the scientists said. Microplastics and nanoplastics produce roughly 16% the warming impact of black carbon, or soot, a powerful airborne pollutant.

In ocean areas where plastic gets caught in spinning currents, such as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, the warming impact is particularly pronounced and may exceed black carbon, the study found. It's "bits of plastic hitting other bits of plastic that causes the extra-large flux of material out into the atmosphere," Shindell said.

Experts told CNN the study results are interesting and build on previous findings, but do have significant limitations.

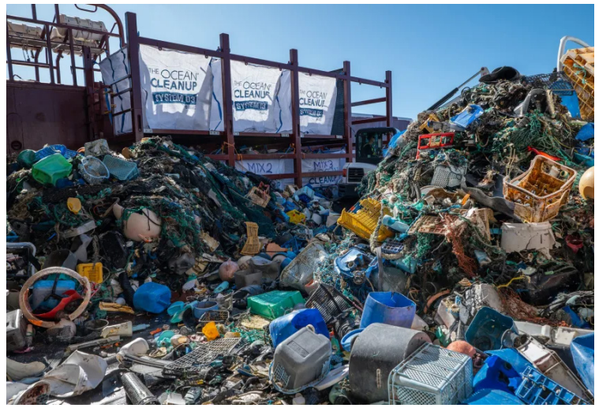
"What's new here is the numbers," said Zamin Kanji, group leader of the Atmospheric Physics Lab at ETH Zürich in Switzerland, who was not involved in the research. The study systematically quantifies the size and pigment of various plastics and their impact on sunlight, he told CNN.

The finding that microplastics have a warming impact isn't new however, he said, pointing to a 2021 study, which made the same finding. "The number in the latest study is higher," Kanji said, but the previous paper projected the impact was likely to rise as more data became available, plastic production rose and plastic already in the environment broke down.

We won't get a full picture of the climate impact until we have better data on how much plastic is in the atmosphere, Kanji said. "This will take a long time to robustly quantify," he said.

Natalie Mahowald, chair of the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at Cornell University, who was also not involved in the research, said the study shows current levels of microplastics have a very small climate impact, although that could change if levels grow considerably.

"In my opinion, the most important impacts of microplastics are likely to be on health, but we still don't know very much about them," she told CNN.



Trash cleaned up from the Great Pacific Garbage Patch by The Ocean Cleanup, a non-profit environmental organization, in August 2023. Photo: The Ocean Cleanup

The study authors acknowledged it's exceptionally hard to measure exactly how many plastic particles are in the air, but said they say they are confident that even with these uncertainties, the net impact is warming. "Our work suggests that climate models need to be updated," Fu said.

About 47 percent of wolves in Italy are considered wolf-dog hybrids, according to a recent genetic analysis. Bildagentur Zoonar GmbH / Shutterstock

Nearly Half of Italy's Wolves Are Part Dog Now, Thanks to Hybridization. Is That a Threat to the Species?

Gennaro Tomma | Smithsonian Magazine, bioGraphic | May 6, 2026

Between 15,000 and 30,000 years ago, a now-extinct population of wolves evolved into dogs, with a little help from humans. Today—at least in Italy, which hosts one of Europe's largest wolf populations—genes are flowing in the opposite direction. Recent genetic testing suggests that, particularly in the country's central and southern regions, nearly half of the wild wolves (Canis lupus) are actually wolf-dog hybrids.

That represents a massive shift from the 1970s, when Luigi Boitani, now the chair of the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe, discovered the country's first known wolf-dog hybrid.

The 1970s were a period of transition for Italy's wolves. At the time, the population was coming out of a tailspin. New laws and conservation efforts were designed to encourage wolves to recolonize habitat from which they'd been extirpated. But the landscape, and its inhabitants, had changed. Wild countryside had given way to rampant urbanization, and Italy's central and southern regions—where wolves began recovering first—hosted high numbers of free-ranging dogs. It didn't take long for the wolves to begin rubbing shoulders (and more) with the local canines.

Decades later, Rita Lorenzini, a biologist and director of Italy's Experimental Zooprophylactic Institute of Lazio and Tuscany, worked with her team to analyze hundreds of DNA samples collected from a region spanning from Bologna down to the toe of Italy's boot. Their analysis, published in January in the journal Biological Conservation, reveals just how close the two canid species have become.

Lorenzini's research looked at genetic material collected from 748 wolves that had been found dead between 2020 and 2024, and 26 more that had been collected between 1993 and 2003. The team found that 47 percent were wolf-dog hybrids. And while some of these animals are the descendants of hybridization events that took place generations ago, others are more recent crosses, showing that hybridization is still occurring.

Hybrids are not easy to spot. While some people suggest wolf-dog hybrids have distinctive physical features, such as darker fur than non-hybrid wolves, Paolo Ciucci, a biologist at Sapienza University of Rome who worked with Lorenzini on the recent study, says scientific evidence of these visual differences is lacking and that genetic analysis remains the most reliable way to identify a hybrid.

Wolf-dog hybrids arise when a wolf—typically a female—breeds with a domesticated dog. Around the world, the vast majority of domesticated dogs are actually free-ranging. Alberto Tivoli

But the extremely high presence of wolf-dog hybrids in central and southern Italy, Ciucci says, represents a threat to the future of the country's wolves.

It's unlikely that a wolf living in a healthy, stable pack in the wild would reproduce with a free-ranging dog, Ciucci explains. Those wolves are more likely to see a dog as competition, or even as prey. But when the pack structure falls apart and female wolves find themselves alone in an area filled with free-ranging dogs, the dynamic can change.

While Italy hosts nearly 3,300 of Europe's roughly 21,500 wolves, the fact that so many are actually dog hybrids poses a silent danger, Ciucci says. Italy's wolves might be close to a point of no return that experts call "genetic swamping," in which the wolves' original gene pool is irreversibly replaced by that of the hybrids. In simple words, it means the wolf—genetically speaking—could disappear.

In northern Italy, where there are fewer free-ranging dogs, wolf-dog hybrids are much rarer than in the central and southern regions of the country. But that, Lorenzini says, is likely temporary. Wolves can cross vast distances, and hybrids could eventually mix and mingle with wolves in northern Italy, or even across Europe.

Of course, wolves and domesticated dogs have been breeding—and thus hybridizing—since they first diverged thousands of years ago. In North America, for example, gray wolves with black coloring are believed to be the distant descendants of wolf-dog mixes. Research suggests these canines even picked up some perks from their interspecies mingling. Black wolves are in fact more resistant than their peers to some diseases, such as canine distemper, and they may also be more successful at hunting in forests.

But what's happening in Italy is totally different, Lorenzini says, because of the scale and the speed at which it is taking place.

Astrid Vik Stronen, a geneticist at the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia who wasn't involved in the research, agrees the possible downsides of hybridization outweigh the potential benefits. "Overall," she says, "I think the main concern is that it would be a risk."

Italy's abundance of wolf-dog hybrids, Ciucci adds, threatens to disrupt the key role wolves play in the ecosystem. Though researchers know little about the ways hybridization affects how wolves function, as it's difficult to study the animals in the wild, Ciucci says it's possible that hybridization is driving changes to their physiology and behavior—such as how they hunt, how they find and defend their territory, and how they interact socially.

To Ciucci, the rampant hybridization is also putting the uniqueness of the species at risk. "The authenticity of the wolf species [is going] missing, with all its cultural, ecological and evolutionary value."

This is something Boitani has been worried about—and has been persistently warning about—since he discovered that first hybrid decades ago. "Perhaps because I'm a bit old fashioned," Boitani says, "and because I'm attached to the idea of the wolf as I've always known it, dreamed it and experienced it … [but] I oppose the idea that, tomorrow, all Italian wolves will be naturally hybrids."

Colorado's wolf reintroduction hits "inflection point" as program leader steps down, population dwindles and conflicts increase

Eric Odell, Colorado Parks and Wildlife's wolf conservation program manager since the program's inception, announces his retirement

Tracy Ross | The Colorado Sun | May 7, 2026

Grand Junction — Colorado's wolf reintroduction program is entering its most precarious stretch yet, as the program's top administrator publicly announced his retirement Thursday — but not before telling commissioners he could not provide them with an estimate of when, if ever, wolves would be fully reestablished in the state.

During opening remarks to the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission on Thursday, Eric Odell, CPW's wolf conservation program manager, said a requirement of the agency's annual report on wolf restoration "is to give an anticipated timeline to recovery."

But at this stage, he said, "I cannot provide a definitive timeline, and that's an honest reflection of where we are in the implementation of wolf restoration."

Odell has led Colorado's wolf recovery effort since it was mandated by voters in 2020. In his role, he oversaw the capture and release of 25 wolves from Oregon and British Columbia into Colorado's Western Slope. The agency Thursday released its third annual report since reintroduction began in December 2023.

The report appeared grim: Just 18 reintroduced adult wolves are alive and 14 pups. But officials say those numbers aren't surprising and that "in the last biological year, pup survival seemed to be relatively high."

A CPW spokesperson said Odell's job was posted in March. It's now closed and "they are reviewing and/or interviewing applicants." Odell will retire in July.

Odell's update comes after the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in October banned Parks and Wildlife from bringing new wolves to the state until the agency could provide a full accounting of all reintroduction efforts made to date. CPW met the deadline and the agency's director, Laura Clellan, said they are "continuing to work with Fish and Wildlife." But 15 wolves scheduled to be translocated from British Columbia in January didn't come, leaving all future relocations this year uncertain.

Eric Odell, Colorado Parks and Wildlife wolf conservation program manager, plans to retire in July. He has headed up the wolf recovery program since voters approved it in 2020. (Handout)

The wolf management plan defines a self-sustaining population as roughly 150 to 200 wolves. It has a goal of releasing 30 to 50 wolves over a three-to-five-year period.

Odell said "we're very much at an inflection point."

With high survival and a high number of pups surviving each year, "the population of wolves could expand in both size and distribution, moving us towards the recovery goals that are outlined in the plan," he added. But with even one year of lower survival, high mortality or a reduction in new pups birthed, "additional years of reintroduction may be necessary."

"The key drivers to determining the timeline to recovery will be the survival rates of wolves of different ages, reproduction and wolf-pup survival rates and the reintroduction opportunities," he said. "Until those variables become clear, the timeline to recovery will remain uncertain."

Paws on the ground as of March 31

Brenna Cassidy, CPW's wolf monitoring and data coordinator, told the commission that as of March 31, the minimum number of wolves on the ground is 32, including 18 adults and 14 pups.

Of those, 24 are members of established packs (10 adults and 14 pups) with the remaining eight dispersed. Cassidy said of the 17 pups CPW was monitoring in 2025, 14 were still alive at the end of March. She did not say how three pups died.

The packs have established territories in Jackson, Routt, Rio Blanco and Pitkin counties. Female wolves with packs have tended to stay near their packs while lone females, not associated with any pack, have ranged widely.

Cassidy said dispersed or lone wolves are dying at a higher rate than wolves in packs. Of the 10 known deaths in 2025-26, three were in packs and seven were dispersed. Of those, one died in an encounter with a mountain lion over a moose carcass, six died from known human causes and three deaths remain under investigation.

Territory size of the four wolf packs differs by habitat type, human presence, pack size and prey availability, Cassidy said. When wolves establish territories, they are "somewhat more predictable," making it easier for wildlife officials to monitor them and prevent conflicts, she added.

And, she said, "one year of successful reproduction is a positive step to our long road of a self-sustaining population, but it is only one year. What the next years look like …will depend on future successful reproduction and any potential future translocations."

Range riders covered 15,000 miles

In December, CPW hired a new wolf damage and conflict specialist, Rae Nickerson, who updated the commission on 2025-26 wolf conflict mitigation strategies. A CPW spokesperson told The Colorado Sun Nickerson brings extensive knowledge of wolf management in the West and is completing one of the most comprehensive studies on the effectiveness and best practices related to range riding, a nonlethal, proactive livestock management technique where personnel patrol grazing areas on horseback, to reduce large carnivore-livestock conflicts.

During the 2025-26 annual reporting season, Nickerson said eight range riders rode 15,000 miles over 4,000 hours serving 34 livestock producers across eight counties. They detected at least 15 deaths or injuries linked to wolves, she said, "which is important for getting livestock producers compensated for their wolf related losses."

"This coming grazing season, we have 15 super-excited range riders" of which seven are returning, she added. Last week they completed a five-day range rider training she led in Grand Junction.

The increase in riders will allow CPW to cover more area and expand into the southwestern part of the state to prepare for the potential migration of wolves into new areas, Nickerson said.

Nonlethal mitigation an imperfect solution

Ethan Kohn, one of CPW's wildlife damage specialists, said despite extensive efforts to prevent wolves from getting into livestock herds using nonlethal tools like turbo fladry — brightly colored flags draped on electric barbed wire fences — flashing lights and other scare devices, wolves in Pitkin and Routt counties proved difficult to deter.

The Copper Creek pack, whose territory includes the areas around Carbondale and Basalt, was particularly challenging. The landscape there includes large private residences, small hobby farms and approximately six to eight large livestock producers, Kohn said.

Elk and deer also use private lands year-round due to high-quality forage associated with agricultural production, he added. And "heavy year-round recreational use on adjacent public lands, including hiking, biking and winter recreation, pushes ungulates onto private lands where human pressure is lower, creating conditions that also attract wolves," he said.

In 2025, CPW worked with three livestock producers experiencing consistent wolf activity on two large cattle operations and a smaller one with sheep and cattle. Throughout the 60- to 90-day calving period, they documented wolf tracks outside and inside fences draped with fladry as well as inside fladry enclosed pastures.

Elk frequently entered pastures at night to feed, tearing down fencing and reducing its effectiveness as a protective barrier. CPW also used a full-time range rider who worked across public and private lands. "This individual supported livestock monitoring, night watch and hazing during periods of increased conflict," Kohn said. CPW and Colorado Department of Agriculture staff conducted coordinated night watch efforts for approximately three weeks.

Despite these efforts, multiple livestock losses occurred, beginning in March 2025 and continuing into April of this year.

"These experiences highlight the challenges of conflict minimization in high conflict areas like this," Kohn said. "Intensive measures such as extended night watch, range riding

continues on next page...

and the use of thermal imaging are being implemented by both agency staff and producers. However, even with significant investment in nonlethal tools, conflict continues to occur under these conditions."

Large-scale livestock operations, allotments up the challenge

Kohn said the King Mountain pack, whose established territory ranges from northern Eagle County to southern Routt County near the ranching communities of Burns into Toponas, have also continued getting into livestock.

Deterring attacks there is particularly challenging due to the scale of the operations, including large calving areas and extensive, expansive summer grazing allotments. In 2025, CPW implemented two fladry projects, along with additional scare devices and other nonlethal deterrence measures, he said. Range riding proved to be one of the most effective tools as it provided consistent human presence, improved livestock monitoring and quick detection and recovery of carcasses.

Two full-time CPW range riders were deployed during the 2025 summer grazing season. Yet wolf conflicts included the killing of a calf during spring calving season, multiple attacks in October and one in March.

"Wolves were observed in and around livestock," he said. "This prompted a combined night watch with CPW staff, (USDA) wildlife services and a conservation district CPW range rider."

But due to the size and scale of these operations, maintaining consistent coverage with nonlethal tools is difficult.

Colorado unlike any "comparable Western states"

CPW has approved more than $1 million in compensation for livestock killed or harmed by wolves in 2025-26, including $260,000 the commission approved Wednesday for wolf damage to two ranchers and $700,000 they approved at their March meeting.

But it has that funding and "this needs to be clearly stated," Ray Aberle, CPW's private lands program manager, told commissioners. He reminded them that the bill authorizing payments — Senate Bill 255 — was signed prior to finalization of the Colorado wolf restoration plan.

The timing is important, "because it points to the concurrence of these actions and the challenges in having accurate projections for the costs associated" with starting such a plan, he said. Colorado's compensation plan "is exceedingly different from any other state's" due to the decision to restore wolves coming by citizen initiative."

Lastly, he pointed out that from a perspective of "topography, human land use and densities of livestock and people, Colorado is very unlike any of our comparable Western states managing wolves, such as Montana, Idaho, Wyoming and even Arizona."

Colorado has the highest livestock inventory (of those states) with a resident population of more than 6 million and more than 98 million annual visitors, he added. In 2025, the Colorado livestock population was estimated at 2.6 million head. Nonetheless, Colorado experienced just 42 confirmed depredations of cattle, sheep and working dogs, he said.

Other updates

In December, CPW hired a new wolf damage and conflict specialist, Rae Nickerson, who updated the commission on 2025-26 wolf conflict mitigation strategies. A CPW spokesperson told The Colorado Sun Nickerson brings extensive knowledge of wolf management in the West and is completing one of the most comprehensive studies on the effectiveness and best practices related to range riding, a nonlethal, proactive livestock management technique where personnel patrol grazing areas on horseback, to reduce large carnivore-livestock conflicts.

During the 2025-26 reporting period, CPW received 45 nonlethal wolf hazing permits and three chronic depredation permits. They issued all of the former and denied all of the latter.

Chronic depredation permits are issued when three or more depredation events are caused by the same wolf or wolves within a 30-day period, provided there is clear and convincing evidence that at least one of the depredation events was caused by a wolf or wolves, according to CPW.

They also conducted multiple wolf depredation investigation trainings, made continued investments in deploying conflict minimization resources and expanded their stockpile for upcoming seasons.

They conducted 78 site assessments (bringing the total site assessments conducted in Colorado to over 280), led 12 night watch events, and deployed 61 scare devices and more than 13 miles of fladry across 15 locations.

And research is ongoing into deer and elk activity in areas with wolves.

Odell moving on

Odell said retiring from CPW "is entirely a personal decision" that doesn't stem "from external pressures, political or otherwise…despite what might be suggested elsewhere."

"The past six years…focused on wolf restoration… have been among the most challenging, complex and meaningful of my career," he added.

And he said he leaves the program "with full confidence in its future," knowing it's in the hands of "exceptional scientists and biologists, skilled conflict mitigation specialists, dedicated field and regional staff and professionals who are deeply committed to public service to the people and wildlife of Colorado."

Trump Permits New Cross-Border Pipeline

Guardians and partners activate to prevent Bridger Pipeline

Sean Stevens | WildEarth Guardians | May 12, 2026

President Trump issued a permit for a new cross-border pipeline before completing an environmental analysis, consulting with impacted Tribes, or even informing the public about the type of oil the proposed pipeline would transport.

This month, Guardians joined a coalition of Indigenous, conservation, and community groups sounding the alarm about the proposed Bridger Pipeline Expansion, which could transport more tar sands oil per day than the controversial and now-defunct Keystone XL project if approved.

Five new endangered red wolf pups at Museum of Life and Science

Five endangered Red Wolf pups born at Museum of Life and Sciences

The museum's 7-year-old female Red Wolf welcomed a litter of three male and two female pups.

Morgan Macenka | WRAL News | May 12, 2026

The Museum of Life and Sciences in Durham welcomed five new critically endangered Red Wolf pups.

The litter was born on Tuesday, May 5. There are three male and two female pups. The animal care team and veterinary staff said all of them are in good health.

This marks a significant milestone in the third consecutive Red Wolf Breeding Season. The pups were born to a female named Carolina and a male named Jaques.

The red wolves at the Museum play a large role in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Red Wolf Recovery Program and the Saving Animals From Extinction (SAFE) Initiative.

The Museum received its first Red Wolf in November 1992. There have been eight additional litters since then.

The Red Wolf habitat is currently closed to visitors, but other animal exhibits are open.

To get tickets and more information, visit lifeandscience.org.

Adoption corner

TCRAS

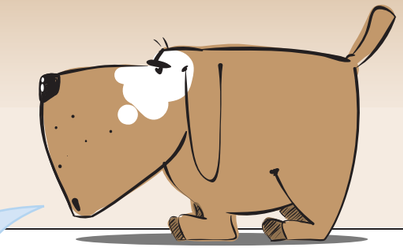
Teller County Regional Animal Shelter

tcrascolorado.org · 719.686.7707

SLVAWS

San Luis Valley Animal Welfare Society

slvaws.org · 719.587.woof (9663)

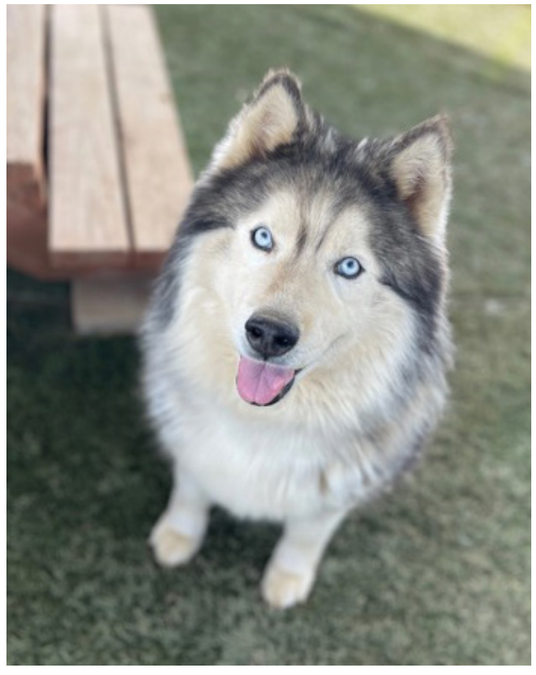


NOTE - Our shelter is still open for adoptions, but we are asking that you call ahead and make an appointment before coming in to the shelter - 719-686-7707.

SLVAWS

Please check our website, www.slvaws.org for our next adoption fair in Colorado Springs, every Saturday 10am-3pm.

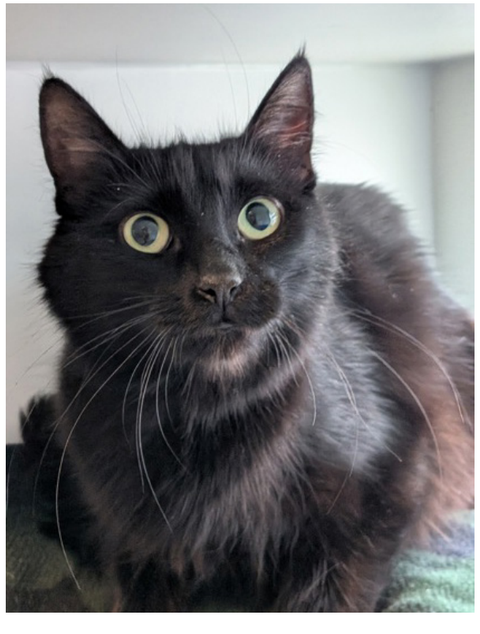
ZOOK »



I'm a sweet, easy-going fella looking for a new family! I love being with people, and I enjoy a good brushing which is good because I have a lot of fur! I tend to howl when left alone, but it's just because I want you to know you are missed. If you have other dogs I'd like to meet them first before I enter my new home to make sure we get along. I'm a little older, so I can be a bit grumpy with some dogs.

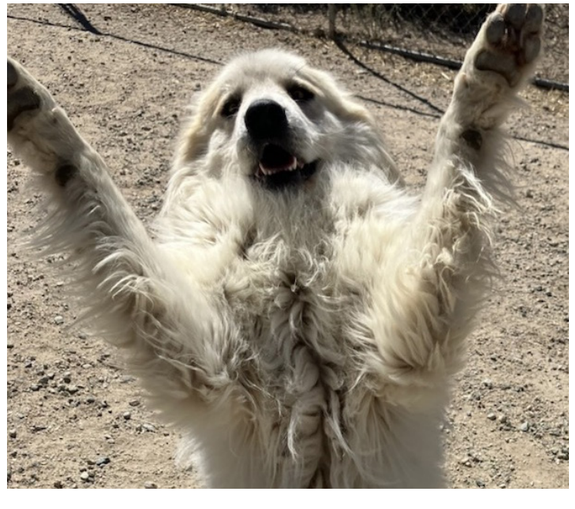
BEAR (A.K.A MISHA) »

What a lovely hairdo!!! Perhaps Aussie/ husky/live stock guardian dog. No children under 12, no cats, no small dogs. 10 months old. ~ 45 pounds. Affectionate, playful. Fully crate trained. Fully vetted. May be fearful in new, noisy situations. Needs management around food. We love her!!!



« SABRINA

Hi I'm Sabrina! I love pets and am getting very close to being a cuddler. After 10 weeks (and after having 4 rambunctious kittens!), I am becoming more playful and actually played fetch a few times. I like being in the same room as my foster all day long, follow them around the house but keep to myself a bit. I would be an amazing companion to work from home with!



« BIG MACK

Big Mack, a party animal, truly the life of the party. Loves to play with puppies and other dogs. Fully vetted. 2 years old. Stray. 105 pounds. Good with children.