

**Testimony by Jim Keen, D.V.M., Ph.D.**

**Director of Veterinary Sciences**

**Center for a Humane Economy**

**Before the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission**

**April 16-17, 2024**

Summary

- 1 – An agricultural veterinarian and scientist, steeped in rural culture and a resident of the interior West, says the wolf killing episode in Sublette County was inexcusable and even pathological.
- 2 – A severely injured, dying wolf was in a state of extreme distress during a period of forced captivity and almost certainly suffered internal injuries after being run over and crushed by a large snowmobile.
- 3 – A complete veterinary forensic investigation should be conducted to fortify an unambiguous case of cruelty to animals.
- 4 – Wyoming must reform its wolf and “predator zone” management (killing) policies or else defer to the US Fish and Wildlife Service. States lose their rights when they obviously mismanage their responsibilities.

Full Presentation

I am Jim Keen, an agricultural veterinarian living in rural South Dakota. I earned my D.V.M. and Ph.D. in infectious disease epidemiology at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana. In my 34-year-long career as an animal scientist, I have been a large animal practitioner, a veterinary researcher for 15 years at the USDA’s Meat Animal Research Center (where USDA conducted some of its predator control work), and a faculty at the University of Nebraska School of Veterinary Medicine. I am currently the director of veterinary sciences at the Center for a Humane Economy, an anti-animal cruelty non-profit.

My family continues to farm and ranch in eastern South Dakota as they have for the past 140 years since homesteading the land in the 1880s.

**1 – *Cody Roberts “live wolf possession” case from Feb 29, 2024***

As a veterinarian, I was disgusted by the cruelty and inhumanity exhibited by Cody Roberts towards a young female wild wolf. It takes no bravery or ability to run down a young female wolf with a 600-pound snowmobile. It only takes a remorseless person who does not understand rural values and notions about the proper treatment of animals. Rural people know animals, and this is no way to handle a solemn responsibility to treat all animals with respect and to exhibit best practices on animal care.

The wolf certainly sustained massive internal injuries from blunt force trauma. The only proper and humane response should have been euthanasia. Only a sadist inflicts severe pain and suffering on an innocent living being and then amplifies the animals' agony with shock collars, and handles wild animals and brings them to homes and commercial businesses for performative purposes and public display.

## ***2 – A minimum of what should be done***

Like the Michael Vick case raising understanding about the prevalence and severity of dogfighting, the Cody Roberts case is a wake-up moment on the treatment of wolves in Wyoming and in other northern Rockies states.

- a – Mr. Roberts should be prosecuted for animal cruelty and torture with prison time. He should be permanently stripped of his hunting rights, since he has violated any code of a responsible sportsman.
- b – An independent veterinary forensic investigation including locating and then performing a careful necropsy of the remains of the wolf tortured and killed by Mr. Roberts needs to be executed.
- c - Wyoming wildlife policies need revamping. Policies that completely devalue wolves invariably lead some people to act with vengeance and extreme malice.
  - Snowmobile “hunting” and other cruel methods must be banned for wolves, coyotes, and all other Wyoming wildlife. The use of wire snares and steel-jawed leghold traps should also be banned since they cause extreme distress. There is no domestic market for the fur of wolves, so the killing of the animals by these means is gratuitous.
  - The “predator zone” free-for-all covering 85% outside of the Greater Yellowstone Basin of the state must be scrapped. The policy of unlimited, unlicensed killing of wolves reflects a 19<sup>th</sup>-century attitude.
  - The ecological services of wolves and other predators should be recognized and promoted. For example, Wyoming has perhaps the highest prevalence of Chronic Wasting Disease in its deer and elk populations. Hunters are advised not to consume CWD-infected venison due to the zoonotic disease risk of eating infected meat. Apex predators like wolves and mountain lions selectively target and kill CWD-infected deer and elk, helping to keep these herds healthy – and amount to our best defense against this fatal disease. Wolf attacks on wildlife and people are rare occurrences. Yet indiscriminate killing of wolves just increases the likelihood of conflict with people, pets, and livestock by disrupting their social structures. Heavy exploitation of wolves reduces pack sizes and makes it more difficult for packs to kill traditional prey, such as elk or moose. This drives these small packs to opt for less traditional prey, such as sheep or calves.
  - If states fail in their duties, then the Federal government has a duty to intervene. If Wyoming does not take proper immediate remedial actions to protect wolves and other

predators, then the state invites the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to restore order through relisting of wolves as threatened across their range in the state. If that is not an action that the state wants, and I am sure it is not, then the best policy is to establish careful safeguards for wolves and tamp down on policies that reflect an irrational hatred of the animals.