

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Wyoming Wolf Torture Incident Highlights Need to Drastically Reform State Wildlife Management

A coalition of wildlife, hunting, animal welfare, scientific, and governance reform organizations is calling for Wyoming and other states to overhaul their wildlife management policies in the wake of an incident of a wolf having been captured and tortured in Wyoming.

As reported by [KHOL 89.1 radio on March 29, 2024](#) a Wyoming man injured a gray wolf with his snowmobile, taped the wolf's mouth shut, brought the animal to a home and then a local bar where the wolf was eventually killed after several hours of being paraded around the bar. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department states that the only crime the man violated is possession of a living, warm blooded wild animal, which is a violation of Wyoming law that carries a maximum \$250 fine. He was fined \$250, and, to our knowledge, the state wildlife management agency has not indicated that any further investigation is being conducted.

The incident reveals fundamental problems with the way Wyoming and many other states manage wildlife. The groups point out that states need to address these systemic problems to prevent similar incidents from happening again.

“Wyoming wolf management ignores and defies science and is based instead on politics driven by fear-mongering myths and misconceptions about wolves, helping perpetuate irrational hatred towards these native animals,” says Kristin Combs, executive director of Wyoming Wildlife Advocates. “State wildlife managers are focused on populations of animals and often turn a blind-eye or ignore the welfare of individuals. This gives silent permission to those who would commit acts of cruelty that it is ok to torture animals as long as it isn't hurting the overall population.”

“This incident is a symptom of a broken system of wildlife management in Wyoming and other states,” said Kevin Bixby, Wildlife for All co-executive director. “State wildlife laws and policies are a relic of the past, reflecting a time when animals were divided into “good” and “bad” based

on their perceived value to humans, ignoring their ecological and intrinsic value, and out of touch with modern science and public attitudes. Until those policies are changed, wolves will remain unprotected in Wyoming, sending a message that it is okay to commit these barbaric acts against them.”

“This has no resemblance to hunting,” said Dave Stalling, founder and executive director of Hunters and Anglers for Wildlife Management Reform. “This horrific incident is a symptom of an irrational hatred for wolves that exists throughout much of the West, perpetuated by many — not all — hunters and agricultural interests who have far too much influence and control over state wildlife management. It illustrates why we need to reform wildlife management so that all citizens have a say and all species are protected.”

“The blatant disregard for native carnivores in Wyoming is a systemic sickness that is based on fear and bigotry,” said Kim Bean, President of Wolves of the Rockies. “It is time for wildlife reform that is not biased to what is wanted on the landscape, but what is needed for the well-being of all.”

“This wolf was legally tortured, needlessly,” said Lisa Robertson, President/Co-Founder for Wyoming Untrapped. “Wyoming’s laws do not protect many of our wildlife from being treated in almost any manner, with no accountability. We must encourage compassionate coexistence, which will naturally lead to a more balanced approach to the management of natural resources and less tolerance for unchecked exploitation. Wyoming’s laws and regulations must better meet the values of a changing public to join us in creating a conservation ethic aligned with ecological and socially current principles.”

“As a society, we should not allow someone who injures, captures, tortures and then transports any living wild animal to merely be fined a small fee with no additional enforcement,” said Helena Edelson, President and CEO of Large Carnivore Fund. At a minimum such actions should exclude the offender from obtaining hunting and trapping licenses. This is indicative of the overarching and urgent need for wildlife management reform and laws protecting public wildlife in this country.”

As the public awaits further details of the cruel incident to be revealed in coming days and weeks, groups are demanding immediate action in Wyoming to prevent repeat offenses. Above all, the Wyoming legislature should finally pass a law outlawing the killing or maiming of any wildlife with snowmobiles or other vehicles (often colloquially referred to as “coyote whacking” after the most common target of the practice).

Additionally, the Legislature should delegate management authority over all wildlife in the state to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department so that it can enact regulations to protect carnivores such as wolves, coyotes, and mountain lions. Scientific studies link a lack of protections to increased illegal activity, including poaching and the behavior behind this tragedy, by signaling the animals have no value and therefore can be persecuted without recourse.

Longer term, Wyoming and other states should establish alternative sources of funding for wildlife conservation that aren't dependent on license fees. State wildlife agencies in many states are captured by the minority of the public –hunters, anglers and trappers—who buy the licenses that generate a portion of agency revenues, leading managers to turn a blind eye to cruel behavior such as this incident out of fear of offending hunting groups. We call on ethical hunters everywhere to speak out against this type of behavior and support the changes that will prevent it from happening in the future.

Finally, the coalition is calling on states to accept their responsibility to be leaders in protecting wildlife in the U.S. in accordance with established American values for the compassionate treatment of wildlife. These groups are committed to holding Wyoming and other states accountable to democratize wildlife management, move beyond their historic animosity towards wolves and other carnivores, and accept their responsibility to protect all species as a public trust for the benefit of all.

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