

# RANCHER PERSPECTIVES ON LIVESTOCK PREDATION DETERRENENTS IN COLORADO STATEWIDE

## PROJECT BACKGROUND

Over 70% of the Western U.S. is grazed by livestock, and managing grazing activities is the primary tool for managing those lands. In much of these same lands, carnivore populations have been recovering and reclaiming recently unoccupied habitat, with a corresponding increase in the intensity and frequency of livestock predation and other negative impacts. While there are many potential tools and strategies available to livestock producers and land managers, there is little information on what practices Colorado ranchers are currently employing, how they see those tools changing in the next several years as wolves return, how much they know about other current livestock protection tools, how they feel about their options, and how they learn about new tools and practices. As predation risk grows, so will the pressure for ranchers to use protective tools. The goal of this project is to understand the current state of livestock protection practices so we can evaluate the tools we have, focusing on the tools that ranchers are interested in using.

## INTERNSHIP GOALS

- Understand the current state of livestock protection tools and practices
- Identify current challenges ranchers are facing
- Strengthen the bridges between ranchers, Extension, and local researchers
- Build relationships for future livestock protection research and Extension programming
- Learn from producers about where they gather knowledge about tools and techniques for avoiding livestock predation
- Gather data which will inform Extension resources to ultimately benefit rancher livelihoods, livestock, and wild carnivores

## APPLICATION

As a graduate student in the Conservation Leadership program, I must be skillful with crucial conversations, build relationships with diverse stakeholders, and cultivate collaboration to solve problems. Wolf reintroduction and recolonization is a complex topic due to challenges that wolves may present in shared landscapes with ranching operations. This internship has provided me the opportunity to listen to learn, cultivate understanding, and build relationships with the ranching community around the topic of carnivore-livestock interactions. My academic and career goals include collaborating with diverse stakeholders to benefit ranching livelihoods, livestock, and wild carnivores as we work toward coexistence.



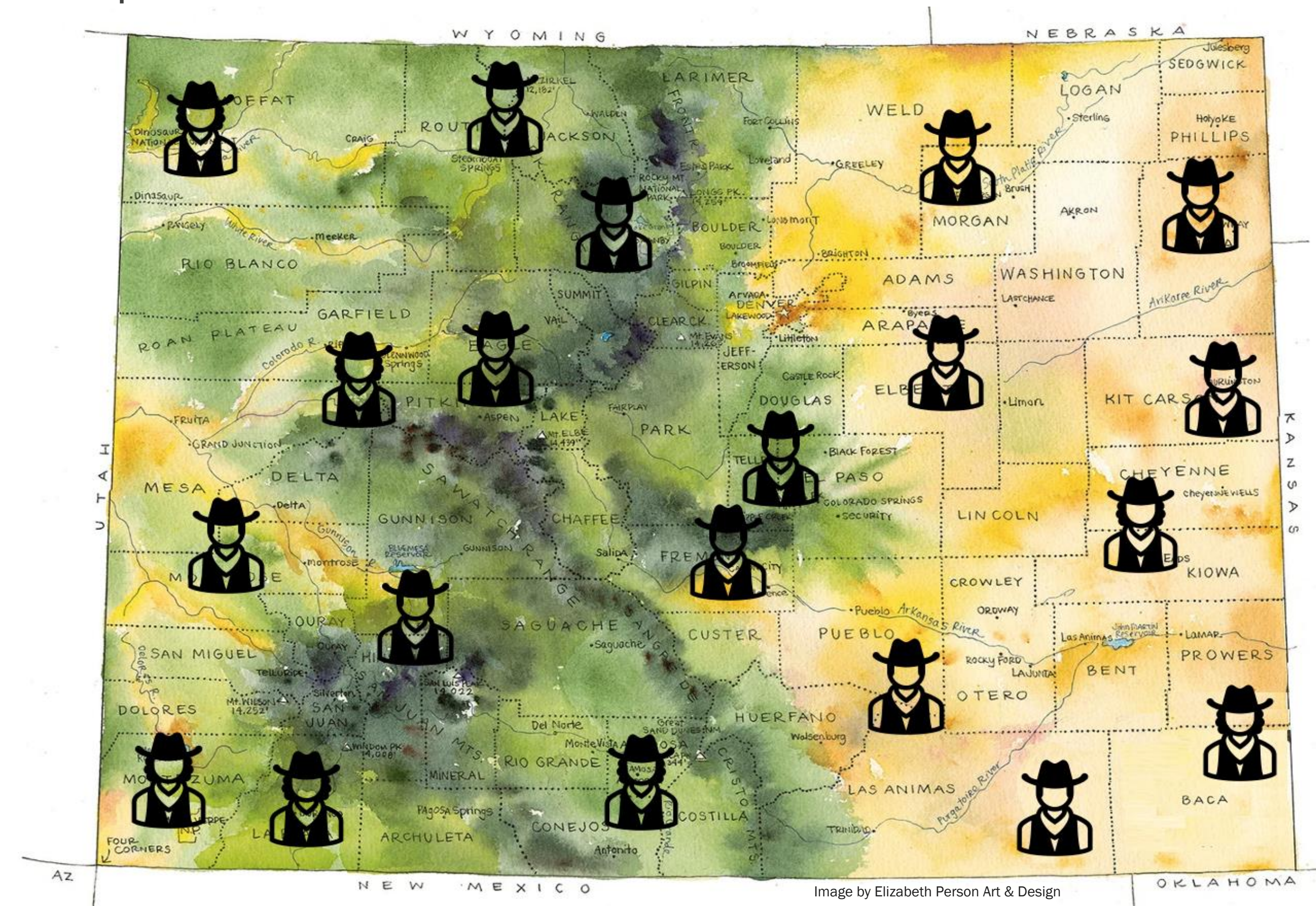
## INTERNSHIP ACTIVITIES

**Recruiting Rancher Partners:** To start, the project team had identified a few rancher partners. As interviews progressed, I asked interviewees and other colleagues to connect me with more ranchers who might participate in an interview, which brought us to our goal.

**Interviews:** I conducted 25 semi-structured interviews with livestock producers across Colorado in person, on Zoom, and by phone.

**Transcripts:** Once each interview was completed, I uploaded the recording to a program that transcribed them, and then I cleaned interviews for accuracy.

**Ranch Visits:** Some interviewees invited me to their ranch, where, in addition to conducting the interview, I was able to see aspects of their operation, including implementation of livestock protection tools and techniques.



## LESSONS LEARNED

**Challenges:** Ranchers are facing many challenges and concerns in addition to predation threats, including winter weather, disease, noxious weeds, water issues, non-carnivore wildlife, development pressures, and negative public perceptions of ranching.

**Motivations:** Ranchers are motivated to use livestock protection tools and techniques based on successful personal experiences, stories from other ranchers and media sources, concerns about wolf presence, actual predation events, and other types of incentives.

**Barriers:** There are many obstacles preventing ranchers from considering tools or continuing the use of tools, including money/resources, perceived ineffectiveness, stories from others, peer pressure, opposition to change, lack of knowledge, and bad experiences.

**Learning Sources:** Ranchers learn about ranching practices and livestock protection approaches from many sources, including other ranchers, ranching organizations, social and other media, workshops, books, academic institutions, and wildlife agencies.



## NEXT STEPS

- Extrapolate and write up findings from interview data.
- Develop strategies that simultaneously support effective depredation prevention and rangeland management practices.
- Use research information to develop Extension programs which support Colorado's ranching community, based on needs identified during interviews.