

September 2, 2016

Larimer County Planning Department
P.O. Box 1190
200 West Oak – Suite 3100
Fort Collins, CO 80522-1190
Attn: Rob Helmick – by email: rhelmick@larimer.org

Subject: Comments on the W.O.L.F. II Special Review Proposal

Dear Mr. Helmick:

We are writing on behalf of the Red Feather Highlands Maintenance Association (RFHMA), as our residential development is immediately adjacent to the proposed W.O.L.F. Sanctuary. RFHMA has several serious concerns regarding the proposed relocation of the W.O.L.F. sanctuary to the immediate vicinity of our neighborhood.

During an informal meeting held by W.O.L.F. staff on August 13 at the Red Feather Lakes library, the Executive Director of W.O.L.F. could not point out where our subdivision was in relation to their site map that they had on display. In fact, the map did not show the location of our subdivision at all. This is concerning when presented with the W.O.L.F. organization's comments that "W.O.L.F. wants to work together with our new community and show what a positive addition our organization will be to the area". How seriously can we take that comment when they don't even know where our subdivision is with respect to their property?

In reading the Special Review Criteria, we noted the following criteria as being particularly relevant in this case.

Special Review Criteria: "To approve a Special Review application, the Board of County Commissioners must consider the following review criteria and *find that each criterion has been met or does not apply:*"

- A. The proposed use will be compatible with existing and allowed uses in the surrounding area and be in harmony with the neighborhood.
- D. The proposed use will not result in a substantial adverse impact on property in the vicinity of the subject property.

The proposed use is not compatible with the existing and allowed uses in the surrounding area. The W.O.L.F. sanctuary cannot be compared to the Shambhala Mountain Center, the Ben Delatour Boy Scout ranch, or the Magic Sky Girl Scout ranch. These are much larger acreage facilities and the educational activities do not include animal shelters or a large congregation of animals that bark and howl at all hours of the day and night. The rest of our surrounding community is either residential or agricultural.

How does the Planning Commission and Board apply the concept of "substantial adverse impact on property in the vicinity of the subject property"?

In reading the past minutes of Larimer County Commission meetings regarding the W.O.L.F. organization and its sanctuary, it is common to find the phrase “minimal” impact on surrounding properties. It is unfair and subjective for those who will not be impacted by this facility to make a determination as to what is “significant” and what constitutes “minimal”.

One of our major concerns is noise from the sanctuary. Many of us moved to this area for the peace and quiet of the mountains; to get away from the noise and traffic of the adjoining cities and towns. The introduction of a kennel of 30-60 wolf-dogs will destroy the tranquility of our area and *is not in harmony with the neighborhood*. According to the Larimer County Noise Ordinance, a “noise disturbance” means any sound which is or may be: “Of such a volume, frequency and/or intensity that it unreasonably interferes with the enjoyment of life, quiet, comfort or outdoor recreation of an individual of ordinary sensitivity and habits.” The frequency of the noise from 30-60 penned animals cannot be managed, and it cannot be described as a natural noise or in harmony with the surrounding area.

Although the noise can vary in frequency and volume during 24 hours, it will be a persistent noise 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Comments from W.O.L.F. such as “typically the frequency of animals howling is about 5-6 times per day for very short periods of time” are vague and do not take into consideration how many times a day any number of animals may become more vocal due to external sources of excitement. Multiply the 5-6 times a day by the number of animals, add more frequent sources of excitement, as well as the barking and yelping of a large group of penned wolf-dogs, and that amounts to significant frequency of noise.

The noise study done in 1999 at the Rist Canyon location resulted in a Noise Mitigation Plan which consisted of procedural mitigation only, no structural mitigation. When the 1999 study was done, the sanctuary was already in existence. In spite of the implementation of the Noise Mitigation Plan in 1999, there were still complaints from neighbors about noise at the 2008 hearing (W.O.L.F. was requesting an increase in the number of animals from 30 to 60). The complaints indicate that the 1999 Mitigation plan was not successful. W.O.L.F. has indicated that the noise study to be conducted at the Livermore property will use modeling utilizing the noise at the current sanctuary location and the background noise at various locations at the Livermore site and surrounding areas. This will result in even less reliable results than the 1999 study.

There is no proof that the topography in the Livermore area will be conducive to mitigating the noise that exists at the current location in Rist Canyon. In fact the flatter topography may cause the noise to travel further. We are not convinced that modeling can and will be effective in producing accurate results for the noise study being proposed and therefore, produce a noise mitigation plan that will be truly effective (if such a plan is even feasible). We do not want to live where we can hear the persistent noise from 30- 60 penned wolf-dogs.

The greater the number of animals, the greater the impact on our lives and community.

The property values in our subdivision will be impacted to the same degree that the sanctuary will impact our quality of life. If the reasons that people move to this area are negatively impacted, then property values, as well as the time it will take to sell, will be negatively impacted.

Unless W.O.L.F. has had an independent study of real estate values of property in close proximity to the current sanctuary (discounting the fact that all real estate in Colorado has increased as compared to 1995, when the sanctuary was started), then the concerns of property owners in close proximity to the proposed location cannot and must not be summarily dismissed.

General statements from real estate agents that “it shouldn’t affect property values” have no merit. In a handout from W.O.L.F. (at the August 25 Commissioner meeting) a realtor from Summit Real Estate in Red Feather Lakes states that neighboring mountain property real estate values generally benefit from the preservation of large tracts of land used for nature-based educational attractions (it wasn’t a direct quote from the realtor, so we assume W.O.L.F. is paraphrasing). The example used is Shambhala Mountain Center on Boy Scout Camp Road and that neighboring real estate prices have increased. Again, all real estate prices in Colorado have increased over the past years, not because of the preservation of large tracts of land. The attempt to compare the Shambhala Mountain Center, which is located on more than 600 acres with educational activities involving humans only, and the proposed W.O.L.F. sanctuary of 180 acres with 30-60 penned wolf-dogs is more than a stretch and does nothing to address our real concerns regarding our property values. It is just an opinion of a real estate person whose qualifications with respect to this particular issue are unknown.

Current land owners have a much larger stake in this than the applicant. We live here, some of us full time, others part time, but we have all invested time and money into creating homes for ourselves and our families in this mountain community and do not believe that a non-profit should have the right to interfere with or destroy what we have here. If the Highlands homeowners prove at some point that the sanctuary has had an adverse impact on property values, who is going to pay? Unfortunately, not the W.O.L.F. organization, not the county; it will be the property owners.

Safety issues regarding the security of the proposed facility are also a concern. The initial plan description states that the wolf dog enclosures would be 8-10 feet high with a dig guard. How far down would the dig guards be and how does existing rock formations affect the placement of dig guards? There are on occasion snowfalls in excess of 3 feet in this area (4-5 feet is not uncommon), as well as large snow drifts during heavy snowfalls due to high winds. These drifts and snowfalls would cause the height inside the enclosures to be substantially less than 8-10 feet. What measures would be in place to address the altered height in the enclosures to ensure that the wolf-dogs do not breach the fence and escape?

We are concerned with the lack of security measures listed in the Sketch Plan phase. This facility will be far more accessible than the Rist Canyon location. There is 80 acres of public land that borders the proposed facility. If the wolf dog enclosures are located along this 80 acre border how will W.O.L.F. secure the facility from people entering through public land?

This again brings up a source of excitement that would cause the animals to bark and howl excessively.

Being more accessible than Rist Canyon will also bring additional issues due to that accessibility, one of them being the need for expanded security measures that far surpass what exists at the current location. The question has been posed as to how quickly will the surrounding community (and who will that include) be notified if a wolf dog escapes, and what is the means of notification. Using a social media site is unacceptable for a number of reasons: one cannot expect everyone to be online all the time, some people do not use these sites, some don't have access.

Due to the close proximity of the Highlands to the proposed facility, timeliness and reliability of notification is extremely important. We await an acceptable plan from W.O.L.F. regarding this notification, as well as notification when, and if, the animal is recovered. If an animal escapes, what is the action plan of W.O.L.F. to recover the animal? Will this plan be made available to the surrounding area?

If the W.O.L.F. sanctuary is approved at this new, proposed location, there will be inherent traffic issues. Regardless of what the final plan looks like, there will be an increase in the traffic on 74E as a result of the sanctuary. This will be a direct result of the number of volunteers, staffing, third party workers, vendors, and visitors. Even if the entrance is moved west, the road frontage on the west part of the property has multiple curves and elevations, causing blind spots and limited visibility of traffic from the east and west. As 74E has limited coverage by the Sheriff's department deputies due to the large geographical area they must cover and the limited number of deputies, there is already an issue with speeding, passing on double yellow lines, etc. The limited visibility in the curves, speeding in the 40 mph zone, combined with the possibility of people slamming on the brakes when they see the signage at the front entrance of the sanctuary, concerns us.

We believe the County needs to have traffic surveys done to ascertain the current levels of traffic and continue to have them done if the sanctuary is approved. A traffic light may become a reality if the increase in traffic is significant, particularly if the sanctuary begins to offer more educational activities to the public and adds the proposed visitor center and camping, etc.

The proposed location of the W.O.L.F. facility would be disruptive to the wildlife that reside in this area and also to the elk migration. Maps depicting animal migration patterns provided by the Division of Wildlife do not include all migrations, particularly the smaller ones. There is definitely an elk migration pattern thru the proposed facility. Those who have lived in the Highlands have witnessed it.

A kennel of 30-60 wolf-dogs would be disruptive to all the wildlife in the area. Their presence in enclosures is not the presence of a "natural" part of nature. The pictures provided by W.O.L.F. of turkeys near an enclosure don't show a wolf-dog in the picture, so we aren't convinced that the wildlife will adapt to being around this kennel of wolf-dogs. We are also concerned about the effect of this concentration of wolf-dogs on our horses and other pets, and remain dubious that they will adapt to the sounds and smells of these wolf-dogs.

The wolf biology lecture presented at the Red Feather POA on August 13 centered on the role of each creature within an ecosystem and how that balance needs to be maintained. The W.O.L.F. sanctuary appears to be in direct conflict with those ideals. This group of wolf-dogs will upset the balance in this small ecosystem and displace the wildlife groups here.

If the W.O.L.F. organization intends on pursuing the visitor center, gift shop, public tours, etc. (either in this Special Review or in a subsequent one), then this non-profit is essentially a commercial operation. It will bring no material benefit to the area (as they pay no property taxes, etc.) but will bring multiple issues to a mountain community with limited fire, emergency, and law enforcement resources.

The residents of RFHMA feel we are being made to pay for the mistakes of those who breed and own these wolf-dogs. Our property rights should be no less than those of the W.O.L.F. organization. To place a higher value on the lives and quality of life of animals over people is unfair and disrespectful to those of us who live here.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our very important concerns. The decisions made in this matter critically affect our quality of life on this mountain.

Sincerely,

Secretary of the Board of Directors
Red Feather Highlands Maintenance Association
writing on behalf of the residents of the RFHMA residential development