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Thursday, January 20, 2011

MONTH: **March 2007**

Colorado blizzards hit wildlife, sanctuaries, cattle, & pigs

DENVER--The Colorado Wildlife Commission on February 13, 2007 authorized spending up to \$160,000 on emergency feed rations for as many as 2,000 mule deer and pronghorn antelope who remained stranded nearly two months after a trio of blizzards paralyzed parts of the west from the Rocky Mountains to Kansas.

"An aerial survey found distressed animals in small clusters of 50 to 100 in a belt stretching from Burlington south to Lamar and west to Trinidad," Associated Press reported.

"Initially we were using food to lure animals away from highways, train tracks and haystacks," Colorado Division of Wildlife southeast regional manager Dan Prenzlou said. "Now we are feeding some of those same animals," just to help them survive.

Snowdrifts up to 10 feet deep caused deer, elk and pronghorn to cluster on plowed roads and railways. Forty-one elk were hit by trains between Trinidad and Aguilar in only four days at one point, CDOW spokesperson Michael Seraphin said. Altogether, the blizzards were blamed for more than 200 elk/train collisions.

"When the snow gets that high," district wildlife manager Travis Black explained, "animals look for anywhere they can stand where it's blown clear and they aren't buried up to their chest. Once they get on a roadway or the train tracks, they are vulnerable because the banks are so steep that when a car or a train approaches, they have no place to flee."

Initial reports indicated that the storms killed only about 3,500 cattle, but as roads and water sources remained under deep snow weeks later, Colorado Cattlemen's Association executive vice president Terry Fankhauser estimated that the final toll would be between 10,000 and 15,000, far fewer than the 30,000 who were killed by an exceptionally bad blizzard in 1997, but still among the bigger losses on record.

A hay shortage caused the cost of feeding animals to double and triple.

At least two animal sanctuaries were hard hit. Big Cats of Serenity Springs director Nick Scular told Andrea Brown of the Colorado Springs Gazette that snow removal alone had cost the 17-acre sanctuary nearly \$15,000. Big Cats of Serenity Springs houses 147 lions, tigers, leopards and other big cats, and was already having hard times since founder Karen Scular, 47, died from pneumonia on August 12, 2006.

A fire subsequently destroyed bookkeeper Collette Colvin's home, including a computer that contained the master copy of the sanctuary mailing lists and donation records.

Wolves Offered Life & Friendship sanctuary cofounder Frank Wendland meanwhile appealed for volunteers with snowmobiles to haul food and medicine to 13 wolves who were stranded on sanctuary land six miles south of Nederland, three miles from the nearest open road.

The 30 wolves at the main WOLF site, 20 miles northwest of Fort Collins, were unaffected.

[Free-range pig farm debacle](#)

Responding to a call from the Colorado Department of Agriculture, the American SPCA "deployed personnel to assist in the evacuation of Pioneer Pork, a pig farm in Lamar, Colorado," spokesperson Anita Edson announced on January 10. "The 5,000-acre farm includes hundreds of free-range pigs," Edson elaborated, "many of whom are piglets in need of nursing because sows have perished."

Pioneer Pork passed an audit by the American Humane Free Farmed Certified labeling program in September 2005, and was to be audited again in October 2007," American Humane executive director Marie Wheatley told ANIMAL PEOPLE.

"American Humane was the original, lone responder to the dire situation at the Pioneer Pork facility," Wheatley continued. "We spent a tremendous amount of hours and money to assist Pioneer for several days. When it became apparent to us that the situation was much more dire than originally predicted, and with an additional snowstorm moving in, we strongly suggested and in fact directed Pioneer to request a larger, state-sponsored disaster response.

"In the interim," Wheatley continued, "Pioneer Pork went into receivership. Following the blizzard, our staff became aware that some standards of our Free Farmed program were not being met, probably due to financial difficulties. Thus, American Humane immediately suspended Pioneer Pork's certified status. Regardless of that, we continued to help Pioneer Pork attempt to save as many animals as possible.

"If and when Pioneer Pork recovers financially and operationally," Wheatley said, "we will reassess, reinspect, and, if appropriate, reinstate their certification."

The Humane Society of the U.S. contributed \$55,000 to emergency feeding programs, including \$10,000 to the Colorado Veterinary Medical Foundation's Animal Emergency Relief Fund to assist stranded livestock. The fund helped the National Guard and Civil Air patrol to drop 80 tons of hay to starving animals in the first week of January 2007 alone.