

The PAUSE Initiative: What it is and why it is a problem

JoAnn Hackos. June 1, 2021 :

The PAUSE (Protect Animals from Unnecessary Suffering and Exploitation) initiative is an effort by extreme animal rights advocates to have a ballot question put to Colorado voters in the mid-2022 election. The initiative has been granted initial approval and proponents have begun circulating petitions to gather the necessary signatures even while there are significant legal challenges in process. Certainly, most of us would support protecting animals from unnecessary suffering and exploitation, but this proposal is not what it seems on the surface. Evergreen Audubon joins Audubon Rockies in asking our members and friends NOT TO SIGN THE PETITION.

PAUSE does several things:

1. It expands the current laws prohibiting cruelty to all animals, specifically livestock and fish.
2. It expands the current definition of “sex with an animal” to include “any contact or penetration no matter how slight between any part of a person or object, and the anus or genitalia of an animal.”
3. It eliminates exemptions for traditional animal husbandry.
4. It declares that it supersedes all other animal welfare laws on the books – except those pertaining to wildlife.
5. It permits slaughter of animals ONLY once the animal has lived 25 percent of its expected natural lifespan.
6. It arbitrarily defines the lifespan for several common livestock species.

Let's take issues in order:



The new language would criminalize many of the activities that are common veterinary practices for farm animals and pets, large and small. For example, artificial insemination, including semen collection and subsequent insemination of all species, including cattle, horses, and dogs, would be outlawed. Rectal examinations; palpation to establish pregnancy; assistance with labor and delivery; spaying and neutering and many other common veterinary procedures would be outlawed. While there is language to exempt procedures performed to protect animal health, the exempted procedures and guidelines to what constitutes animal health are not defined. The Veterinary Procedures Act, already on the books, specifies procedures considered necessary to protect animal health but the PAUSE initiative would supersede that statute. Additionally, by eliminating traditional animal husbandry practices, such as selective breeding or castration, the initiative further clouds what is acceptable to protect an animal's health. Veterinarians and other animal health professions will be open to prosecution for providing standard and necessary, if unpalatable, care.

Another problem with the initiative is that it declares itself superior to all other statutes, meaning that wherever there is a conflict between existing law and the new law, PAUSE would prevail. This would create significant ambiguity for everyone involved in animal care.



Finally, there is the issue of prohibiting slaughter before an animal has lived 25% of its expected natural lifespan. ***This is the crux of Audubon's concern with the initiative.*** Using cattle as an example, the initiative defines a cow's lifespan as 20 years, and that would mean that slaughter would not be permitted until the animal is five years old. From a consumer perspective, a 5-year-old cow would be extremely tough and undesirable. From a production perspective, this would drastically increase the cost of beef production and would drive most Colorado producers out of business. For those who might manage to survive, feeding and caring for animals for at least three years more than the current practice would necessarily result in producers having to maintain bigger herds with the result that the land would be overwhelmed.

Audubon has worked hard to develop sound relationships with meat producers with the goal of improving range-land habitat through the [Conservation Ranching program](#). As a result, producers working with Audubon and other conservation organizations are seeing improved soils, the return of prairie plants and birds, less erosion, restored riparian and aquatic habitats, and better water quality. If passed, the PAUSE initiative would directly threaten these conservation goals, reversing the progress that has been made by forcing overgrazing. Alternatively, if producers are driven out of business, previously grazed lands will become vulnerable to invasive plant species, soil erosion and other undesirable outcomes.

Please do not sign the petition to put this measure to a vote in Colorado.

