



February 2020

There has been a substantial increase in public interest in wolves in Colorado in recent months. The Frequently Asked Questions document below was developed in response to questions received by Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

Background Information on Gray Wolves:

- Currently, wolves in Colorado are protected as Endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act. They are also listed as State Endangered in Colorado. As long as the species is listed under the Endangered Species Act, authority for any management of the species lies with the federal government, through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). This authority extends to all aspects of wolf management in the state, including efforts to release wolves and subsequent management. The USFWS also has management authority for wolves that disperse naturally into the state. Federal wolf recovery plans do not address or specify Colorado as a location needed for the recovery of the species or to actively establish wolf populations.
- In March 2019, the USFWS published a rule proposing to remove the gray wolf from the list of federally endangered and threatened wildlife. The rule has yet to be finalized. If this rule is finalized, management authority for the gray wolf (but not the Mexican gray wolf) will be transferred to the states. The timeline for this process is uncertain. A final listing decision could be litigated, making the outcome uncertain for a period of time.
- On Tuesday, Dec. 10, the Rocky Mountain Wolf Action Fund submitted to the Colorado Secretary of State's Office what it said are more than 200,000 signatures to place restoration of wolves on Colorado's 2020 statewide ballot. On Monday, Jan. 6, the Secretary of State's Office qualified the measure for the ballot, saying that based on its sampling of *"215,370 submitted signatures, the projected number of valid signatures is greater than 110% of the total number required."*
 - For information on the **2020 initiative Colorado Ballot Proposal 2019-2020 #107 – Restoration of Gray Wolves**, please visit <https://leg.colorado.gov/content/restoration-gray-wolves-1>
 - The Parks and Wildlife Commission has no resolution or position specifically on ballot initiative #107.

Wolves in Colorado

Q: When was the last time there were resident wolves in Colorado?

A: Gray wolves historically inhabited most of Colorado, but were extirpated. The last known resident wolves in Colorado were in the 1940s until the most recent sighting of a group of wolves in northwest Colorado in 2020.

Q: Has CPW had prior reports of wolves in Colorado?

A: Yes, as well as evidence of occasional dispersers. We typically field around 100 sightings per year. However, wolf reports are typically not considered reliable without strong supporting

evidence. Confirmed or probable wolf dispersals into Colorado have occurred in 2004, 2007, 2009, 2015, 2019 and 2020.

Q: Are there currently wolves that CPW knows about in the state?

A: There are indications of wolves in the state.

- In the summer of 2019, an individual male wolf from the Snake River Pack in Wyoming was located in Jackson County.
- In January of 2020, CPW confirmed the presence of at least six wolves in northern Moffat County.
- There are other reports of wolves in Colorado and we work closely with our federal partners to investigate them. We will work with our partners at the USFWS and other federal partners in letting the public know about the verified sightings.

Q: Where do most wolves that disperse into Colorado originate?

A: Most dispersal into Colorado is believed to have originated from the Greater Yellowstone Area, which is part of the Northern Rocky Mountain gray wolf population. However, it is often difficult to determine a dispersing animal’s specific point of origin with certainty as only a small portion of the Northern Rocky Mountain gray wolf population is marked or fitted with telemetry collars.

Q: How will wolf populations be monitored?

A: A variety of tools could be used to monitor wolves including collared animals, cameras, howling surveys and other techniques.

Q: Can you provide a report listing all sightings in Colorado the last 15 years?

A: Below is the table of confirmed wolves in the state since 2004.

DATE	LOCATION	ORIGIN	SEX	COLOR	OUTCOME
June 7, 2004	Near Idaho Springs, CO	Unknown	Female	Gray	Found by side of I-70 deceased
February 16, 2007	North Park, CO	Unknown	Unknown	Black	Video taken by Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) staff

					(unconfirmed)
February 2009	North of Rifle, CO	Montana, Mill Creek 314F	Female	Gray	Presumed poisoned
April 2015	North Park, CO	Wyoming, 935M	Unknown	Black	Trail Camera and radio-collar data
April 29, 2015	Kremmling, CO	Unknown	Male	Gray	Shot by legal coyote hunter
November 12, 2018	Divide, Colorado	Colorado Wolf and Wildlife Center	Male	Mexican Wolf	Captive raised wolf escaped from facility near Divide, CO. Animal was recaptured
July 8, 2019	North Park, CO	Wyoming, 1084M, Snake River Pack	Male	Black	Wolf was photographed in North Park, Colorado
January 6, 2020	Moffat County	Unknown	Group of approximately six		Scavenged elk carcass and prints reported. Genetic analysis of scat is conducted. CPW staff later saw this group of at least six animals

Identification of the Species

Q: How can people identify wolves?

A: Wolves are bigger, stockier and have a longer tail than other canids (e.g., foxes and coyotes).

Despite their name, gray wolves may be white, tawny gray or black, or any combination of those colors. Approximately half of any gray wolf population actually is gray. Adult male gray wolves typically weigh between 90 and 110 pounds, and may exceed 5 feet in length from nose to tail tip. Adult females typically weigh between 80 and 90 pounds and can be 5 feet long. Pups are born with black spots on the upper outside of their tails, which may fade with age. Young wolves may resemble coyotes or some larger domestic dogs. However, wolves can be distinguished from most coyotes and dogs by their longer legs, larger feet, wider head and snout, shorter ears, narrow body and straight tail. Coyotes are 1.5 feet tall, and 4 feet long, weighing between 20-50 pounds.

- Wolf heads/faces are broader, and ears are rounder than the coyote's narrower face and tail, and pointed ears.
- Apparent sightings of wolf tracks often are a case of mistaken identity. Dog and coyote paw prints can be mistaken for wolf tracks. Adult wolf prints are larger than dog and coyote prints. An average-sized wolf makes a track about 5 inches long (without claws) and 3 to 4 ½ inches wide. Coyotes are considerably smaller and narrower.
- Although some dog breeds can have tracks greater than 4 inches in length, in general, if a 4-inch or greater canid track is observed, the probability that it may be a wolf is increased. Due to some overlap in size or the substrate the track was made in, tracks identification can be challenging. It is recommended to follow the tracks out, if possible, to obtain additional measurements, to look for other sign that may be in the area, and to identify the general travel path as wolves tend to travel in a straight line whereas domestic dogs tend weave more.

Q: What is a wolf pack?

A: The wolf pack is an extended family unit that includes a dominant male and female. In each pack, there is usually only a breeding pair, preventing subordinate adults from mating by physically harassing them. Thus, most packs produce only one litter of four to six pups each year. A pack typically includes the breeding pair, the young wolves born that year, perhaps last year's young and sometimes a few older wolves that may or may not be related to the breeding pair.

Q: I've heard reports that the wolves being proposed for reintroduction are Canadian gray wolves and that these wolves have never been in Colorado. I've heard these wolves are bigger and more aggressive than the wolves that had been in Colorado historically. Is this true?

A: The scientific system of identifying species works fairly well for distinguishing among species, but when you get to the subspecies level, the system becomes more complicated. At one time, taxonomists identified 24 subspecies of the gray wolf in North America. Today, taxonomists believe the number is closer to five. Debates about which subspecies naturally occurred where and when in the United States continue today.

Some have questioned whether the “wrong” subspecies of wolf was reintroduced into Yellowstone National Park. The National Park Service’s lead wolf biologist says the answer is no. The wolves reintroduced into Yellowstone were somewhat larger than what was believed to have been there historically, though the difference may be within the range of natural variation that could be expected.

The Mexican subspecies of gray wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*) is worth special mention. The Mexican wolf has always been considered a separate subspecies, and it is listed as a unique entity under the Endangered Species Act. Colorado is not within the historical range for this subspecies, and there is no expectation that this subspecies would be reintroduced into Colorado.

More information can be found here:

https://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/mexicanwolf/pdf/Mexican_Wolf_f10j_FAQ_FINAL.pdf

Living with Wolves

Q: Are wolves a threat to humans, in particular small children?

A: Aggressive behavior from wild wolves towards humans is rare. Mark McNay of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game compiled information about documented wolf-human encounters in “*A Case History of Wolf-Human Encounters in Alaska and Canada*” which was published in 2002. There are 59,000 to 70,000 gray wolves in Alaska and Canada, and since 1970 there were 16 cases of non-rabid wolves biting people. Six of those cases were severe. Since that report was written, wolves killed a man in Saskatchewan, Canada in 2005. In 2010, a woman jogging outside a remote village in Alaska was killed by wolves. In both instances, habituation to humans was a key factor in the deaths.

Generally, wild wolves are shy of people and avoid contact with them whenever possible. However, any wild animal can be dangerous if it is cornered, injured or sick, or has become habituated to people through activities such as artificial feeding. People should avoid actions that encourage wolves to spend time near people or become dependent on them for food.

Although the wolf remains listed as endangered, the Endangered Species Act allows for the protection of human safety if there is an immediate threat from any endangered or threatened species. If someone is in a situation where they feel they or someone else is in immediate

danger from a wolf, they can kill the wolf. However, these situations are extremely rare and would be thoroughly investigated. Additionally, although rare, state and federal land management agencies can remove or kill a wolf that presents a demonstrable, non-immediate threat to human safety.

Q: Are wolves known to eat pets? What about backyard farm animals, like alpacas and chickens?

A: They may kill pets and other farm animals such as alpacas and chickens. In general, techniques used to reduce depredation risk on private property from other predators may also be effective at minimizing risk associated with possible wolf depredations.

Q: Can landowners kill a wolf that is depredating livestock? If not, who is responsible for removing a depredating wolf?

A: No they cannot. All wolf management must be done in accordance with USFWS rules and regulations.

Q: Have there been wolves intentionally killed by landowners, or by anyone else in Colorado?

A: Not to our knowledge.

Q: Who will pay for landowner losses from wolf depredation?

A: CPW does not have the authority to compensate landowners for livestock losses caused by wolves. Currently, there is not a federal source of funds to compensate landowners for depredation losses in Colorado, either.

According to the Colorado Department of Agriculture, it may be possible to implement the [USDA Livestock Indemnity Program](#) in the future to assist with compensation.

More information can also be found here: https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdfiles/FactSheets/livestock_indemnity_program_lip-fact_sheet.pdf

Q: Who will be responsible for responding to damage claims/human health and safety issues and how will the costs be covered, including wages?

A: The USFWS has the primary authority and responsibility to respond to concerns about damage and public safety, as long as wolves remain federally listed as endangered, unless an arrangement is made with other parties. Should the wolf be delisted, a source of state funds other than CPW's wildlife cash fund has not yet been identified.

Q: Will CPW respond to wolf/human conflicts, or just the federal government?

A: Wolves are a federally endangered species under the jurisdiction of the USFWS, but CPW will assist our federal partners with conflicts in Colorado.

Wolves on the Landscape

Q: What is considered wolf habitat?

A: Wolves are habitat generalists, meaning they do not have specific habitat requirements that determine where they can live. As long as prey is available, wolves can use a variety of areas.

Q: How will wolves impact Colorado's ungulate populations?

A: Wolves consume approximately 7-10 pounds of meat per day on average. In some other areas where wolves exist at a sustainable population level, there have been impacts to ungulate populations. Elk, moose, and deer are primary prey species for wolves. However, wolves are opportunistic hunters. Wolf populations would need to be established for an extended period before we can evaluate the extent to which they impact populations of prey species in Colorado.

Q: I've heard that elk/deer herds are struggling in areas and the agency is doing a lot of research to understand why. How would wolves play into that?

A: Wolves would be one of many factors that may influence ungulate population dynamics. It is impossible to predict precisely how wolves would impact Colorado ungulate populations on either a local, regional or statewide scale.

Mule deer populations in portions of western Colorado have declined significantly, causing concerns within CPW and its many constituencies who depend upon or enjoy mule deer.

Recognizing the need for action, CPW embarked on a comprehensive public engagement effort to gather input for developing the West Slope Mule Deer Strategy to guide future management actions.

For more about CPW's West Slope Mule Deer Strategy please visit:

<https://cpw.state.co.us/Documents/MuleDeer/MuleDeerStrategy.pdf>

For more about the history of mule deer management in Colorado please see Colorado's Mule Deer Story at: <https://cpw.state.co.us/Documents/MuleDeer/ColoradosMuleDeerStory.pdf>

For more information about the status of mule deer populations in Colorado please visit:

https://cpw.state.co.us/Documents/Hunting/BigGame/Colorado_Big_Game_Population_Status_and_Management_Summary2_2020.pdf

Q: Colorado has the largest elk herd in the world, does it matter if wolves eat a few?

A: The statewide elk population is stable; the 2018 estimate is 287,000. CPW has intentionally reduced elk populations to achieve population objectives set for each herd. Currently, 22 of 42 (52 percent) elk herds are still above their current population objective ranges. Nonetheless, public perception of the desired number of elk in Colorado varies.

Elk research and continued management changes such as reductions in cow elk hunting licenses are necessary since elk calf production remains low in many herds.

For more information about the status of elk populations in Colorado please visit:

https://cpw.state.co.us/Documents/Hunting/BigGame/Colorado_Big_Game_Population_Status_and_Management_Summary2_2020.pdf

Q: Are wolves more likely to increase or decrease the severity of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in Colorado?

A: The geographic distributions of wolves and chronic wasting disease in the United States have overlapped little until fairly recently, so this interaction has not been sufficiently studied.

It is not possible to say with certainty the extent to which wolves will or will not reduce the prevalence of CWD in specific areas of Colorado. Predictions would be speculative and based on very little actual data. However, we do believe that it is not feasible for CWD to be completely eliminated from Colorado. Beneficial effects have been suggested by limited [modeling](#), but have yet to be shown empirically. If wolves could selectively kill CWD-infected animals within a herd and were sufficiently abundant, then this would help suppress the disease. We know that infected deer and elk are more vulnerable to predation (including [non-human](#) and [hunting](#) 'predation') than healthy animals. We also know that [selectively culling](#) infected deer from a herd can reduce prevalence and that 'predation' (from hunting or [culling](#)) can help suppress CWD. But we don't know whether wolves would be selective enough or sufficiently abundant to have a measurable effect on disease suppression. [Mountain lions selectively kill CWD-infected deer](#), yet their presence has not prevented increases in prevalence in some areas. Even if wolves do not selectively kill CWD-infected animals, it is possible that predation or scavenging by wolves could help reduce environmental contamination with the prion that causes CWD. Studies have shown that passing CWD-infected elk brain tissue through the [coyote digestive](#) tract reduced the amount of prions available to cause infection. Whether wolves would also reduce the prion load in carcass tissues they consume has not been studied. Nor can we evaluate the extent to which wolves, through extensive landscape movement, could introduce prions to areas where CWD is not known to exist, and if they do, to what extent that poses a risk of increased disease distribution.

Q: If impacts to deer and elk are noticed at a high enough level, how will wolves be managed to mitigate those impacts?

A: As long as the wolf is federally listed under the Endangered Species Act, management is significantly restricted. If wolves are eventually delisted, management authority is returned to the state and consideration for impacts to wildlife populations will help inform the range of management options.

Q: What impacts do wolves have on other predatory species, like lions, bears, coyotes or foxes? How common is it for wolves to prey on mountain lions/bears/coyotes in areas with high predator densities?

A: Wolves do have a tendency to displace other canids like coyotes and foxes, but not lions or bears.

Different combinations and densities of predator and prey species, terrain, vegetation, climate, land-ownership patterns and land uses result in different ecological relationships. It is difficult to predict how the interactions will play out. It is not common for wolves to prey on other carnivore species.

Q: What impacts have states with wolves witnessed and how have those impacts been handled?

A: From Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks:
(<http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/wolf/gamefaq.html>)

“How much, where, and how wolves impact prey varies through space and time. Wolves like mountain lions, coyotes and bears eat deer, elk, moose, and other game animals. Research in Montana and elsewhere has shown that predation may influence deer, elk and moose populations through changes in the survival of young and adult animals or a combination of both. In Montana, elk numbers in some areas have declined, due in part to wolf predation. Yet in other areas where wolves and elk interact, elk numbers are stable or increasing. Habitat, weather patterns, human hunting, the presence of other large predators in the same area and the presence of livestock seasonally or year-round are important factors, too. Wolf predation by itself does not initiate declines in prey populations, but it can exacerbate declines or lengthen periods of prey population rebounds. Research in Yellowstone National Park and elsewhere has shown that elk use habitats differently since wolves have returned. One study showed that when wolves are in the local area, elk spend less time in open areas and more time in forested areas. However, extrapolation of this potential effect to broad landscapes should not be made. Hunters may need to adjust their strategies in areas where wolves exist.”

Colorado Parks and Wildlife's Position on Wolf Management

In 2004, CPW convened a diverse group of stakeholders (the Colorado Wolf Management Working Group) representing livestock producers, wildlife advocates, wildlife biologists, sportsmen and local government officials to develop a set of recommendations for managing wolves that disperse into Colorado. If wolves are de-listed under the Endangered Species Act, the wolf management recommendations will guide CPW managers and others responsible for the planning and policy decisions that affect wolf management in Colorado.

- The Working Group recommended wolves naturally dispersing into Colorado should be allowed to live with no boundaries where they find habitat. Wolf distribution in Colorado will ultimately be defined by ecological needs and social tolerance. If wolves are causing problems, management may be needed to resolve the problem.
- The report of the Wolf Management Working Group is available on the CPW website at: <https://cpw.state.co.us/Documents/WildlifeSpecies/SpeciesOfConcern/Wolf/recomendations.pdf>

Ballot Initiative 107

On Tuesday, Dec. 10, the Rocky Mountain Wolf Action Fund submitted to the Colorado Secretary of State's Office what it said are more than 200,000 signatures to place restoration of wolves on Colorado's 2020 statewide ballot. On Monday, Jan. 6, the Secretary of State's Office qualified the measure for the ballot, saying that based on its sampling of *"215,370 submitted signatures, the projected number of valid signatures is greater than 110% of the total number required."*

For information on the **2020 initiative Colorado Ballot Proposal 2019-2020 #107 – Restoration of Gray Wolves**, please visit <https://leg.colorado.gov/content/restoration-gray-wolves-1>

Q: What is CPW's role with regard to wolf reintroduction by the ballot initiative?

A: CPW has elected to limit its role to providing scientific and factual information about wolves in Colorado without expressing an opinion in favor of or against the wolf ballot initiative (#107). State employees operating in their official capacity are prohibited by law from urging voters to support or oppose the initiative. For background, the Parks and Wildlife Commission has taken a stance on active wolf reintroduction through a resolution adopted in 2016.

Q: Does CPW want wolves in the state?

A: It is not a question of “want” or “don’t want.” We do anticipate they will eventually enter the state as some have already, and we are prepared for their arrival.

Q: If wolves have dispersed into the state of Colorado, who has management authority? When and how could that change?

A: While listed under Endangered Species Act, the USFWS has primary management authority over wolves in Colorado. If delisted from the Endangered Species Act, management authority would be transferred to CPW.

Q: This is going to be paid for by taxpayers. How would it impact Colorado Parks and Wildlife?

A: Costs for the development and implementation of the management plan and reintroduction, and for fair compensation for livestock losses as called for in the ballot initiative are to be borne by CPW’s wildlife cash fund (hunting- and fishing-derived revenue), unless the wildlife cash fund cannot pay for such expenses. (see Legislative Council’s fiscal note <https://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/Initiatives/titleBoard/filings/2019-2020/107FiscallImpact.pdf>)

There will be funding and staffing impacts to CPW, should a reintroduction occur. A more precise understanding of what this would look like will be apparent after a management plan is developed, should the ballot initiative pass in November 2020.

Q: What is the possibility of the Colorado General Fund being used for reintroduction?

A: CPW is currently unable to predict whether state taxpayer dollars would eventually be made available to help fund this effort.

Q: What is the probability of those wanting wolves moved to Colorado being required to fund the effort?

A: CPW is unable to answer this question.

Q: Who will actually do the work on reintroduction?

A: The ballot initiative assigns to the Parks and Wildlife Commission the responsibility for developing a plan to restore and manage gray wolves in Colorado, to hold statewide hearings, to obtain public input, to oversee wolf restoration and management, to assist owners of livestock, to prevent and resolve conflicts and to pay compensation for livestock losses caused

by gray wolves. The extent to which the Commission and CPW would be authorized by the USFWS to do so while the wolf is listed as federally endangered remains to be determined.

Q: What number of wolves will it take for a complete reintroduction to be successful?

A: This should be determined as a management plan is developed.

Q: What other steps will need to happen if a reintroduction will take place and how long will they take?

A: If the ballot is approved by voters in 2020, the language directs the Parks and Wildlife Commission to “take the steps necessary to begin reintroduction of gray wolves by December 31, 2023...” If wolves are still federally listed at that time, a permit for reintroduction will be required from the USFWS. Issuance of that permit would likely require review under the National Environmental Policy Act.

Q: Does this ballot initiative include the possibility that Mexican gray wolves will come into the state?

A: We don't believe the intent of the ballot initiative proponents was to introduce the Mexican gray wolf. The recent revision to the Mexican Wolf Recovery plan limits the geography of recovery to the area south of I-40, including Arizona, New Mexico and Mexico. See: https://cpw.state.co.us/Documents/Research/Mammals/Publications/Odell_Perils_of_recovering_the_Mexican_wolf_outside_of_its_historical_range_OA.pdf

Q: Will the presence of wolves require more CPW regulations, and what kind of regulations will be necessary?

A: Not at this time as gray wolves in Colorado are under the jurisdiction of the federal government. The USFWS has its own regulations for threatened and endangered species.

Q: If wolves are coming, why not just speed it up and relocate them here?

A: Wolves are currently protected by the Endangered Species Act and under the jurisdiction of the USFWS. The USFWS has not stated that establishing a wolf population in Colorado would benefit the recovery of the species. Neither CPW nor the state can decide to reintroduce wolves without approval from the Fish and Wildlife Service because it is currently a listed species. Additionally, state law prohibits CPW from undertaking such a reintroduction without approval of the state legislature.

Legal Consequences of Taking or Killing a Wolf

Q: Once wolves become established in Colorado, will they be hunted?

A: Not while they are on the federal or the state endangered species list. If wolves have established a population greater than yet-to-be-determined thresholds, population management options will be evaluated at that time.

Q: What should someone do if they accidentally kill a wolf?

A: Notify federal and state authorities immediately; calling CPW is the best, first step.

Q: Considering the fines, why wouldn't someone just dispose of wolves on their own?

A: Wolves are a federally protected endangered species and killing one is punishable by up to a year in prison and a \$100,000 fine. In addition, it is a crime to kill an animal listed as endangered by the State.

We do not advise that anyone take that action in any case. We strongly encourage people be ethical and follow the law.

Q: If a person shoots a wolf without justification, how will that be treated in a Law Enforcement situation?

A: Wolves are a federally protected endangered species and killing one is punishable by up to a year in prison and a \$100,000 fine.

Q: If a ticket is written, who issues the ticket?

A: Wolves are a federally protected endangered species and under the jurisdiction of the USFWS. They would typically be the agency to handle these cases.

General Statements

- Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) is primarily a cash-funded agency. We receive very little tax-generated funding from the state's general fund (less than 1 percent). Colorado Parks and Wildlife's programs, recreation opportunities, state park management and wildlife conservation and management are funded largely through customer purchases.
- CPW is prohibited by law from urging voters to vote in favor of or against any statewide ballot initiative.
- Neither the Parks and Wildlife Commission nor the Division of Parks and Wildlife has adopted a formal resolution or position on this ballot initiative. The Commission and the Division are committed to ensuring a fair election takes place.