

Wolves FAQs



Proposition 114 passed on November 3, 2020. What are the next steps?

The first part of the directive from the ballot initiative is to create a plan, so it should be understood that this is not a plan that would be released immediately.

Proposition 114 directs the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission to:

- Develop a plan to reintroduce and manage gray wolves in Colorado;
- Take necessary steps to begin reintroduction by December 31, 2023, on designated lands west of the Continental Divide; and
- Pay fair compensation for livestock losses caused by gray wolves

Timeline

The CPW Commission will briefly discuss this issue at its November 2020 meeting. Schedules and agendas for upcoming Commission meetings are available on the [CPW website](#).

To stay updated with any current developments, visit CPW's wolf management page: <https://cpw.state.co.us/learn/Pages/CON-Wolf-Management.aspx>. Sign up for CPW's Conservation eNews and follow us on social media to receive email updates concerning wolf management.

Background Information on Gray Wolves:

- On October 29, 2020, the Department of the Interior announced a rule to delist the gray wolf from federal protection under the Endangered Species Act. The rule was published in the Federal Register on November 3. The final rule will take effect on January 4, 2021, transferring management authority over the gray wolf in Colorado from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to CPW. However, previous federal rules delisting gray wolves have routinely been litigated once finalized. If that happens in this case – which is likely -- federal listing status may be unclear in the immediate term. Regardless, the species remains listed as endangered under state law in Colorado, and take of gray wolves will remain prohibited.
- CPW will continue to monitor wolf dispersal into and within Colorado. Additionally, as directed by the voters of Colorado through the passage of Colorado Proposition 114, CPW will work with federal counterparts, neighboring states, and partners and stakeholders across Colorado to create a plan to



Gray wolf spotted on a game cam in July, 2020

implement the outcome of the ballot vote.

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.

When CPW receives credible reports of wolves in Colorado we work closely with our federal partners to investigate them. We will continue to work with USFWS and others in sharing information regarding verified sightings with the public.

Q: *How many wolves are in the state today?*

A: Colorado Parks and Wildlife cannot provide a specific population number for wolves in Colorado. As many as six congregating wolves have been identified by CPW staff in 2020, but that does not mean that is a definitive number of animals on the ground in the state.

- Wolf M1084 from the Snake River Pack in Wyoming has been detected as recently as October 2020 in Jackson County, Colorado.
- In January of 2020, CPW confirmed the presence of at least six wolves in northern Moffat County.

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: *Where will new wolves come from?*

A: The potential source populations of introduced wolves is not yet known; this information will be included in the overall introduction and management plan being developed as a result of the passage of 114.

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. Monitoring plans will be included in the overall introduction and management plan being developed as a result of the passage of 114.



Wolf tracks observed by CPW officers in northwest Colorado on January 19, 2020.

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

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

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
February 2009	North of Rifle, CO	Montana, Mill Creek 314F	Female	Gray	presumed poisoned
April 2015	North Park, CO	Wyoming, 935M	Male	Black	Trail camera and radio collar data
April 29, 2015	Kremmling, CO	Unknown	Male	Gray	Shot by legal coyote hunter
November 12, 2018	Divide, CO	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, CO
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.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife's Position/Role in 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. Now that wolves are delisted 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 now that wolf reintroduction is called for by the passage of Proposition 114.

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>

Q: Does CPW want wolves in the state?

A: It is not a question of “want” or “don’t want.” We have long anticipated that gray wolves would eventually enter the state as some have already, and we have been prepared for their arrival. With Colorado voters electing to reintroduce additional wolves to the state, our team of biologists, researchers, wildlife officers and other staff will work with stakeholders statewide to create a plan that provides the best chance for the species to thrive in Colorado. This planning will factor in the best available science regarding habitat, prey availability, and will include input from the public and key stakeholders.

As a result of the gray wolf delisting, CPW will begin assuming the management of gray wolves in the state from USFWS. CPW will use the 2004 working group plan until the new plan required by Proposition 114 is developed.

Q: What is CPW's role in management and reintroduction now that the ballot initiative has passed?

A: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service retained sole management authority of gray wolves until recently. On October 29, 2020, the Department of the Interior announced a rule to delist the gray wolf from federal protection under the ESA.

The rule was published in the Federal Register November 3, 2020.

The USFWS will retain management control of the species until January 4, 2021, 60 days after publication of the rule to delist. There are also potential legal challenges to this rule in the coming months.

After 60 days, CPW will assume management of gray wolves in the state from USFWS. USFWS will continue to monitor the status of the species nationwide for 5 years after the rule to remove ESA protections is finalized. CPW will use the 2004 working group plan until the new plan required by the ballot initiative is developed.

The passage of Proposition 114 requires that the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission begin developing the plans for wolf restoration on the Western Slope. As described above, that plan does not exist today, but will be developed using the best available scientific, economic, and social considerations.

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.

CPW staff will execute the plan as developed and approved.

Q: Who will pay for the reintroduction? How would it impact Colorado Parks and Wildlife budgets?

A: The funding source for the development and implementation of the management plan will be determined through the annual budget process. The source would likely be either tax dollars or CPW's wildlife cash fund (hunting- and fishing-derived revenue), although other options may be considered. Once wolves are introduced, fair compensation for livestock losses as called for in the ballot initiative are to be borne by CPW's wildlife cash fund unless it cannot pay for such expenses. (Funding is discussed in the Joint Budget Committee briefing document https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/fy2021-22_natbrf1.pdf)

There will be funding and staffing impacts to CPW to bring additional wolves into the state. A more precise understanding of what this would look like will be apparent after a management plan is developed.

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

A: This is a question for the legislature. CPW is currently unable to predict whether state taxpayer dollars would eventually be made available to help fund this effort.

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

A: The language directs the Parks and Wildlife Commission to "take the steps necessary to begin reintroduction of gray wolves by December 31, 2023..." CPW will use the 2004 wolf working group plan until the new plan required by the ballot initiative is developed.

Should the plan as developed include reintroduction onto federal lands, CPW would need to collaborate and cooperate with federal partners and land managers to work through any required federal processes.

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

A: There is currently no recovery plan for wolves in Colorado, so there are no specified recovery goals. As a management plan is developed, objectives for success (e.g., wolf numbers, pack numbers) will be defined.

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

A: The language directs the Parks and Wildlife Commission to “take the steps necessary to begin reintroduction of gray wolves by December 31, 2023...” CPW will use the 2004 wolf working group plan until the new plan required by the ballot initiative is developed.

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

A: CPW and the Parks and Wildlife Commission will create or modify appropriate regulations to manage the species according to the management plan developed.

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

Regulations and Legal Consequences of Taking or Killing a Wolf

Q: What are the penalties for killing a gray wolf in Colorado?

A: Illegally harvesting these animals are cause for a criminal investigation, punishable by fines and jail time under C.R.S. 33-6-109.

C.R.S. 33-6-109. Wildlife--illegal possession

- (1) It is unlawful for any person to hunt, take, or have in such person's possession any wildlife that is the property of this state as provided in section 33-1-101, except as permitted by articles 1 to 6 of this title or by rule or regulation of the commission.
- (2) It is unlawful for any person to have in his possession in Colorado any wildlife, as defined by the state or country of origin, that was acquired, taken, or transported from such state or country in violation of the laws or regulations thereof.
- (2.5) This section does not apply to the illegal possession of live native or nonnative fish or viable gametes (eggs or sperm) which is governed by section 33-6-114.5.
- (3) A person who violates subsection (1) or (2) of this section is guilty of a misdemeanor and, depending upon the wildlife involved, shall be punished upon conviction by a fine or imprisonment, or both, and license suspension points or suspension or revocation of license privileges as follows:
 - (a) For each animal listed as endangered or threatened, a fine of not less than two thousand dollars and not more than one hundred thousand dollars, or by imprisonment for not more than one year in the county jail, or by both such fine and such imprisonment, and an assessment of twenty points. Upon conviction, the commission may suspend any or all license privileges of the person for a period of from one year to life.

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

A: Contact CPW immediately to notify them of the error.

Q: Why wouldn't someone just dispose of wolves on their own?

A: Killing a wolf is cause for a criminal investigation, punishable by fines and jail time. We strongly encourage people to be ethical and follow the law.

Q: Will CPW respond to wolf/human conflicts?

A: Yes, CPW will respond as it does with other wildlife conflicts in the state (e.g., bears, mountain lions, etc.), dispatching the necessary wildlife officers to the scene.

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

A: No the landowner cannot. CPW is responsible (after it takes over management from USFWS) for removing a depredating wolf.

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

A: Currently, CPW does not have the authority to compensate landowners for livestock losses caused by wolves. Colorado statute only accounts for damages caused by big game species; wolves are not classified as a big game species in Colorado today. Currently, there is not a federal source of funds to compensate landowners for depredation losses in Colorado, either.

With CPW assuming management control of gray wolves in the state, a legislative solution will have to be adopted by the state legislature to allow CPW to pay for livestock losses from its game damage fund. CPW's game damage program is funded by the sale of hunting and fishing licenses.

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: CPW will respond. A source of state funds other than CPW's wildlife cash fund has not yet been identified.

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

A: If wolves have established a population greater than yet-to-be-determined thresholds, population management options, including hunting, will be evaluated.

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. However, with a pack identified in Northwest Colorado, efforts to monitor elk herds in the region will begin as early as winter of 2020-21.

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 some elk populations to achieve population objectives set for those herds. Currently, 22 of 42 (52 percent) elk herds are still above their current population objective ranges. However, some herds remain below the established population objective. 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

As wolves become more established on the landscape, CPW will adjust its research and management efforts to address these questions.

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.

Based on what we know today, the majority of direct and indirect evidence suggests wolves can be expected to have a neutral effect on CWD occurrence and distribution in Colorado.

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

A: Understanding that the current rule may be challenged, if wolves are eventually delisted, management authority is returned to the states and tribes. All consideration for impacts to wildlife populations will help inform the range of management options for wolves in Colorado.

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: Other states have noted that both big game distribution and habitat use by big game animals can be impacted by wolves. Additionally:

“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.”

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