



Reintroduction and Management of Gray Wolves

Placed on the ballot by citizen initiative • Passes with a majority vote

Proposition 114 proposes amending the Colorado statutes to require the state to:

- develop a plan to reintroduce and manage gray wolves in Colorado;
- take necessary steps to begin reintroduction by December 31, 2023; and
- pay fair compensation for livestock losses caused by gray wolves.

What Your Vote Means

YES A “yes” vote on Proposition 114 means that the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission will develop a plan to reintroduce and manage gray wolves west of the Continental Divide.

NO A “no” vote on Proposition 114 means that Colorado will not be required to reintroduce gray wolves.

Summary and Analysis for Proposition 114

What happens if Proposition 114 passes?

The Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission will be required to:

- develop a plan to reintroduce and manage gray wolves in Colorado by December 31, 2023, on designated lands west of the Continental Divide;
- hold statewide hearings about scientific, economic, and social considerations;
- periodically obtain public input to update the plan; and
- use state funds to assist livestock owners in preventing conflicts with gray wolves and pay fair compensation for livestock losses.

What will be included in the plan?

The plan will identify gray wolves to be reintroduced in Colorado, as well as the locations, methods, and timing for reintroduction. The plan will also determine how to establish and maintain a self-sustaining population and the criteria for removing the gray wolf from the state's threatened and endangered species list. The reintroduction may be subject to federal approval. The commission is prohibited from imposing any land, water, or resource use restrictions on private landowners.

What is the gray wolf?

The gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) is a large predatory canine that lives in packs. Historically, gray wolves were found throughout North America, including Colorado. Gray wolf populations declined during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries due to human activities, such as hunting and trapping, and were largely eliminated from the lower 48 states, except for the northern portions of Minnesota and Michigan. They are carnivores that consume small and large prey, including elk and deer, and are able to survive in a range of habitats if enough food is available.

What is the deer and elk population in Colorado?

Colorado is home to about 710,000 deer and elk, roughly three-quarters of which live west of the Continental Divide. The size of these herds is impacted by many factors, including disease, hunting, land use, predators, and weather. About 73,000 deer and elk were killed statewide by licensed hunters in 2019. Since 2006, the statewide deer population has declined, while the elk population has remained relatively stable.

Where does the gray wolf live today?

Gray wolves in the lower 48 states are largely clustered in two self-sustaining populations: about 4,000 in the western Great Lakes region and about 2,000 in the northern Rocky Mountain region. An additional 60,000 to 70,000 gray wolves live throughout Alaska and Canada. While there have been confirmed sightings of gray wolves in Colorado in recent years, a self-sustaining population of gray wolves has not been confirmed in Colorado since the 1930s or 1940s. Figure 1 shows the estimated current and historical range of the gray wolf in the United States.

Figure 1
Approximate Gray Wolf Range



Source: Adapted from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Proposed Rule Docket No. FWS-HQ ES-2018-0097 to exclude the Mexican gray wolf, a separately listed entity under the Endangered Species Act, which resides in Arizona and New Mexico.

Do gray wolves present a danger to humans?

All wild animals, including gray wolves, can pose a danger to humans under certain conditions, and caution should be exercised when near them. Gray wolves are generally shy of people and tend to avoid contact when possible. Aggressive behavior from wild gray wolves toward humans is rare. However, when wild animals are cornered, injured, sick, or become accustomed to humans, they can become dangerous and cause harm.

Who manages wildlife in Colorado?

The Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission is responsible for wildlife management in Colorado and regulates hunting, fishing, and trapping. State law requires wildlife and their environment to be protected, preserved, enhanced, and managed for the use, benefit, and enjoyment of the people and visitors of Colorado. The commission develops recreation areas, wildlife habitat, and species conservation and management plans.

How are gray wolves protected and managed in the United States?

The Endangered Species Act requires the federal government to conserve and restore species deemed threatened by or in danger of extinction. In 1978, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) listed the gray wolf as endangered throughout the contiguous United States, except in Minnesota, where they are classified as threatened. States are prohibited from managing federally endangered species without federal permission. In 1995, gray wolves were reintroduced in the northern Rocky Mountains, and in 2011 they were removed from the federal endangered species list in that region. Because of this, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming now have statewide management authority for gray wolves. Gray wolves in these states are managed to maintain populations above species recovery thresholds while mitigating predation on livestock and sustaining deer and elk herds. These states monitor gray wolf populations and distribution, permit

limited hunting and trapping, and allow gray wolves to be killed in order to protect livestock. These states also monitor livestock losses and offer compensation programs for livestock owners. Across these three states, confirmed livestock losses total about 300 per year, mostly consisting of cattle and sheep.

Who would manage gray wolves in Colorado if Proposition 114 passes?

If gray wolves remain on the federal endangered species list, management authority rests with the USFWS, and the state would need to obtain federal approval prior to reintroduction. If gray wolves are removed from the federal endangered species list, Colorado could assume management responsibility as other states have done. In 2019, the USFWS proposed removing gray wolves from the endangered species list in the remaining portions of the United States, including Colorado.