

Initiative 107: Reintroduction and Management of Gray Wolves

1 Initiative 107 proposes amending the Colorado statutes to require the
2 state to:

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

6 What Your Vote Means

YES

A “yes” vote on Initiative 107 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 Initiative 107 means that Colorado will not be required to reintroduce gray wolves.

1 **Summary and Analysis for Initiative 107**

2 **What happens if Initiative 107 passes?**

3 The Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission will be required to:

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

11 **What will be included in the plan?**

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

18 **What is the gray wolf?**

19 The gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) is a large social canine that lives in packs. Historically,
20 gray wolves were found throughout North America, including Colorado. Gray wolf
21 populations declined during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries due to human
22 activities, such as hunting and trapping, and were eliminated from the lower
23 48 states, except for the northern portions of Minnesota and Michigan. They are
24 carnivores that consume small and large prey, including elk and deer, and are able
25 to survive in a range of habitats if enough food is available.

26 **What is the deer and elk population in Colorado?**

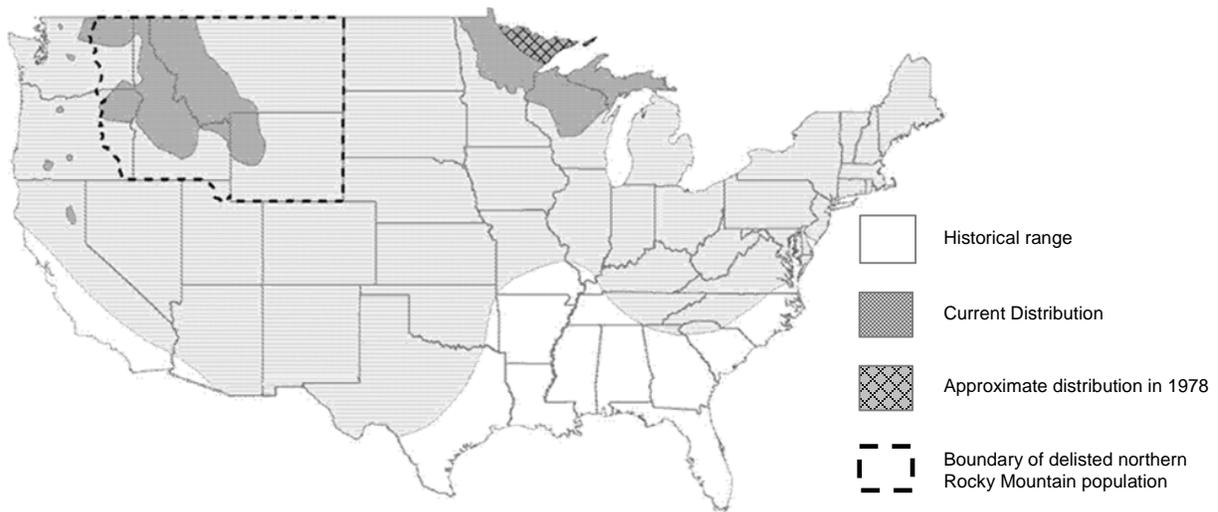
27 Colorado is home to about 710,000 deer and elk, roughly three-quarters of which live
28 west of the Continental Divide. The size of these herds is impacted by many factors,
29 including disease, hunting, land use, predators, and weather. About 73,000 deer
30 and elk were killed statewide by licensed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

32 **Where does the gray wolf live today?**

33 About 6,000 gray wolves live in the lower 48 states, largely clustered in two
34 self-sustaining populations in the western Great Lakes and northern Rocky Mountain
35 regions. An additional 60,000 to 70,000 gray wolves live throughout Alaska and
36 Canada. While there have been confirmed sightings of gray wolves in Colorado in
37 recent years, a self-sustaining population of gray wolves has not been confirmed in
38 Colorado since the 1940s. Figure 1 shows the current and historical range of the
39 gray wolf in the United States.

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**Figure 1
Gray Wolf Range**



3 *Source: Adapted from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Proposed Rule Docket No. FWS-HQ ES-2018-0097*

4 **Do gray wolves present a danger to humans?**

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

11 **Who manages wildlife in Colorado?**

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

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

19 The Endangered Species Act requires the federal government to conserve and
20 restore species deemed threatened by or in danger of extinction. In 1978, the
21 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) listed the gray wolf as endangered
22 throughout the contiguous United States, except in Minnesota, where they are
23 classified as threatened. States are prohibited from managing federally endangered
24 species without federal permission. In 1995, gray wolves were reintroduced in the
25 northern Rocky Mountains and have grown in number to about 1,700 today. In 2011,
26 they were removed from the federal endangered species list in that region. Because
27 of this, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming now have statewide management authority for
28 gray wolves. Gray wolves in these states are managed to maintain populations
29 above species recovery thresholds while mitigating predation on livestock and
30 sustaining deer and elk herds. These states monitor gray wolf populations and
31 distribution, permit limited hunting and trapping, and allow gray wolves to be killed in

1 order to protect livestock. These states also monitor livestock losses and offer
2 compensation programs for livestock owners. Across these three states, confirmed
3 livestock losses total about 300 per year, mostly consisting of cattle and sheep.

4 **Who would manage gray wolves in Colorado if Initiative 107 passes?**

5 If gray wolves remain on the federal endangered species list, management authority
6 rests with the USFWS, and the state would need to obtain federal approval prior to
7 reintroduction. If gray wolves are removed from the federal endangered species list,
8 Colorado could assume management responsibility as other states have done. In
9 2019, the USFWS proposed removing gray wolves from the endangered species list
10 in the remaining portions of the United States, including Colorado.

For information on those issue committees that support or oppose the measures on the ballot at the November 3, 2020, election, go to the Colorado Secretary of State's elections center web site hyperlink for ballot and initiative information:

<http://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/Initiatives/InitiativesHome.html>

11 **Arguments For Initiative 107**

- 12 1) Gray wolves perform important ecological functions that impact other plants and
13 animals. Without them, deer and elk can overgraze sensitive habitats such as
14 riverbanks, leading to declines in ecosystem health. Leftover prey can also
15 provide food for other scavengers such as birds and smaller mammals.
16 Reintroducing gray wolves can help support a healthy environment upon which
17 Coloradans depend.
- 18 2) A reintroduction plan is necessary to ensure that gray wolves are restored to their
19 historic range. Through control efforts such as bounty programs, gray wolves
20 were eliminated in Colorado by the 1940s. While there have been occasional
21 sightings in Colorado, it is uncertain gray wolves will establish a permanent
22 population on their own. The measure aligns with other states' successful
23 recovery efforts and provides a way to restore the species while considering
24 Colorado's interests.

25 **Arguments Against Initiative 107**

- 26 1) The presence of gray wolves can cause conflict with humans and animals that
27 live in Colorado now. Gray wolves are known to prey on livestock. Deer herds in
28 some areas have fallen below population goals established by state wildlife
29 managers, and introducing another predator would put further pressure on these
30 herds. In addition, many people live and recreate in areas being considered for
31 gray wolf habitat.
- 32 2) Gray wolves from neighboring states have been observed in Colorado, including
33 a wolf pack in northwest Colorado in 2020. This suggests that wolves may be
34 establishing a presence in the state on their own, making a reintroduction
35 program unnecessary. Allowing wolves to come back on their own, rather than
36 through forced reintroduction, could give Coloradans more time to adapt to their
37 presence.

1 **Estimate of Fiscal Impact of Initiative #107**

2 Initiative 107 increases state expenditures by approximately \$300,000 in budget year
3 2021-22 and \$500,000 in budget year 2022-23 for public outreach and development
4 of a gray wolf reintroduction plan. Beginning in budget year 2023-24, expenditures
5 increase to about \$800,000 per year for the implementation of the wolf reintroduction
6 plan. Implementation costs will only be incurred if federal approval is received, or
7 gray wolves are no longer listed as endangered and the state is able to begin its
8 reintroduction plan. Costs will be paid primarily from hunting and fishing license
9 fees. Actual expenditures will depend on the details of the plan developed by the
10 Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission and the amount of livestock losses caused
11 by wolves.