

Colorado Wolf Restoration and Management Plan Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) to Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW)

Report on Ungulate Management Recommendations August 2022

This report summarizes consensus recommendations of the Colorado Wolf Restoration and Management Plan Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) regarding strategies to manage ungulate populations and hunter opportunities in the context of wolf reintroduction and management.

In conjunction with the recommendations made in this report, the SAG's report on impact-based management also provides insight on direct management of wolves in response to ungulate populations significantly below objectives that can be caused by wolf predation.

Discussion

Although impacts to outfitters and hunters are not addressed in Proposition 114, the SAG feels it is important to address them as part of the plan. A SAG member reported the concern that some members of the hunting community are not supportive of how their concerns have been addressed within the SAG process. Many SAG members are concerned that the tension and frustrations that have led to anti-wolf policies experienced in Idaho and Montana are beginning in Colorado. SAG members encourage the Commission to work early and proactively to address these tensions and frustrations.

The SAG understands that it is difficult to predict specific numerical impacts and location of impacts of wolves on ungulates. Wolves may bring about negative impacts at localized levels to certain ungulate populations while some herds may be largely unaffected with little to no impacts. Additionally, wolves may help certain populations become healthier through predation and altering habitat use.

While these outcomes will play out as wolves repopulate western Colorado, the real and perceived social and economic impacts are already present among the hunter/outfitter community. There is concern that wolves will reduce hunter opportunity due to declining herd numbers, deer and elk will be pushed out of designated permit areas that outfitters operate in and result in their businesses not being able to provide the services they are permitted to provide, and numerous other concerns. For more detailed descriptions on both the positive and negative impacts wolves may have on a localized level, the SAG recommends reviewing the impact-based management report.

Whether it's positive or negative impacts being discussed, the SAG recognizes there is some speculation involved about impacts in Colorado based on science and previous observations where wolves have been present. It would be beneficial for CPW and Colorado to develop proactive measures prior to wolf restoration that will address potential impacts to livestock producers or hunters and outfitters. Therefore, it is critical for CPW to develop a proactive approach to potential and perceived negative impacts that may stoke greater barriers to sustainable wolf populations and deliver clear and consistent messaging on the handling of wolf/ungulate interactions. In this way, CPW can create trust and buy-in

from the public and contribute to the long-term sustainability of both wolves and ungulate populations and ultimately individuals and communities living with them in Colorado.

Based on evidence and direct communication with biologists from the Northern Rockies, if and where impacts occur, they will be at a local level (in Colorado, likely at a DAU or GMU scale). Local level impacts on ungulates, both real and perceived, may have an outsized role in catalyzing opposition to wolves and may serve as one of the greatest long-term challenges to wolf sustainability. Monitoring will be key to understanding impacts and responding accordingly through impact-based management (see the SAG's impact-based management report for more on this topic).

The SAG understands that wolves alone are not the focus of ungulate management but another layer that must be incorporated into the current models. Ungulates face multiple stressors including but not limited to ever-increasing non-consumptive recreational impacts, multiple predators, habitat encroachment/loss, drought/aridification and more. With all these factors in mind, it is important to remember CPW's main tool for ungulate population management is through hunting. Managed hunting of ungulate game populations provides the backbone source of revenue for CPW, provides numerous outlets for economic activity, and provides an extremely valuable source of protein/food.

In closing, the SAG offers the following recommendations, understanding that there is not a collective assumption wolves will negatively impact ungulate herds. Rather, these recommendations are offered for consideration of how to manage already existing concerns and proactively address them should they occur in the future. The details of such recommendations would require further discussion.

Recommendations

- **Prioritize, ramp up and maintain monitoring of ungulate populations and actively manage for impacts at a local level.** Where consistent monitoring identifies localized impacts (cause-specific), integrate data into the planning and management strategies at the local level. Cause-specific factors could include habitat fragmentation, increased recreation, or drought, along with predation.
- **Continue growing ungulate herds.** The SAG recognizes that CPW is making efforts to bring certain ungulate populations that are currently below objective back within objective. In this vein, the SAG would suggest continuing these efforts, as well as proactively expanding efforts to grow ungulate herds on a GMU or DAU basis, particularly where wolves are predicted to occupy, and managing/maintaining these herds at the upper end of objectives. This approach could provide a win-win in the sense that an abundance of ungulates will provide a buffer against potential wolf-caused population decline, provide ample prey base for rapid and successful wolf population growth, and, if population declines fail to appear over time, the opportunity will exist to increase hunt-based ungulate management. Additionally, prioritize wolf release sites where ungulate populations are NOT under objective. This recommendation should be taken into consideration in addition to other ungulate management factors.
- **Develop and implement an Education and Outreach communications campaign.** A consensus recommendation from the SAG is to create an active communications campaign for target audiences. CPW should provide education and outreach that gives consistent baseline information for agency actions with respect to ungulate management (license allocation, quota

reduction, herd counts, etc.) and science around Colorado's wolves, in order to mitigate controversies with best available science and provide transparent, relevant, and easy-to-understand information to impacted communities. This recommendation hinges on a proactive approach to outreach by putting information into the hands of the public vs. the public needing to seek it out. In reference to this recommendation, CPW has stated the cost of \$1.7 million to pursue the next levels of outreach and social science driven education. More specific details on this communications campaign are provided in the attached addendum. Refer as well to the SAG's recommendations on outreach and education for more on these topics.

- **Consider a compensation program for affected outfitter businesses and/or clients. See attached documents on other state voucher/set aside programs.** There are a variety of options the SAG discussed with this recommendation. The basic premise revolves around outfitters whose permitted area shows a data-backed connection between declining ungulate herds and wolf predation. CPW may provide vouchers to these affected operators that could provide an alternate means of generating revenue for the outfitter, thereby keeping their business alive until a wolf/ungulate balance is achieved. Alternatively, CPW could create or support other compensation avenues for outfitter businesses that cannot provide services related to wolf presence. A separate compilation of data directly from the Northern Rockies' state wildlife agencies is being submitted separately but in conjunction with these recommendations. As a related concept, consider working with the US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and private landowners, as applicable, to explore reserved common permits for outfitters.
- **Create new opportunities and promote current opportunities for the public to provide non-hunting income to support wolves and wildlife management.** This recommendation stems from the idea that those who voted for Proposition 114 and want wolves on the landscape should have the opportunity to provide financial support to CPW for the management of wolves, impacts on ungulate populations, and habitat to support both. Refer as well to the SAG's recommendations on funding for more on these topics.
- **Solidify robust and consistent funding.** The SAG recognizes that robust and consistent funding is necessary to accomplish the recommendations above. Solidifying reliable and adequate sources of additional funding to implement ideas such as a top-notch communications campaign and increased monitoring are paramount to the success and associated costs of Colorado wolves, while also maintaining the ungulate populations that CPW and hunter dollars have invested so much in already. In the 2022 budget, the General Fund provided \$2.1 million for wolf planning. A preliminary estimate for actual needs would be an amount of up to \$3 million annually for funding of directly related expenses; this number could potentially be more when considering adjacent expenses that are indirectly or partially related to wolf restoration and management, for example research and communications. Refer to the SAG's recommendations on funding for more on these topics.

Conclusion

The SAG recognizes the issue of ungulate management is challenging and highly variable. Ultimately, CPW staff and the CPW Commission are tasked to take actions that are best for a successful wolf recovery in conjunction with maintaining healthy ungulate populations and maintaining hunter opportunity.

Ungulate Management Report: SAG Member Level of Support

First Name	Last Name	Ungulate Management Report: Individual votes
Matt	Barnes	3
Donald	Broom	2
Jenny	Burbey	1
Bob	Chastain	2
Renee	Deal	2
Adam	Gall	2
Dan	Gates	Absent
John	Howard	3
Francie	Jacober	1
Lenny	Kinglesmith	2
Darlene	Kobobel	3
Tom	Kourlis	2
Brian	Kurzel	2
Hallie	Mahowald	2
Jonathan	Proctor	2
Gary	Skiba	2
Steve	Whiteman	2
Total support/no objection (1, 2, or 3)		16
Total objections (4 or 5)		0
*Consensus scale:		
1	Enthusiastically support	
2	Support	
3	Can abide by or live with; do not object	
4	Object	
5	Strongly object	

About the Stakeholder Advisory Group

The Colorado Wolf Restoration and Management Plan Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) offers a broad range of perspectives and experience to inform the social implications of wolf restoration and management strategies for the Colorado Wolf Restoration and Management Plan. SAG members were selected by Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) for diversity in demographics, backgrounds, geographic regions, perspectives, and knowledge in order to constitute a vibrant, diverse, and inclusive stakeholder voice in the planning process. The SAG is comprised of 17 voting members and 3 non-voting members. CPW is responsible for writing the Wolf Restoration and Management Plan. The Parks and Wildlife Commission (PWC) serves as the decision-making body responsible for approving the Wolf Restoration and Management Plan. The SAG serves in an advisory capacity to Colorado Parks and Wildlife, offering non-binding input into the development of plan content. The SAG is not a decision-making body and has no authority on wolf management policy, research, or operations.

The SAG strives to make decisions based on the consensus of all voting members, where possible. Where the SAG is able to achieve consensus, its input will receive priority consideration by CPW. Per the SAG charter, consensus is defined as general agreement that is shared by all the people in a group; it reflects a recommendation, option or idea that all participants can support or abide by, or, at a minimum, to which they do not object. In other words, consensus is a recommendation, option or idea that all can live with. Where consensus does not exist, a vote will be taken and the votes of individual members will be recorded along with a summary of the rationale for supportive and dissenting views.

Stakeholder Advisory Group Members:

Voting Members:

- Matt Barnes
- Donald Broom
- Jenny Burbey
- Bob Chastain
- Renee Deal
- Adam Gall
- Dan Gates
- John Howard
- Francie Jacober
- Lenny KlingleSmith
- Darlene Kobobel
- Tom Kourlis
- Brian Kurzel
- Hallie Mahowald
- Jonathan Proctor
- Gary Skiba
- Steve Whiteman

Ex Officio Members:

- Dan Gibbs, Executive Director, Colorado Department of Natural Resources
- Les Owen, Division Director, Colorado Department of Agriculture (*designee of Kate Greenberg, Commissioner, Colorado Department of Agriculture*)
- Heather Dugan, Acting Director, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Stakeholder Advisory Group report developed with third party facilitation from Keystone Policy Center.

Appendix:

Avoiding Real and Perceived Loss of Hunting Opportunity and Montana/Idaho Outcomes

Additional input provided by Adam Gall and John Howard

Whether wolves will greatly impact hunting opportunity and/or success is difficult to determine due to the number of variables at play. In looking at data from the Northern Rockies, we believe the impacts will be at a localized level. Sometimes as specific as a particular creek drainage or basin where wolves might or will impact the presence of elk.

This presents an opportunity to take early proactive action in the field and in communications to avoid the Montana/Idaho Outcomes. To change the narrative.

Biologists in MT and ID report the failure to take more proactive action scaling back elk licenses in areas of predation (from many species) was a missed opportunity. It allowed a largely data free narrative to develop over time born out of the frustration with the absence of various state and federal actions and engagement. Working with the data and experiences from the Northern Rockies, these are a few suggestions for the Commission to proactively avoid the Montana/Idaho outcome:

- 1) **Continue growing the elk herds.** While efforts to do so have been under way for the past several years, we believe the hunting community fails to understand this effort. In addition, this conversation tends to be tags versus predators and now wolves. While reduction in cow elk harvest is an important lever in elk population growth, there are many factors: other predator control (lions in particular, bears in the spring), drought mitigation, conservation of calving and winter range, habitat improvement, **recreation planning and restraint**. CPW knows how to manage elk, but two public announcements we believe would cause immediate relief and support in the hunting community. We have trial tested these ideas with various leadership levels of major conservation groups in Colorado and received an overwhelmingly positive response.
 - a. *Raise the elk herd population goal publicly (consider deer and moose);*
 - b. *When the agency considers localized conditions within a DAU/GMU where wolves are present or likely present in the future, the agency will consider a larger population goal for that DAU/GMU.*
 - c. This comes at the expense of short-term loss of opportunity for hunters, potential for increased damage on livestock operators, and a decrease in revenue for CPW. However, the increased herd numbers should offer medium- and long-term greater hunting opportunity countering any actual or perceived narrative blaming wolves for elk population decline. If such a growth is unneeded in the future, CPW knows how to manage the population down.

- d. Such a strategy can unite the diverse stakeholders around greater food sources for wolves, preserving and perhaps expanding hunting opportunity, and most importantly avoiding the Montana/Idaho outcome.

2) Targeted Active Communications Campaign – The Critical Step

- a. CPW should retain a Colorado based advertising agency with experience in conservation. A model is GOCO's Generation Wild campaign, although on a much smaller and targeted scale;
- b. An advertising agency should be retained to work with agency staff to design a proactive communication plan with the following goals:
 - i. Provide a baseline of information for the agency's actions;
 - ii. Provide a baseline of information for science around Colorado's wolves;
 - iii. Address controversies with the best available science;
 - iv. Provide impacted communities with information in forms and format they accept and understand.
- c. Tactics
 - i. Target impacted communities;
 - ii. Receive back in real time effectiveness of such communication (this is not only possible in social media now, but also traditional media);
 - iii. Adjust immediately to real time feedback to improve communications;
 - iv. Explain transparently what actions the agency is taking;
 - v. Explain transparently the science from CPW's research;
 - vi. Lead the conversation, don't react to it;
 - vii. Always seek to target messages appropriately to different groups across the state – addressing not just what they want to hear but also what they do not want to hear, but on their terms.
- d. How is this different from CPW's current communications?
 - i. It's active – it takes particular messages out across multiple channels in a coordinated fashion;
 - ii. CPW is great at passive communication of data – “It's all up on the website”.
 - iii. Our proposal takes that mountain of data and shapes it into succinct messages – “wolves do not impact hunting” or “wolves do impact hunting locally, but our planning has accounted for it” or “elk populations are up and we are in a new golden age of hunting”.
 - iv. Not propaganda, but a compelling invitation for greater engagement with the facts on the ground.
 - v. GOCO could have put data on how the outdoors impacts kids and moms on a website. What made Generation Wild a success was the active engagement via media, games, contests, events, and other tactics that drove the message that Moms and Kids in the outdoors is key to health and a happy life.