

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

**July 27, 2021  
10:00 AM – 4:00 PM MDT  
Colorado Northwestern Community College  
2801 West 9th St., Craig, CO 81625**

**Participants**

SAG voting members in attendance: Matt Barnes, Donald Broom, Jenny Burbey, Bob Chastain, Renee Deal, Adam Gall (virtual, by Zoom), John Howard (virtual, by Zoom), Francie Jacober, Lenny Klinglesmith, Darlene Kobobel, Hallie Mahowald (virtual, by Zoom), Jonathan Proctor, Gary Skiba (virtual, by Zoom), Steve Whiteman (virtual, by Zoom)

SAG *Ex Officio* members in attendance: Colorado Parks and Wildlife Director Dan Prenzl; Colorado Department of Agriculture Division Director Les Owen

CPW Staff Present: Jeff Ver Steeg (Assistant Director for Research, Policy, and Planning); Katie Lanter (Policy and Planning Supervisor); Eric Odell (Species Conservation Program Manager, virtual, by Zoom)

SAG voting members not present: Dan Gates, Tom Kourlis, and Brian Kurzel

SAG *Ex Officio* members not present: Colorado Division of Natural Resources (DNR) Executive Director Dan Gibbs

Keystone Policy Center Staff Present: Julie Shapiro, Ernest House Jr., Cally King Newman, Jonathan Tyrrell

**Purpose/Overview**

The Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) convened for its second meeting to have an in-depth roundtable discussion to understand perspectives on planning topics and questions that are also being considered during Summer 2021 public engagement effort for the wolf restoration and management plan.

**Next Steps & Action Items**

- The SAG will reconvene in Salida on August 25, 2021. The agenda is under development.
- Future 2021 SAG meetings will be as follows:
  - August 25, in Salida
  - September 22, in Grand Junction
  - October 27, in Glenwood Springs
  - November 15, location TBD
  - December 15 (with a back-to-back TWG meeting December 14), in Denver
- SAG members are encouraged to attend summer public open houses and invitational focus groups in a listening mode and to interact with the public to hear perspectives on the plan. SAG members are also encouraged to share information about the open houses and website with their networks.

- Keystone Policy Center will continue to 1) develop the agendas and workflow for upcoming meetings with CPW staff and 2) work with SAG members and CPW staff on the 'wish list' of questions and information requests.

## **Welcome & Introductions**

CPW Director Dan Prenzlou welcomed the group to Craig. The meeting began with a round of introductions. Julie Shapiro with Keystone Policy Center gave an overview of the meeting agenda and objectives.

## **Technical Working Group (TWG) Update**

Eric Odell gave a brief overview of the TWG's second meeting on July 14, 2021. The meeting consisted of a conversation on the technical details of reintroduction logistics, covering topics pertaining to capture considerations, handling techniques, and reintroduction considerations. Keystone Policy Center staff is drafting a report of the TWG's feedback for the TWG's review; when ready it will be shared with the SAG to foster stakeholder discussion and feedback on these topics.

## **SAG Focus Group**

Members of the SAG participated in a roundtable discussion facilitated by Julie Shapiro and Ernest House. The discussion covered the same topics, in the same format, as the focus groups conducted as a part of the Summer 2021 public engagement effort. The group discussed topics pertaining to wolf restoration, wolf management, livestock interactions, and engagement, education, and outreach. Major themes of the discussion are captured below: See appendix A for categories and questions discussed.

*Listing status of gray wolves and differences between the gray wolves present in the Northern Rocky Mountains region and the Mexican Gray Wolf subspecies:*

The group discussed the listing status of gray wolves and the biological and legal differences between gray wolves and the subspecies of Mexican gray wolves. One member stated there is misinformation circulating about the differences between the two subspecies and called for the need to draw a clearer distinction between the two. One member noted that the Mexican gray wolf retains federal listing as an endangered species and has special protections and management under the Endangered Species Act distinct from the Northern gray wolf. As a subspecies, there is little biological difference between the Mexican gray wolf and the Northern gray wolf. One member noted the Mexican gray wolf subspecies does not have a historic range in Colorado and deferred to biological experts to make the call if reintroducing them to Colorado may have potential benefit.

Discussion was had that gray wolves are listed by the state as an endangered species, which affords gray wolves special protections in the state of Colorado, such as against harassment and lethal control.<sup>1</sup> There was some discussion over the definition of harassment, which one member noted could significantly impact management opportunities. To this end, it was noted gray wolves have previously been reintroduced in other states using a 10(j) rule, which afforded management flexibility in the context of federal Endangered Species Act protections. Some discussion about the 10(j) and management prohibitions around a state listed species followed. It was noted that CPW was exploring options to maintain management flexibility in consideration of the state listing status as well as potential federal relisting status.

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<sup>1</sup> Post-meeting clarification: 'take' of a Colorado state endangered species is allowed if it is threatening a human life: "Any person may take threatened or endangered wildlife in defense of his life or the life of others."

### *Factors that may inform a threshold for a self-sustaining wolf population in Colorado:*

Members discussed factors that could inform population goals, including environmental conditions, such as drought, habitat, and other wildlife species (both prey and predators). Members also discussed human factors that may affect population goals, such as population density, land size, and social acceptance of wolves in Western Colorado. A member made comparison between the human population density in the Northern Rocky Mountain region and Colorado and the population density in eastern Europe, which has a higher population density with wolves present. Members also discussed population thresholds in the context of land use, such as recreation, outfitting, large-scale grazing permits, and hunting; SAG members requested data on hunting and ranching impacts following reintroductions in the Northern Rocky Mountain Region. There was also discussion about consideration of connectivity between wolves in the Northern Rockies and the reintroduced population in Western Colorado, which may affect how population goals are considered. Members also discussed the difference between a population threshold and a population minimum, noting that education could help circumvent potential confusion and negative feedback regarding these goals.

### *Funding:*

The group discussed the scale and targets of funding, focusing particularly on compensation for direct and indirect costs to producers and costs of labor for conflict minimization techniques. Discussion was had regarding the scale of compensation needed to adequately offset losses. Members suggested use of data from the Northern Rockies to model cost of loss and determine the annual scale of funding needed. Members discussed current funding sources, noting the current planning effort is being funded by the General Assembly, with a prohibition on using funds from hunting and fishing licenses (HB21-1243). Members expressed concern over loss of sportspersons dollars, with some members concerned that if wolves negatively affect ungulate populations, this could limit CPW's annual revenue from hunting licenses. However, several other members suggested that elk numbers are up in Wyoming, Idaho and Montana and that there are multiple factors, including habitat loss, weather, predators, human management, etc. that affect herd size. SAG members requested additional information from CPW regarding the status of big game populations in Colorado, to be provided in a future discussion. Members discussed alternative funding sources, such as funds from the General Assembly, special license plates and stamps, and NGO donations, among others, as potential short and long-term sources of revenue to support wolf restoration and alleviate financial burdens of producers, with the constraint of CPW's enterprise status in mind.

### *Conflict minimization considerations:*

Members discussed conflict minimization, including feasibility of certain techniques, additional financial burdens of some strategies, and lethal and nonlethal methods to mitigate wolf conflict. It was noted that livestock compensation programs alone do not address all land uses, and multiple members spoke to their experience about the practicalities of certain land-uses that cannot be compensated for if disrupted. Discussion was had around the definition of harassment, given potential legal impediments to conflict minimization techniques which are considered harassment. Members noted specific issues with nonlethal conflict minimization techniques in certain cases, such as fladry on large lots of public grazing allotments; the upkeep and social perceptions of guard dogs; the feasibility and effectiveness of range riders, and general considerations around finding the right minimization tool for the appropriate context.

Multiple members spoke of successful nonlethal conflict minimization programs employed in other states with a wolf presence and noted it would be helpful to further discuss and gain information about efficacy and

technique from outside experts. It was also suggested that CPW should look internally at management flexibility regarding nonlethal techniques in the context of harassment. Members also discussed lethal control of conflict wolves, discussing the pros and cons of lethal control as a conflict minimization strategy.

#### *Impacts on ungulates:*

Members discussed the impact of wolves on wild ungulates, discussing differing statistics of predation rates in the Northern Rocky Mountain region and that such rates are important to gauge the scope of the issue at hand. Members also voiced concern around effects from wolves and conflict minimization strategies on herd behavior, such as migration. Members asked for estimates of elk and deer populations and relevant trends in Colorado to better inform their decision-making matrix moving forward. Members expressed interest in better understanding carrying capacity and how it has changed according to different environmental effects, including wolf presence.

#### *Education, public engagement, and outreach:*

Members discussed various procedural and substantive considerations for public engagement. Members noted misinformation is a challenge to social acceptance of the wolf restoration plan and may be alleviated with targeted education. Members discussed the group Working Circle, which could help educate members of the public on working with wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains. Members also noted that securing funding to support this plan, conflict management programs and education efforts should also be a priority and may help assuage public anxiety.

#### *Information wish list:*

Throughout the discussion, members suggested or requested information to help inform future discussions. Related to funding and economic impacts, members inquired about costs and revenues for wolf restoration and management in other states. Members also inquired about aspects of wolf biology, such as effects of wolves on other predators and data on the population growth of wolves. Regarding outfitting and ungulate management, members asked questions regarding the nexus between wolves and other subjects such as herd management, migration patterns, current elk populations, and trends of elk populations in other states. Members also inquired about efficacy of nonlethal conflict minimization methods, technologies for loss documentation, and monitoring efforts to track wolf presence and population numbers. Members also inquired about information related to human-wolf interactions and a general report on demographics in Colorado.

#### **Public Comment**

Pat O'Toole with Ladder Ranch commented that the 2-minute comment length and waiting till the end of the meeting to comment is insulting. Pat commented on concerns regarding bringing an additional predator into the system, that the verification process and the current system of game damage compensation does not work, that CPW does not have enough capacity, and that there are folks whose livelihoods are at stake.

T. Wright Dickinson with Vermillion Ranch objected to the 2-minute time, thanked the SAG for coming to Craig and commended the group of leaders. He supported the point of tackling tough issues first, stating that people want to work through this; he discussed the importance of compensation, consideration of indirect costs and the importance of hunting to large ranches.

Jeff Comstock, Moffat County Natural Resources Director, commented that the public comment approach was insulting and should be reconsidered. He commented on the importance of social acceptance and setting a reliable control mechanism in place, otherwise reintroduction will fail. He also commented that there needs to be formal exchange and relationship between the TWG and SAG.

Kacey Green with Dry Fork Ranch commented that wolves and large tourist populations are not compatible. She asked the group to have clear parameters and expectations for how ranchers can operate, what is considered loss, and the process for compensation, which she noted is difficult. She asked that the plan maintain flexibility.

Jayne Morley, a Moffat County resident, commented that to make the most of the money to fulfill the law, find where social acceptance is higher and reintroduce there, and not in the NW or SW corners of the state.

Tyler Emrick, a Moffat County outfitter commented on concern about the number of elk to be killed by wolves and impact on hunters and local economies; he commented that hunting brings in significant tourism revenue.

Bonnie Brown, Colorado Wool Growers Association, commented on the need for a better structure to verify and compensate livestock damage and need for automatic verification if CPW can't get out in the field. She stated that it is disingenuous to look at wolf coexistence in other countries if you aren't talking with them directly. She expressed concerns about wolves taking livestock that bunch up due to wolf presence, the loss of allotments if they are not used appropriately; the dangers of horned cattle and rekindling the herding instinct, and difficulty of range riders and changing how ranchers do business.

John Murtaugh with Defenders of Wildlife and Jefferson County resident, commented on the importance of being in Western Slope communities; noted we have 25 years of data to learn from; encouraged the SAG to keep its doors open to the public; encouraged everyone to keep talking; and stated he doesn't want to contribute to anyone's direct loss or loss of their legacy.

**Members of the public in attendance** (affiliation noted as applicable)

Tony Bohrer (Moffat County BoCC), Nick Charchalis (Moffat County resident), Jeff Comstock (Moffat County resident), T. Wright Dickenson (Vermillion Ranch), Kacey Green (Moffat County resident), John Murtaugh (Defenders of Wildlife), Pat O'Toole (Ladder Ranch), Sharon O'Toole (Ladder Ranch), Steve Raftopoulos (Two Bar Sheep Co. LLC.), Ben Rodgers (Rio Blanco County resident), Angelo Theos (Theos Swallow Fork Ranch), Anthony Theos (Theos Swallow Fork Ranch)

**The meeting was adjourned.**

## **Appendix A: SAG Focus Group Framework (Categories and questions)**

### **Wolf Restoration**

- What specific suggestions do you have for restoration logistics to make gray wolf restoration in Colorado as successful as possible?
- What concerns or questions about wolf restoration logistics do you have?

### **Wolf Management**

- What wolf population and other biological information would indicate that the gray wolf restoration program was a success?
- What suggestions do you have for management strategies to make gray wolf restoration in CO as successful as possible?
- What suggestions do you have for monitoring?
- What suggestions do you have for funding gray wolf management?
- What concerns or questions about wolf management do you have?

### **Livestock Interactions**

- What suggestions do you have for conflict minimization best practices?
- What suggestions do you have for compensation programs?
- What suggestions do you have for management of conflict wolves?
- What concerns or questions do you have?

### **Engagement, Education, and Outreach**

- What suggestions do you have for engagement, education and outreach to make gray wolf restoration and management as successful as possible?
- What concerns or questions about engagement, education and outreach do you have?