



Office of the County Manager

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Colorado Parks and Wildlife
0088 Wildlife Way
Glenwood Springs, CO 81601
[Via Email]

February 22, 2023

RE: Eagle County BoCC Comments on Draft Wolf Restoration and Management Plan

Eagle County appreciates our partnership with Colorado Parks and Wildlife and we would like to thank you for this opportunity to provide feedback on the Draft Colorado Wolf Restoration and Management Plan. Eagle County residents hold a wide range of opinions on the reintroduction of wolves to Colorado, as evidenced by the close result of the vote on Proposition 114 in Eagle County, on which 53.4% of voters voted “no.” With such a divided sentiment on wolf recovery along with Eagle County identified as ecologically suitable for reintroduction in the plan, Eagle County government is engaged and paying attention to the conversations, presentations, public comments, public desires, and ultimately the safety, livelihood, and well being of Eagle County residents and mountain ecosystems. Therefore, the purpose of this comment letter is to express the concerns of Eagle County residents regarding wolf reintroduction and to highlight strategies we feel are essential to the plan’s public acceptance.

We have outlined our comments related to the draft plan below:

1. **Ungulate populations.** Eagle County residents greatly value wildlife populations, as indicated by the results of a recent survey conducted by Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the Eagle County Community Wildlife Roundtable in which nearly 100% of respondents indicated that sustaining wildlife populations in Eagle County over time was somewhat, moderately or very important to them.¹ Many Eagle County residents are concerned about the additional impact wolves will have on wildlife populations that are already facing increased pressure. The elk population in Eagle County in particular has decreased from an estimated 10,600 individuals to an estimated 6,554 in 2016.² Eagle County supports CPW’s ongoing efforts to monitor Eagle Valley elk and deer populations, and is respectfully requesting more information on what can be expected for deer and elk herd populations, production areas, and management objectives. The County also requests more information on the likely impacts and management implications for moose, which are also a reintroduced species.

¹ Filtz, R., Kurtz, J., & Quartuch, M.R., (2022). Conservation at the intersection: Examining residents’ perceptions of and preferences for wildlife, outdoor recreation, and development. Colorado Parks and Wildlife, technical report series #(insert here).

²<https://www.vaildaily.com/news/where-has-all-the-wildlife-gone-cpw-officials-cite-50-percent-drop-in-eagle-valleys-elk-population/>



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2. **Hunting.** The decreasing elk population is especially concerning for Eagle County's hunting community. Reductions in elk or deer licenses due to increased wolf predation could affect Eagle County residents who rely on game meat to feed their families or who generate substantial income through guiding or other hunting related tourism activities. It is important that CPW works with the hunting and guiding communities to address concerns related to potential decreases in available hunting licenses and associated economic losses.
3. **Livestock compensation values.** CPW's wolf-livestock compensation program would provide 100% fair market value (FMV) compensation, up to \$8,000 per animal, for losses of livestock caused by gray wolves. However, many Eagle County ranchers feel that this compensation is not sufficient, as it does not account for lost stud fees or lost revenue from an animal lost to depredation. The compensation also does not account for decreased revenues from livestock that are under stress due to wolf depredation, and therefore less productive. Additionally, ranchers have expressed having negative experiences with big game damage reimbursements in the past, and are concerned this program will have similar issues.³ It is important that CPW works with the ranching community to develop a program that equitably and adequately compensates ranchers for wolf-related losses. In addition, CPW should allocate funding and expertise to assist ranchers in implementing non-lethal wolf deterrent methods.
4. **Tourism.** Eagle County requests additional health and human safety conflict management strategies. Tourism is the backbone of the economy in Eagle County, as the White River National Forest estimates that over 17.8 million visitors come to the forest annually to ski, hike, bike, camp, drive, fish, and hunt. Additionally, increased human-wolf conflicts may occur as wolves continue to move into agricultural lands and valley floors, where people live, work, and recreate. The County requests CPW develop a robust education campaign to educate the residents, visitors, outfitters and guides, and others on wolf interactions, conflict avoidance methods, and how to properly cohabitate on the landscape.
5. **Support for 10(j) rule.** Eagle County supports CPW's work with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to develop a 10(j) rule to address management of wolves in Colorado. The designation of gray wolves as an experimental population under the Endangered Species Act is essential because it will allow land managers and ranchers greater flexibility to use management techniques that may otherwise be prohibited as a form of take without the 10(j) designation.
6. **Collaboration for success.** Eagle County would like to see CPW working closely with the County, land owners, ranchers, and other stakeholders to make sure lines of communication continue to remain open throughout the wolf reintroduction process, and to explore creative solutions and

³<https://www.vaildaily.com/news/eagle-county-will-probably-see-wolves-reintroduced-to-its-remote-areas-and-that-worries-ranchers/>



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partnerships to share funding and resources to address stakeholder concerns and minimize wolf conflicts (i.e., human, social, pets, livestock, etc.). Eagle County hopes to see CPW hire staff to work on the social science, collaboration, and facilitation of these conversations and projects. The County also hopes to see ongoing collaboration between CPW and the USFWS to identify appropriate reintroduction locations.

Thank you again for your partnership with our community and for the opportunity to comment on the draft plan. We appreciate your hard work, collaborative spirit, and willingness to engage with varied perspectives, and look forward to continuing to engage with CPW throughout the development and implementation of the plan. If you have any questions regarding this letter, you may contact Marcia Gilles, Director Open Space and Natural Resources by email at marcia.gilles@eaglecounty.us or by phone at (970) 328-8697.

Sincerely,

Jeff Shroll

County Manager