

Initiative 107: Reintroduction and Management of Gray Wolves

1 **Initiative 107 proposes amending the Colorado statutes to:**

- 2 • require the state to develop a plan to reintroduce and manage gray wolves
3 in Colorado and begin reintroduction by December 31, 2023; and
4 • require the state to pay fair compensation for livestock losses caused by
5 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 gray wolves will not be

reintroduced by the state.

Summary and Analysis for Initiative 107

1 What happens if Initiative 107 passes?

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

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

8 What will be included in the plan?

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

15 What is the gray wolf?

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

23 What is the deer and elk population in Colorado?

24 Colorado is home to about 710,000 deer and elk. The size of these herds is impacted by
25 a variety of factors, which include weather, land use, other predators, and active
26 population management through the issuance of hunting licenses. About 73,000 deer and
27 elk were killed by licensed hunters in 2019. Since 2006, the statewide deer population
28 has declined, while the elk population has remained relatively stable.

29 Where does the gray wolf live today?

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

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2

**Figure 1
Gray Wolf Range**



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Source: National Park Service.

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 generally
7 shy of people and tend to avoid contact when possible. Aggressive behavior from wild
8 gray wolves toward humans is rare. However, when wild animals are cornered, injured,
9 sick, or become accustomed to humans, they can become dangerous and cause harm.

10 **Who manages wildlife in Colorado?**

11 The Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission is responsible for wildlife management in
12 Colorado and regulates hunting, fishing, and trapping. State law requires wildlife and their
13 environment to be protected, preserved, enhanced, and managed for the use, benefit, and
14 enjoyment of the people and visitors of Colorado. The commission is also required to
15 protect threatened or endangered species. The commission offers recreation and
16 develops habitat at state wildlife areas. In coordination with the federal government, the
17 commission develops conservation and 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 restore
20 species deemed threatened by or in danger of extinction. In 1978, the U.S. Fish and
21 Wildlife Service (USFWS) listed the gray wolf as endangered throughout the contiguous

1 United States, except in Minnesota, where they are classified as threatened. States are
2 prohibited from managing endangered species without federal permission. In 1995, gray
3 wolves were reintroduced in the northern Rocky Mountains and have grown in number to
4 about 1,700 today. In 2011, they were removed from the federal endangered species list
5 in this region. Because of this, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming now have statewide
6 management authority for gray wolves. Gray wolves in these states are managed to
7 maintain populations above species recovery thresholds while mitigating predation on
8 livestock and sustaining deer and elk herds. These states monitor gray wolf populations
9 and distribution, permit limited hunting and trapping, and allow gray wolves to be killed in
10 order to protect livestock. These states also monitor livestock losses and offer
11 compensation programs for livestock owners. Across these three states, confirmed
12 livestock losses total about 300 per year, mostly consisting of cattle and sheep.

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

14 If gray wolves remain on the federal endangered species list, management authority rests
15 with the USFWS, and the state would need to obtain federal approval prior to
16 reintroduction. If gray wolves are removed from the federal endangered species list,
17 Colorado could assume management responsibility as other states have done. In 2019,
18 the USFWS proposed removing gray wolves from the endangered species list in the
19 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>

20 **Arguments For Initiative 107**

- 21 1) Gray wolves perform important ecological functions that impact other plants and
22 animals. Without gray wolves, deer and elk can overgraze sensitive habitats such
23 as riverbanks, leading to declines in ecosystem health. Leftover prey can also
24 provide food for other scavengers such as birds and smaller mammals.
25 Reintroducing gray wolves can help support a healthy environment upon which
26 Coloradans depend.
- 27 2) Restoring gray wolves in Colorado facilitates species recovery throughout their
28 native range. Gray wolves once inhabited much of North America, including
29 Colorado, and were eliminated in most areas through human activities. Although
30 there have been occasional sightings, it is doubtful that gray wolves will establish
31 a permanent presence in the state without reintroduction efforts.

1 **Arguments Against Initiative 107**

2 1) The presence of gray wolves introduces the potential for conflict with humans and
3 animals that live in Colorado now. Gray wolves are known to prey on livestock.
4 Deer herds in some areas have fallen below population goals established by state
5 wildlife managers, and introducing another predator would put further pressure on
6 these herds. In addition, many people live and recreate in areas being considered
7 for gray wolf habitat, and this measure could lead to further conflict.

8 2) Gray wolf sightings have increased in Colorado in recent years. This suggests
9 that gray wolf migration from other states is already occurring, making a
10 reintroduction program unnecessary. Allowing gray wolves to naturally migrate
11 from nearby states would allow for a more gradual process and give the people of
12 Colorado more time to adapt to their presence.

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

14 An estimate of fiscal impact will be included in the second draft of this ballot analysis.