



Photo By Pacificforest.org

Act and Protect:

COLORADO'S GRAY WOLF PROGRAM FACES A TRUMP ADMINISTRATION TAKEOVER

BY ZEV BLUMENFELD

In December 2025, a gray wolf walked over the Colorado border into New Mexico. The wolf, known by Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) as Gray Wolf 2403, was part of a voter-approved initiative to reintroduce wolves to Colorado. However, 2403's time in the Land of Enchantment didn't last long. The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish captured the wolf and, on Dec. 12, returned it to Colorado. The return and re-release of 2403 has become a flashpoint in the struggle of reintroducing gray wolves into Colorado.

Since its approval by voters in 2020, the measure has been met with stubborn political resistance from Colorado's anti-wolf legislators and, more recently, from the Trump Administration's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Director.

On Dec. 18, 2025, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to remove protections under the Endangered Species Act. The bill, sponsored by Colorado's bombastic representative Lauren Boebert, threatens the viability of the reintroduction program. With congressional backsliding and pressure from various special interest groups, 2026 will be a crucial year in determining the success and viability of the gray wolf in Colorado. Here's how the program has progressed so far and how you can fight back to protect the Colorado gray wolf.

The Return of the Colorado Gray Wolf

In 2020, Colorado voters successfully passed a ballot measure to reintroduce gray wolves to the state. For wildlife advocates and many Coloradans, this victory marked an exciting opportunity to turn back the clock. Gray wolves are native to Colorado and other Rocky Mountain states but were hunted to near-extinction by settlers and ranchers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The measure also meant that Colorado would join states like New Mexico, Arizona, and North Carolina, which have already enacted their own wolf repatriation programs.



As wild carnivores, wolves play a vital role in balancing ecosystems by controlling deer and elk populations that feed on important vegetation. For example, wolves in Northern Yellowstone have aided in the recovery of riparian habitats previously damaged by overgrazing.

Dillon Hanson-Ahumada, a Southern Rockies field representative for the Endangered Species Coalition, said in a statement that CPW's plan "marks one more step toward a momentous conservation achievement for the wilds and the people of Colorado."

In 2023, the first wolves were transported from Oregon and released in Colorado's Grand and Summit counties. This would prove to be a high watermark for what was to come.

A Rocky Road: Illegal Shootings, Mountain Lions, and Threats

Since its commencement in 2023, Colorado's program has transferred wolves from Oregon and British Columbia, Canada. According to the reintroduction plan, Colorado Parks and Wildlife would capture and release 10 to 15 wolves per year over the next three to five years. The goal: to have at least 50 wolves within the state.



However, setbacks have occurred. Three of the original 10 wolves from Oregon died, two of them due to being illegally shot. In January 2025, the second release occurred, which included 15 wolves from British Columbia, Canada. By July, five of them had died. Mountain lions, poachers, and car strikes have been among the causes of the fatalities. One of the female gray wolves was found dead in Rocky Mountain National Park after sustaining injuries. Then, less than a month later, a second wolf died after getting caught in a foothold trap. While these traps are generally illegal, they may be used by commercial livestock owners under special circumstances. In addition to the deaths, CPW officers have →

dealt with threats ranging from aggressive social media posts and phone calls to being surveilled.

Despite these setbacks, the program has increased in favorability since the elections. In a recent poll, 55% of respondents support moving forward with the plan.

A New Generation Brings Optimism

A major success for Colorado's wolf reintroduction program occurred on July 29, 2025, when a minimum of six pups were born to a pack in Jackson County.

"We know that there are at least six pups in the One Ear Pack, but there is a possibility that there were additional pups we did not see," said Eric Odell, CPW wolf conservation program manager. "Detection of pups early on is inherently low due to a number of factors, including their size, use of densely covered homesites, and time potentially underground."



Photo Provided By
Colorado Parks and Wildlife

As of December, Odell said that at least 20 collared wolves and at least 10 pups are alive in Colorado – a significant step toward the long-term, 50-wolf goal.

2026: The Year of the Wolf and Beyond

The new pups are a good sign for the gray wolf's viability. According to the current CPW plan, more repatriation attempts will be taken, though not necessarily in 2026. However, even with a successful reintroduction, the program and the gray wolf population face significant threats without help.

Tense exchanges surrounding the re-release of Gray Wolf 2403 prompted the Trump administration to threaten to take over the program from CPW. On Dec. 18, 2025, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Brian Nesvik — former Director of Wyoming Game and Fish Department — wrote a letter to Lauren Clellan, CPW director. In the letter, he stated that if a complete report of all gray wolf conservation and management activities is not supplied within 60 days of the letter, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will take over management of the program, which includes relocation and lethal removal of the wolves.

Nesvik has a checkered past when it comes to wildlife conservation. In 2024, a Wyoming man ran a juvenile wolf down on his snowmobile, then published a photo of himself posing with the injured animal, whose muzzle was taped shut. This all happened before he killed the wolf. Nesvik's office responded by giving the man a \$250 fine and no jail time. Nesvik has also opposed efforts to protect sage grouse populations by permitting oil and gas companies to destroy their habitat. He's even failed to act on information that would have prevented chronic wasting disease, currently killing elk in Wyoming — a problem that, if not addressed, is predicted to kill 58% of elk across western Wyoming.

This letter from Nesvik comes on the heels of the U.S. House of Representatives voting to remove protections for the gray wolf under the Endangered Species Act. The bill, sponsored by Colorado representative Lauren Boebert, also prohibits the reissuance of the rule from being subject to judicial review, meaning courts are not allowed to review or challenge this rule in the future.

To make matters worse, if Colorado's wolf population reaches 200, certain protections would expire. As a consequence, this could open the door for legal wolf hunting — a current reality in states like Montana, which recently increased its kill quota to 458 (i.e., half its wolf population).

Colorado's First Gentleman, Marlon Reis, an animal rights advocate, wrote in response to the rollback of gray wolf protections: "America has, for more than 40 years, protected gray wolves as an endangered species, and we must continue to do so, not only because science tells us so, but because it is clear that anti-wolf sentiment is alive and well in all of the states where gray wolves currently live."

Here's How You Can Help

With federal and state officials continuing to gut funding and undermine conservation legislation like the Endangered Species Act of 1973, we need your help more than ever. If you have a moment, consider calling your congressional representatives and speaking out. You can also volunteer or donate to animal advocacy groups in your area. -Zev Blumenfeld



Photo Provided By Colorado Parks and Wildlife