



COLORADO

Parks and Wildlife

Department of Natural Resources

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Fiscal note for ballot initiative 2019-20 #79, Reintroduction of Gray Wolves on Public Lands

Proposed ballot initiative 2019-20 #79 would require Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) to do a number of things, including:

- Develop a plan to restore and manage gray wolves in Colorado
- Hold statewide hearings to assist in developing this plan
- Take the steps necessary to reintroduce wolves by December 31, 2023, on public lands that lie west of the Continental Divide
- Oversee ongoing gray wolf restoration and management
- Assist owners of livestock in preventing and resolving conflicts between gray wolves and livestock, as well as reimbursing owners of livestock for losses caused by gray wolves.

The gray wolf is designated as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act. As such, Colorado Parks and Wildlife will only be able to undertake management efforts related to gray wolves with approval from the federal government. Assuming CPW can work with federal agencies to gain the needed approval to implement this initiative, there will be fiscal impacts to CPW. To meet the requirements of the initiative, CPW would likely undertake a two-year planning and public outreach period, followed by a five-year implementation process. After implementation, CPW will incur annual operating and research costs to manage the ongoing wolf reintroduction program.

CPW projects the following costs to plan and implement a gray wolf reintroduction program:

- **Planning period (years 1-2): \$790,660**
- **Implementation period: (years 3-7): \$4,115,135**
- **Recurring/ongoing costs (years 8 and following): \$792,927**
- **Total estimated cost through year 8: \$5,698,722**

Planning and Public Outreach

CPW would incur costs during the planning and public outreach component of the reintroduction process to support increased workload and new programmatic requirements.



Public meetings: The reintroduction of wolves is likely to be controversial, and the initiative requires CPW to hold statewide hearings to seek public input on a variety of factors, including the scientific, social, and economic considerations of reintroduction. Based on experience with other controversial issues, CPW projects that the agency would hold a minimum of eight public meetings over the two-year planning period, located around the state but primarily focused on the Western Slope. CPW tries to hold meetings in free public spaces and generally does not provide food or other refreshments, but public meetings do involve some cost to CPW. The main cost drivers are related to staff travel, hotel, and per diem costs, vehicle costs, and printed material costs. Because these meetings would likely involve high attendance, and because wolf implementation will affect both CPW administrative units and field units, CPW would probably have a large staff presence at each meeting. CPW estimates an average cost of \$300 per employee for 20 employees, or \$6,000 per meeting. CPW also projects that one outreach meeting per year will be required during the implementation period, with a gradual reduction in staff attendance.

Because this planning process and the meetings will be fairly high profile, with a large crowd and media presence, CPW would likely contract with a meeting facilitator. An independent meeting manager will help CPW build trust in the process among constituent groups with differing views and value systems. Based on prior experience, CPW estimates the cost of a meeting facilitator at \$5,000 per meeting. (As a comparable example, meeting facilitation for recent public meetings about the Basalt shooting range cost approximately \$4,500 per meeting.) CPW would likely use a facilitator only for meetings during the planning period and would rely on staff to manage meetings during the implementation period.

Commission meetings: The Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission (Commission) is charged with implementing the initiative. The Commission values constituent input and schedules time at all meetings for public feedback. Based on experience with other controversial issues, wolf reintroduction could result in a significant increase to the public comment period of Commission meetings. A typical CPW Commission meeting costs about \$25,000 in total for all costs (primarily travel, hotel, and per diem for Commissioners and CPW staff, but also printing and reproduction costs, food and beverages, and other costs). Rather than schedule additional meetings dedicated exclusively to discussion of wolves, CPW would likely extend currently scheduled meetings by half a day, at an estimated cost of about \$10,000 per meeting. CPW projects that the Commission would seek input about wolves at four meetings over the two-year planning period, for a total cost of \$40,000. The Commission would also require an additional half-day meeting for each year of the implementation period.

Public survey: CPW would conduct at least one public opinion survey, with a large sample size and encompassing as much of the state as possible. Based on similar surveys CPW has conducted, this could cost approximately \$50,000. As an example, CPW's most recent big game season structure survey had a large sample size and cost approximately \$40,000.

Public information: The impact to CPW's Public Information staff could be significant, and the unit might need to seek contract or temporary staff assistance to deal with increased CORA and other informational requests. CPW would hire temporary staff to assist with the increased volume of information requests, management of public feedback, and responses to public comment. CPW estimates that the increase in workload would require two six-month temporary staffers per year for the two-year planning period, at \$18 per hour.

Terrestrial section planning: The reintroduction and management of wolves would constitute a new program area for CPW's Terrestrial Wildlife unit and would require additional staff. Costs associated with this are described below in the Implementation and Management section. During the planning and outreach process, CPW could also require assistance from contractors and other specialists to help determine appropriate locations for the implementation of the program. Based on CPW's prior experience, these costs could be approximately \$75,000 per year for the two-year planning period.

Program Implementation and Management

FTE costs: CPW has no experience in managing wolf populations and would essentially be creating a new program from scratch. CPW could not absorb the management of a major new program like this within existing staff resources. Based on agency experience with the staffing load required for other predator management programs (lions and bears), and on the models used by other states, CPW would designate a new Team Lead to oversee the new wolf management program, assisted by two field-based wildlife biologists. CPW would fill the Team Lead position beginning in FY 2021-22 so that the new employee could be involved with public meetings, outreach, and other program development processes. Beginning in FY 2022-23, as the new program gets closer to actually releasing wolves into the wild, CPW would add wildlife biologists in the agency's Northwest and Southwest regions.

Operating costs: The actual introduction of wolves would begin in FY 2023-24, at some point prior to December 31, 2023 as required by the initiative. During this fiscal year, CPW would begin to incur the majority of the operating costs involved with reintroduction. There are many models for species reintroduction and the planning and research process up to this point would help dictate the actual process used by CPW, but for purposes of this fiscal note, CPW projects that the agency would release 10 wolves per year for 4 years, and then release 5 wolves in year 5 of the program. (Please note that these are planning numbers; the number of wolves released per year could vary depending on the availability of wolves.) If possible, capture efforts will target wolves that are pack-mates to promote bonding following release. This relatively modest target of 45 wolves in the first five years of the program will allow close monitoring of post-release movement and activity, which in turn will inform the locations and logistics of future releases

Program start-up costs are detailed on the attached spreadsheet. Among the key components of the project's operating budget are:

- Costs to acquire, transport, house, feed, and care for wolves prior to release.
- Seasonal (temporary) wildlife technicians to assist the program's permanent FTE with tracking and otherwise managing wolves. CPW estimates that the program will require 6 technicians annually, working in overlapping 9 month shifts. Costs are estimated based on 1,500 hours per technician at \$18.00 per hour.
- GPS and telemetry equipment and flight costs for monitoring and management.

Research: Once wolves are released, CPW will need to understand their relationships with other wildlife species and interactions with other land uses such as livestock grazing. Although specific research questions have not been developed, knowledge of wolf food habits in Colorado, impacts of their predation on elk, deer and other big game species, and their interactions and impacts on livestock operations will be valuable to inform future management. Costs are estimated based on similar studies for other large predators.

Game damage: Per Section 33-3-103, C.R.S., the state of Colorado is liable for certain damages caused by wildlife, including damages to livestock. CPW's Game Damage Program strives to prevent game damage in the first place and reimburses ranchers, farmers, and other landowners for damage caused by big game animals. Other states that have reintroduced gray wolves have experienced game damage to cattle, sheep, and other livestock; the reintroduction of wolves in Colorado will result in similar damages.

Game damage claims, or the costs of wolf depredations on livestock, are expected to be low in the first few years following release of wolves but will climb as wolf numbers and distribution increase across the west slope of Colorado. A reasonable cost projection for the initial year following release is \$10,000-20,000; this figure includes cost of livestock losses and associated efforts to prevent additional depredations at the sites of losses (range riders, changes in husbandry practices, hazing, and/or removal of offending wolves). Depredation management costs are expected to climb as the wolf population increases; annual population increases of 25% or more are realistic in the initial years following release, based on the performance of wolves introduced to the northern Rocky Mountains. The desired wolf population size cannot be projected at this time, as it will result from extensive public outreach during development of a wolf management plan. However, both lethal and non-lethal control of depredating wolves is expected to occur soon after initial releases; such control is needed to maintain tolerance for wolves by livestock producers.

Recurring Program Costs

After the five-year implementation period, CPW will experience ongoing costs to manage the program. These include:

- Personal services costs for the program's 3.0 FTE. These will grow over time with Salary Survey and Merit Pay, but growth is not calculated for this exercise.
- Annual operating costs, including vehicle costs, temporary staff, and flight costs.
- Public meeting costs and Commission meeting costs: It seems likely that public interest in the wolf reintroduction program will remain high, and CPW will continue to hold public meetings to seek input about the program.
- Ongoing research costs: Multi-year research will help CPW manage its program more successfully and will contribute to wolf research nationwide.
- Game damage costs: These costs will escalate with anticipated growth of the reintroduced population.