



POLICY LESSONS FOR COLORADO WOLF REINTRODUCTION

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This research serves as part of the Center for Collaborate Conservation policy brief series *Policy and Practice for Wolf Reintroduction in Colorado*. You can find the whole series [here](#).

Research Focus

To inform Colorado's wolf reintroduction process, we conducted a one-year study to understand policy and management strategies from past wolf reintroductions, including the Northern Rocky Mountains and the Mexican wolf recovery area. Our goals were to identify how lessons learned from past reintroduction and management efforts could inform strategies for future reintroduction, and to capture ideas and suggestions specifically for Colorado.

Approach

We conducted 42 interviews with state and federal land/wildlife managers, and individuals from other key stakeholder groups from past reintroduction areas and Colorado.

Key Findings

The majority of interviewees advocated for taking an “all tools” approach to management, meaning a mix of non-lethal and lethal measures. Many felt that having flexibility for some lethal removal was a critical part of management for increasing social tolerance and population control. Some interviewees mentioned the use of management zones where wolves are afforded different protections across boundary lines. A few felt that this increased social tolerance towards wolves in places like Wyoming, but others felt that

boundary lines in the Southwest limited the ecological success of the Mexican wolf population.

Most interviewees felt that collaborative processes with diverse stakeholders and other relevant federal, state, and Tribal managing agencies that allow for joint-decision making increase social tolerance towards having wolves and would be useful in Colorado. Many emphasized the importance of transparency in communication through data-sharing and building personal relationships in order to foster effective collaboration. Decisions affecting specific groups, such as details on livestock compensation programs, should directly involve those stakeholders, interviewees said.

Most felt that depredation compensation programs were a necessity for wolf reintroduction but expressed frustrations with these programs. Difficulties included problems with confirming a depredation, payment not accounting for other losses such as cattle weight loss due to stress, and the amount of time it takes to receive payment. Many also felt that these programs are significantly underfunded.

Many emphasized that Colorado should make sure that the necessary funding mechanisms are in place before reintroduction occurs. Some also were

concerned that reliance on CPW funds may reduce tolerance of wolves. Interviewees suggested that Colorado shift the financial burden away from those who most likely did not vote for reintroduction (e.g., hunter and angler communities) and towards those who did by using general tax revenue.

Although ultimate jurisdictional authority will depend on the federal endangered status of the wolf under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) at the time of reintroduction, the majority of interviewees advocated for Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) to reintroduce wolves only if they remain delisted under the ESA. If wolves are re-listed, CPW will potentially need to seek a permit through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to reintroduce, but ultimate authority will still fall to the federal agency. Interviewees felt that state agencies should have full control over reintroduction because they have more regulatory flexibility and can tailor management plans to state needs.

Implications for Policy and Practice

A regulatory framework that utilizes a mix of policy tools (e.g., incentives or financial assistance), along with regulatory flexibility, can help to effectively manage wolves over different scales. This mix of tools should include both lethal removal and non-lethal measures. It is important to use diverse tools, paying attention to how they will be implemented and affect different groups of people.

Collaborative processes that allow for joint-decision making between stakeholders and managers may help to increase social tolerance towards wolves.

Clear management goals and targets will need to be set prior to reintroduction via management plans that are co-generated amongst all relevant partners (i.e., livestock producers, hunters, NGOs, federal and state agencies, Tribal Nations, and other members of the public and stakeholder groups).

Diversifying funding sources to better leverage the resources of those who voted for wolf reintroduction may be helpful to address perceptions of equity. Funding also should be in place prior to reintroduction in order to better support the implementation of policy and management strategies.

Regardless of which agency has jurisdictional oversight, a community-based approach to management will be helpful for successful reintroduction. An approach including local state agencies and community groups could increase social tolerance towards wolves on the landscape by increasing trust between the public and managers, as opposed to reintroduction being run by organizations outside of the state (i.e., federal agencies).

More Information

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