

Colorado cements plan to reintroduce gray wolves but a snag lingers

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Colorado's plan to capture and release dozens of wolves into the Western Slope's wilderness is now finalized, though the timeline might suffer thanks to a bill proposed by the region's lawmakers.

The Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission unanimously approved the state's Wolf Restoration and Management Plan Wednesday, more than two years after the controversial and narrow passage of Proposition 114.

In all, state wildlife officials plan to capture between 30 and 50 [gray wolves](#) from other Rocky Mountain states over the next three to five years and release them throughout Colorado's Western Slope. Those [wolves](#) should seed what will hopefully grow into a much larger and self-sustaining population, bringing back the predators that were once hunted to extinction in the state generations ago.

The newly approved plan indicates that [state officials](#) expect to begin releasing the wolves in December. But a bill working its way through the statehouse could hamper that plan by hinging the reintroduction on a specific designation from [federal officials](#) that's not yet finished.

That designation—under consideration by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service—would grant Colorado's officials the authority to manage (capture, relocate or even kill) wolves. State officials don't automatically have that authority because the wolves are a federally protected species and they need it because the predators are expected to attack wildlife and pets. One [wolf pack](#) that migrated into the state naturally already has.

Dan Gibbs, executive director of Colorado's Department of Natural Resources, said last week that Fish & Wildlife officials have reassured him they're on track to grant that authority by December. But he warned during a House committee meeting last week that the measure—Senate

Bill 23-256—requiring that federal designation could derail the process and potentially delay the reintroduction.

Western Slope lawmakers argued, however, that the potential delay would likely only last a few months. That's a price they're willing to pay to ensure that [state wildlife officials](#) have the tools they need to handle the predators that their constituents largely don't want in the first place.

The House passed the [bill](#) Tuesday, which must go back to the Senate for another vote before it heads to Gov. Jared Polis's desk. Representatives for the governor did not say whether he supports the measure but in a statement published Wednesday he praised the now-finalized reintroduction plan.

In a release announcing the plan's finalization, Gibbs said the state remains on track to begin releasing wolves by the end of the year.

Alongside the number of wolves to be released, the plan says that the state will pay up to \$30,000 for animals (livestock, guarding or herding animals) killed or injured by wolves.

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