

Colorado secures the first wolves for reintroduction from Oregon

October 9 2023, by Elise Schmelzer, The Denver Post



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Oregon will provide the first gray wolves for Colorado's voter-mandated reintroduction of the species, wildlife officials announced Friday after a months-long search for a state willing to provide the canine before a

Dec. 31 deadline.

Up to 10 wolves will be supplied by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife over the winter. Colorado Parks and Wildlife staff between December and March will capture the wolves in northeastern Oregon using helicopters and spotter planes.

Captured animals would be flown or trucked down to western Colorado for release as soon as possible.

"We are deeply grateful for Oregon's partnership in this endeavor, and we are now one step closer to fulfilling the will of the voters in time," Colorado Gov. Jared Polis said in a news release.

Colorado voters in 2020 narrowly approved the reintroduction of the species to Colorado. As state [wildlife officials](#) have made detailed plans to comply, just where to obtain the wolves has been a big challenge, with several states turning down requests.

"Oregon has a long history of helping other states meet their conservation goals by providing animals for translocation efforts," Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Director Curt Melcher said in the release. "Some of our [wildlife populations](#) were also restored thanks to other states doing the same for us, including Rocky Mountain elk, bighorn sheep and Rocky Mountain goat."

The wolf population in northeastern Oregon is resilient and will not suffer long-term impacts from the captures, according to the news release. State officials plan to release the wolves on Colorado Parks and Wildlife land between Glenwood Springs, Vail and the Roaring Fork Valley.

Although Oregon wildlife officials will help by sharing information

about wolf locations, the release says Colorado will be responsible for all costs of capturing and transporting the wolves. All captured wolves will be tested and treated for disease on-site in Oregon. Those with significant injuries—such as missing eyes or mange—won't be transported to Colorado.

The wolf reintroduction ballot measure drew heavy support from voters along the Front Range, but the wolves will be released west of the Continental Divide.

Many ranchers across the state have opposed the reintroduction, saying wolves pose a threat to their livestock, domestic animals and families. Colorado Parks and Wildlife offered one bit of assurance, saying Friday that officials "will make efforts to transplant wolves that have not been involved in repeated depredations."

Erin Karney, executive vice president of the Colorado Cattlemen's Association, underlined that as a chief concern ranchers will be watching. The agency also needs to reach out to ranchers in the areas they have selected as possible release sites, she said.

"CPW should be doing that proactively now so those producers can prepare," Karney said.

Wolves were killed off in Colorado by 1940, though a few wolves have been recorded in the state since 2020. Colorado is the first state government to reintroduce [gray wolves](#).

"This is really a historic effort," said Michael Saul, Rockies and Plains field director for Defenders of Wildlife. "It's the first time a state has chosen to bring back this amazing and ecologically important carnivore, and all the biological and legal pieces seem to be coming together to get it done on time. We're keeping our fingers crossed to see paws on the

ground by New Year's."

But the work isn't over yet, Saul said. Colorado officials will need multiple sources of wolves to fulfill its plan of releasing between 30 and 50 wolves in the state over the next five years.

In a plan finalized in May, wildlife officials had identified Idaho, Montana or Wyoming as ideal sources of wolves. But none of those states agreed to share their wolves, citing the complications of managing wolf packs in their states.

The plan also identified Oregon and Washington as backup options for source populations. Washington State officials are open to providing [wolves](#) in the future but said they would not be able to do so this calendar year, Colorado Parks and Wildlife officials previously said.

"This is a multi-year process and hopefully the start of what has the potential to be one of the great [wildlife](#) and ecological recovery successes of our time," Saul said.

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Citation: Colorado secures the first wolves for reintroduction from Oregon (2023, October 9) retrieved 16 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-10-colorado-wolves-reintroduction-oregon.html>

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