

# Release of five wolves in the Colorado mountains begins first-of-its kind state reintroduction effort

December 19 2023, by Elise Schmelzer, The Denver Post

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Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Five wolves dashed out of crates and into the Colorado landscape on Monday, culminating three years of work to implement a first-of-its-

kind reintroduction of the controversial predator to the state.

Colorado wildlife officials captured the [wolves](#) in Oregon and flew them to Colorado for release in Grand County, Colorado Parks and Wildlife announced Monday evening. Colorado Parks and Wildlife officials said they would not disclose the exact location of the release in the north-central mountains to keep the canines and the agency's staff members safe.

The five wolves were two juvenile females, two juvenile males and one adult male, a news release said. The five wolves came from three separate packs in Oregon. The wolves are expected to immediately disperse from the release site by up to 70 miles and stay on the move for weeks until they find suitable habitat.

"Today, history was made in Colorado. For the first time since the 1940s, the howl of wolves will officially return to western Colorado," Gov. Jared Polis said in the news release.

Colorado's wolf reintroduction is the first voter-mandated reintroduction of the species in the United States. Federal officials in the 1990s brought back wolves on federal lands in Wyoming and Idaho, where wolves have since established successful packs despite years of litigation over their management.

But wolves have roamed Colorado recently. Wolves naturally migrated into northern Colorado from Wyoming in 2020 and established a pack of eight, though [state wildlife officials](#) believe only two of the wolves remain in the area.

Colorado's reintroduction is the result of a successful ballot measure that in 2020 put the question to voters of whether to bring wolves back. The measure narrowly passed 51% to 49%, fueled primarily by voters along

the state's urban Front Range.

Wildlife activists have hailed the reintroduction as a much-needed chance to restore a crucial species to an ecosystem where wolves have not existed in large numbers since the early 1900s. Some [ranchers](#) and hunters, however, have protested the effort, citing concerns about harms to cattle, sheep and hunting game herds.

Two ranchers' groups sued state and federal [wildlife officials](#) days before efforts to capture wolves in Oregon began, but a [federal judge](#) denied the groups' request to delay the reintroduction on Friday. The ranchers' lawsuit and another lawsuit against the reintroduction, filed Dec. 14, are proceeding in [federal court](#).

The wolves released Monday are the first of up to 50 expected to be released over the next three to five years. Colorado Parks and Wildlife plans to release up to 10 wolves from Oregon between December and March before restarting releases the following winter.

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