



ROCKY MOUNTAIN WOLF PROJECT

RESTORING COLORADO'S NATURAL BALANCE

- WOLVES IN THE WEST -



**After decades of conservation work in the Western Great Lakes states, southeastern and southwestern United States, and northern Rocky Mountains, it's time to consider the last great expanse of wolf-less wild lands in the lower 48 states:
the public lands of Western Colorado.**

Wolves are native to Colorado, having once existed across the state, but the species was rendered all but extinct by the 1930s. The last reported wolf death was in 1945 when it was killed near the New Mexico border, effectively silencing the howl of Colorado's wilderness.

WOLVES IN THE AMERICAN WEST

A Symbol of the West

For millions of years, the gray wolf, alongside the American plains bison, reigned supreme as the keystone features of the western United States. With bison numbering in the tens of millions and wolves in numbers as high as two million, the ecology of the region revolved around the two species, with the wolf serving as the shepherd of the buffalo, elk, deer, moose and American Pronghorn.

As recently as 150 years ago, the gray wolf existed throughout the contiguous United States, except for the southeastern US from central Texas to the Atlantic coast where the red wolf roamed. That changed with the arrival of European settlers.

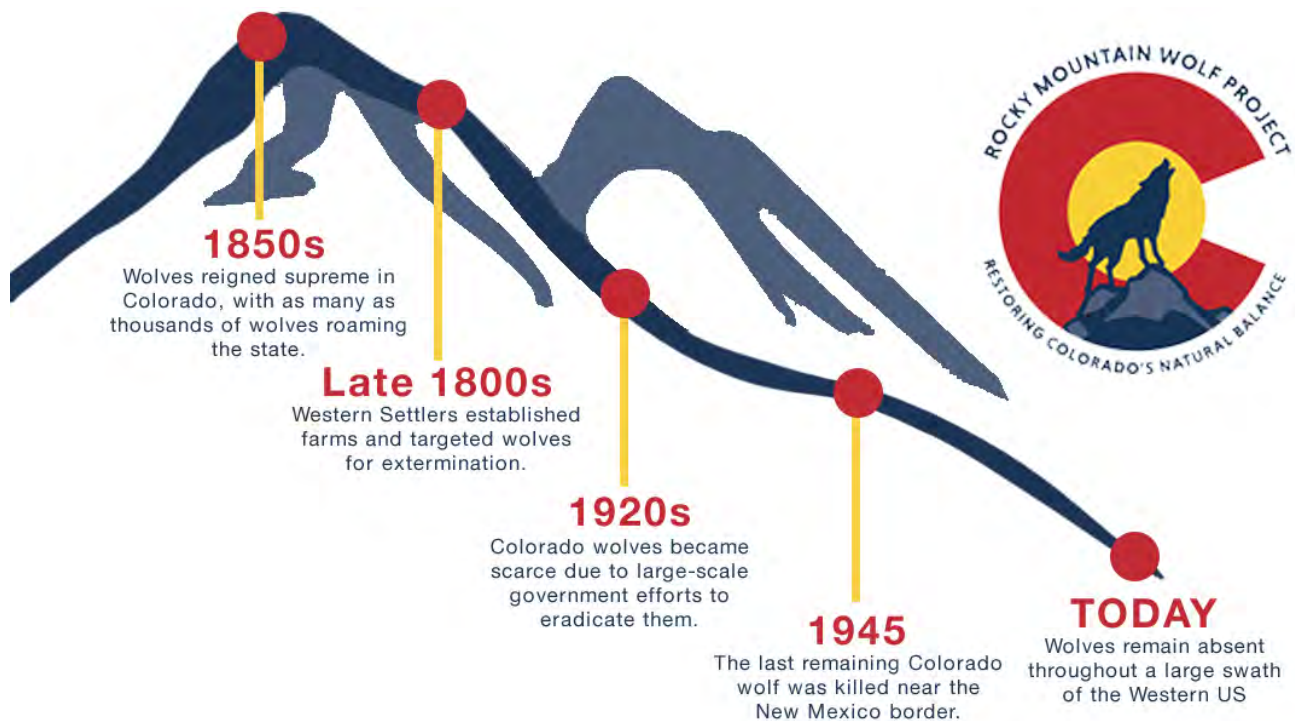
As these settlers moved westward, the native wildlife was destroyed and once wild lands made suitable for large ranching operations of sheep and cattle imported from Europe. Even the mighty bison was brought to the brink of extinction.

With their native prey nearly eliminated, in desperation wolves turned to the rancher's cattle and sheep. Livestock owners responded swiftly, successfully lobbying state and local stockmen's associations to set bounties on wolves and to employ full time field agents to shoot, rope, trap, gas, stomp and strangle wolves.

Although the buffalo is the largest, he has by no means the control among the prairie animals; the scepter of authority has been lodged with the gray wolf."

**-Western explorer
Josiah Gregg**

In 1915, Congress passed a law that provided for the extermination of wolves on federal lands, even in national parks.



As Barry Lopez wrote in his seminal book *Of Wolves and Men*, “The wolf was not the cattlemen’s only problem. There was weather to contend with, disease, rustling, fluctuating beef prices, the hazards of the trail drives, the cost of running such enormous operations. But more and more the cattlemen blamed any economic shortfall on the wolf... The wolf became an object of pathological hatred.”

By the 1920’s, wolves were scarce. The last to survive took on mythic status, with some given names – like Colorado’s Rags, Whitey and Lefty – and a place in Western folklore.



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BARRY LOPEZ, *Of Wolves and Men*

ENDANGERED SPECIES PROTECTIONS

We Can Do More To Save the Gray Wolf

In the decades following the extermination of the wolf in Colorado, gray wolves were listed as endangered per Colorado's Nongame, Endangered, or Threatened Species Conservation Act.

THE ACT STATES:

"...species or subspecies of wildlife indigenous to this state which may be found to be endangered or threatened within the state should be accorded protection in order to maintain and enhance their numbers to the extent possible; that this state should assist in the protection of species or subspecies of wildlife which are deemed to be endangered or threatened..."

Despite the clear intent of Colorado law, the act is best suited for management actions that promote the persistence of imperiled but existing species. For eradicated species like the gray wolf, the law specifies that reintroductions have to be authorized by the Colorado Legislature.

Given the influence of anti-wolf organizations and industries with the state—the odds were stacked against wolf reintroductions. But in recent years Colorado has taken encouraging steps in an effort to bring back the wolf: Colorado Parks and Wildlife appointed a Colorado Wolf Management Working Group and adopted their recommendations in 2005:



Migrating wolves should be allowed to live with no boundaries where they find habitat. Wolf distribution in Colorado will ultimately be defined by the interplay between ecological needs and social tolerance."

COLORADO WOLF MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATION



Gray wolves also found protection under federal law, when Congress enacted the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1973 and listed the species under ESA protections. Starting with around 1,000 wolves in Minnesota in the early 1970s,

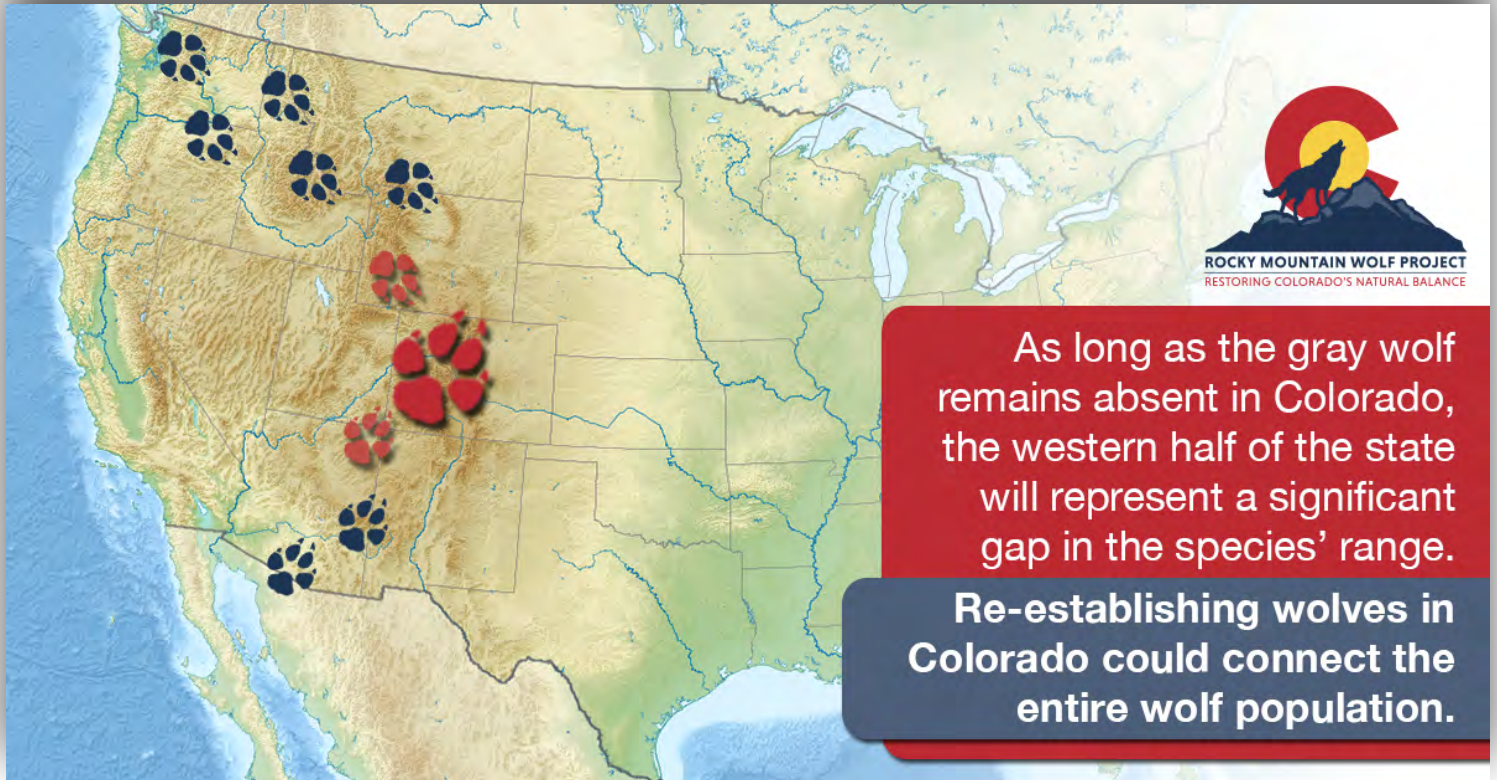
ESA-related actions have led to the restoration of roughly 6,000 wolves in Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin, Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Oregon and Washington, as of 2016. The Act also resulted in the establishment of a population of approximately 100 Mexican gray wolves in southwestern New Mexico and southeastern Arizona.

A common-sense interpretation of the ESA concludes that Congress intended that the law's recovery mandate to have wide geographic application. Not surprisingly, previous delisting actions and case law uphold this intent:

When considering the recovery of the flat-tailed horned lizard (*Phrynosoma mcallii*), the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals concluded that the text of the ESA and its subsequent application have been guided by Aldo Leopold's maxim:

"There seems to be a tacit assumption that if grizzlies survive in Canada and Alaska, that is good enough. It is not good enough for me ... Relegating grizzlies to Alaska is about like relegating happiness to heaven; one may never get there."

Despite the successes of these protections, most biologists agree that relegating the gray wolf to 15 percent of its historical range and at population levels that are a shadow of historical abundance fails to honor the spirit and intent of the ESA.



It is our ecological duty to ensure survival of the gray wolf, and together we can work to make sure we play our role in replacing the wolf's voice in our Colorado chorus.

Hearing that call again would serve as the last piece in a 40-year puzzle to re-establish the species from the High Arctic to Mexico.

"Re-establishing wolves in western Colorado could connect the entire North American wolf population from Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan through Canada and Alaska, down the Rocky Mountains into Mexico.

It would be difficult to overestimate the biological and conservation value of this achievement."

- Dr. L. D. Mech, Wolf Biologist

BRING BACK THE WOLF

For centuries, wolves were a trademark of the west—
help us bring them back to their home.

We know that it can be done and, with your help, it
will be done right here in Colorado.

Take The Next Step -- Add Your Name

