

Colorado Gray Wolf Reintroduction 10j and EIS US Fish and Wildlife Service

Cooperating Agency Meeting Notes

August 18, 2022
10:00 – 11:00 am MST
Microsoft Teams Meeting

Attendees:

Name	Organization
Nicole Alt	FWS
John Hughes	FWS
Darren LeBlanc	FWS
Martin Lowney	APHIS
Clay Crowder	AZGFD
Jim deVos	AZGFD
Jim Heffelfinger	AZGFD
Alan Bittner	BLM
Joel Humphries	BLM
Les Owen	CO Dept. of Agriculture
Callie Hendrickson	Conservation Districts?
Brian Dreher	CPW
Eric Odell	CPW
Reid DeWalt	CPW
Richard Truex	Forest Service
Fred Jarman	Garfield County
Chris Berens	KDWP
Matt Peek	KDWP
Amber Swasey	Mesa County
Jeff Comstock	Moffat County
Steward Liley	NMDGF
Justin Shannon	UDWR
Kim Hersey	UDWR
Dan Thompson	WGFD
Margaret Stover	WSP

Project Background

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (the Service) began the meeting with roll call and an overview of the agenda. The Service also presented the Public Scoping/Project Background which was the same presentation given at the public meetings.

Timeline and Schedule

Nicole explained the emphasis on differentiating between the Service's action versus the Colorado Park's and Wildlife (CPW) action. She clarified that CPW is responsible for the reintroduction work while the Service is analyzing the impacts of the proposed 10(j) regulation rather than the impacts of the reintroduction itself. Nicole gave an overview of the schedule. Key items included draft EIS completion by this winter, an administrative draft by early fall for groups with signed Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) to review, and a series of calls to feed into the draft analysis for agencies with signed MOUs.

Questions

The cooperating agencies were asked what questions they had at this time. The following questions were asked.

Moffat County asked about the differences between Alternative 1 and Alternative 2 and wondered if there was a way the 2-2-2 rule could be met.

It is hard to know if the 2-2-2 rule could be met and that CPW is planning more survey work over the winter. The 2-2-2 is not currently met but the survey could find evidence of breeding occurring and we need to prepare to have flexibility. The Endangered Species Act, Section 10j says that an experimental population can be reintroduced if it is wholly separate from an existing population.

Moffat County asked if there would be a way for cooperators to participate in public comment review.

There are about 200 comments currently and that the Service would speak with cooperators next week about the public comment review process. Data from cooperators could be helpful, especially in socioeconomic areas.

Garfield County asked why cooperators were not involved in the creation of the alternatives and asked about the rationale behind the alternatives. Moffat County asked about Alternative 2 and how to include flexibility in management.

Alternative 1 is included at the request of the state of Colorado and Alternative 2 considers what might occur in the next 18 months to ensure the Service does the right analysis and has that analysis in progress in case facts change. The Service is trying to ensure flexibility as they move forward.

The Colorado Department of Agriculture asked about how much involvement there will be from cooperators on lethal take under Alternative 1.

The Service will be looking to what will be included in the state's plan. The cooperators role is to review the draft EIS but the actual language in the draft 10j rule would not be available until it is published.

The Conservation District asked if cooperators will be able to provide input on things like definition of a problem wolf.

Questions about what a problem wolf is, and similar questions are best directed to the state as Service will be closely following their plan.

Moffat County asked if Service would be determining impacts of different kinds of take.

The Service is analyzing the approval of the 10j rule, the contents of the rule, and the associated socioeconomic and environmental impacts. They will be comparing the No Action Alternative to the other two alternatives. The Service is not specifically analyzing the reintroduction.

The Conservation District asked how the Service would analyze the socioeconomic impacts without having a definition of a problem wolf.

The Service is trying to stay as close as possible to what the state comes up with for definitions, noting that the process can be challenging since Colorado and the Service are working at the same time.

The Colorado Department of Agriculture asked about the No Action Alternative and how CPW would potentially transport wolves across state lines from Wyoming and release them.

Wolves are not endangered in parts of states adjacent to Colorado. There are also some allowances for transport and collaring and that only in situations of disability to the animal in areas where it is endangered would require a permit. Getting wolves from areas where they are not endangered and bringing them back to Colorado for release is permitted and that the wolves are only considered endangered once they are “paws on the ground” and released.

WGFD asked what is needed by cooperators in the near future.

The public scoping comment period closed on August 22nd and comments will be consolidated into a scoping report. The Service would like to include cooperators' expertise while staying on schedule.

The Colorado Department of Agriculture asked if the draft 10j rule could be reviewed by the cooperators.

Cooperators will be able to review the draft EIS but that the actual language in the draft 10j rule would not be available until it is published. The role of cooperators is in the development of the EIS rather than the rulemaking.

Next Steps

The Service will plan a meeting next week for groups with signed MOUs. The Service encouraged groups considering being cooperators to share their comments and submit a signed MOU.