



July 24, 2023

Liisa M. Hernández Niva, Acting Field Office Supervisor
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Colorado Ecological Services Field Office
7333 W Jefferson Avenue
Lakewood, CO 80235

RE: Draft Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Colorado Gray Wolf 10(j) Rulemaking, Cooperating Agency Review- Mesa County

Dear Ms. Hernández Niva:

Mesa County appreciates the opportunity to provide cooperating agency comments to the US Fish and Wildlife Service (“USFWS”) for the Colorado Gray Wolf 10(j) Draft Final Environmental Impact Statement (“FEIS”).

We would like to express our significant concerns regarding the limited time provided for cooperators to review the Draft FEIS. Given the magnitude of this action, which will largely dictate the management flexibility of the apex predator in our state, we believe that a more comprehensive review by cooperating agencies is warranted.

The Memorandum of Understanding signed by all cooperators states in Section V Roles and Responsibilities, Subsection (A), The FWS roles and responsibilities (3):

To the fullest extent practicable, after consideration of the effect such releases may have on the FWS’s ability to withhold this information from other parties under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), or other statutes, the FWS will provide the Cooperator with copies of documents underlying the EIS relevant to the Cooperator’s responsibilities, including technical reports, data, analyses, comments received, working drafts related to environmental reviews, and draft and final EIS.

Mesa County has been and remains dedicated to actively participating in this process, demonstrating our ongoing commitment. Nonetheless, we believe that a more extended review period would have allowed all cooperators to conduct a more thorough examination of the proposed changes. This, in turn, would have enabled us to provide the USFWS with a more comprehensive input, ultimately resulting in a more well-informed 10(j) Rule for the Colorado Gray Wolf.

For the initial review of the Draft FEIS, Mesa County offers the following comments.

Biological Resources – Other Wildlife (Elk, Deer, and Other Ungulates) (p. xi) – Similar to the provision being provided to the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute Indian Tribes, Mesa County urges the USFWS to reconsider extending the ungulate provision to allow Colorado Parks and Wildlife (“CPW”) the option of lethal take to address ungulate population declines due to depredation in the rest of the state.

Several ungulate Game Management Units report struggling big game populations below management goals. In order to ensure sustained populations of ungulates in the state, upon verified

scientific evidence of ungulate decline due to depredations, should also be allowed to submit a proposal for lethal take to the USFWS.

Socioeconomics; Cumulative Impact (p.4-45) – Considering that the optional provision for lethal take in the case of ungulate decline will exclusively apply to Tribal lands, the following sentence: “Based on the above, the proposed action would partially mitigate potential adverse effects from the implementation of the State Plan and would not contribute to adverse cumulative effects on hunters, guides, and outfitters” should be revised to acknowledge that there will likely be minimal adverse cumulative effects for hunters, guides, and outfitters "on Tribal lands."

Thank you for consideration of the above comments. Should the cooperating agency review period be extended, Mesa County reserves the right to submit additional comments.

Sincerely,



Signed on behalf of Mesa County

Amber Swasey

Cc: Cody Davis, Mesa County Commissioner
Todd Hollenbeck, Mesa County Deputy Administrator
Sean Norris, Mesa County Planning Manager