

MAJOR POINTS FOR OPPOSING A RECREATIONAL WOLF KILLING SEASON IN COLORADO

Recreational wolf killing does not have public support

- Recreational killing is inconsistent with Coloradans' mutualistic values toward wildlife.
- Recreational killing of wolves would be at odds with the basic live-and-let-live philosophy of Colorado's current (2004) wolf plan.
- Recreational killing does not align with impact-based management, a key concept of the ongoing planning process.
- The majority of Colorado voters supported the designation of wolves as a non-game species, a status now enshrined in state law.

Recreational wolf killing does not substantially reduce livestock depredation

- Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks found that recreational wolf killing did not affect the likelihood of livestock conflicts on a game management unit level.
- On a statewide level recreational killing (of a substantial number of wolves) only reduced the number of depredations in Montana by 5.7 events or 8% (DeCesare et al. 2018).
- Removal of depredating wolves must be targeted to the individual animal(s) involved and must happen quickly after depredation events to be effective.
- Recreational killing does not target wolves involved in conflict and waiting for a hunting season does not work.
- In Wyoming, where public hunting is so liberalized as to amount to *de facto* preemptive predator control, wolf-livestock conflicts are actually higher than the other NRM states (USFWS 2016).
- Non-targeted killing of predator species in general has little or no effect (coyotes; Conner et al. 1998; Mitchell et al. 2004), or actually increases livestock depredations (cougars; Peebles et al. 2013).

Wolf predation has not caused widespread declines of prey in the Northern Rockies

- Thanks to our great elk habitat and CPW's management, Colorado has almost as many elk as the three Northern Rockies states combined.
- Populations of elk in Idaho, Wyoming and Montana are higher than when wolves were reintroduced, by 4.0% in ID, 6.7% in WY and 26.5% in Montana.
Wyoming: 1995 = 103,448; 2018 = 110,300
Montana: 1995 = 109,500, 2018 = 138,470
Idaho: 1995 = 112,333, 2017 = 116,800
- Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming have actually had increased elk license sales since wolves were reintroduced. Idaho Fish and Game now touts "a second golden age of elk hunting." Wyoming boasts the highest elk hunter success rate in the nation.
- In the few elk herds in the Northern Rockies that have decreased in the last 25 years, most can be linked to dense forest and lower-quality elk habitat (Lolo zone, Idaho; NW Montana).
- In some cases, elk declines are partly due to predation by the entire group of native predators, especially mountain lions and grizzly bears, not to wolves alone.

- Data from Arizona to Montana show that cougars, not wolves, are the most important predator on wild game.
- In Arizona, biologists were surprised to learn that cougars were killing more cattle than Mexican gray wolves were.
- Data from Jackson Hole show that wolves can displace cougars.

Wolves can control their own populations

- Where wolves are at or near carrying capacity, intraspecific conflict (wolves killing other wolves) controls the total number of wolves.
- Recreational killing is not needed to control wolf populations.
- Removing individuals from a pack can cause unintended consequences.
- Pup survival in 10 Idaho packs decreased from 60% in years without hunting to 38% in years with hunting. Only 27% of that decline was attributed to direct killing of pups, the rest was apparently due to decreased survival due to the changes in pack structure and dynamics, resulting in less efficient hunting (Creel et al. 2015).

Wolf killing is inconsistent with the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation

- The North American Model of wildlife conservation (NAM) evolved after millennia of human hunting of game animals combined with coexistence with other predator species.
- Most of our native wildlife were decimated by frontier-era market hunting, followed by the subsequent restoration of wildlife with an emphasis on game species.
- The NAM has been a great success for game species but a disaster for large carnivores.
- As currently articulated by The Wildlife Society and the Boone and Crockett Club (2012), the NAM consists of 7 principles:
 1. Wildlife Resources Are a Public Trust
 2. Markets for Game Are Eliminated
 3. Allocation of Wildlife Is by Law
 4. Wildlife Can Be Killed Only for a Legitimate Purpose
 5. Wildlife Is Considered an International Resource
 6. Science Is the Proper Tool to Discharge Wildlife Policy
 7. Democracy of Hunting Is Standard
- Recreational killing of wolves is not consistent with the NAM even though the NAM is clearly biased towards hunting in general.
- Wildlife are not merely resources, and they are held in trust for all of the public, not just the 5% of Coloradans who hold big game hunting licenses, let alone the much smaller number who would recreationally kill wolves.
- An extensive scientific review of wildlife management and the public trust found that wildlife agencies are not, in fact, managing wildlife for the public trust (Treves et al. 2015).
- Recreational killing of wolves violates the 4th principle, that wildlife can only be killed for a legitimate purpose. This principle is understood to require sporting ethics that in turn require that there be no unnecessary pain or suffering, and no waste.
- In Colorado, game meat must be prepared for human consumption. Hunters do not eat wolf meat.

- Animals should not be killed merely for pelts. Moreover, the negative effect on wolf pup survival (Creel et al. 2015) is an infliction of unnecessary pain and suffering.
- Recreational killing is ineffective at reducing livestock depredation, which is thus not a legitimate purpose. The only reason to kill a wolf is the desire to kill a wolf, which is wasteful and unsportsmanlike.
- Recreational wolf killing also violates the 6th principle, as there is no scientific basis for recreational wolf killing.
- There is no scientific basis for a statewide population target for wolves, or any other apex carnivore; any such target is purely arbitrary.
- Science provides no justification for recreational wolf killing to reduce livestock conflicts.
- In fact, data from the Northern Rockies indicate that (counter to conventional wisdom) human take is not compensatory but strongly additive (Creel and Rotella 2010) and at odds with science generally (Creel et al. 2015).
- Recreational killing also violates the 7th principle, as most Coloradans want wolves back for their own sake and as a non-game species.
- Killing wolves by a few prevents the enjoyment of those wolves by the majority, and thus can hardly be considered democratic.
- An extensive science review found that wildlife agencies often abdicate their public trust responsibility by privileging a special interest group, hunters (Treves et al. 2015).
- While the NAM could (or arguably should) be retained to govern hunting, North American wildlife management has already gone beyond its own model. Aldo Leopold, widely considered the father of wildlife management as a scientific and ethical profession, went far beyond the NAM in both ecological literacy and wildlife ethics, proposing wolf restoration in the 1940s.
- Our federal and state endangered species acts also go beyond the NAM and show that both the wildlife profession and society at large have realized the limitations of the NAM.
- The NAM is increasingly seen as flawed or insufficient by biologists (e.g., Nelson et al. 2011).

Recreational wolf killing decreases public acceptance of wolves and increases poaching

- Legal recreational killing has been shown to decrease tolerance for wolves and increase poaching in the Midwest (Chapron and Treves 2016; Santiago-Avila and Treves 2022).

Recreational killing reduces public trust in agencies and hunting

- The wildlife profession in general is increasingly seen by the public as captured by a special interest. Recent scandals at CPW imply that the agency is responsive towards a small minority of the public. Recreational killing of our most valuable animals would cause further deterioration of public trust in the agency.
- Recreational killing of wolves and other large carnivores is a black eye not just for the wildlife profession but for hunting as well.
- Hunters are a decreasing proportion of American society (only 5% of Coloradans), and society is increasingly recognizing the intrinsic value of nature as a whole and of individual animal lives.
- Hunters' social license to operate depends on conservation, fair-chase ethics, and respect for animals. Every dead wolf is a step closer to a country that no longer tolerates hunting.

BACKGROUND

Internet Resources

Wyoming elk forecast via RMEF: <https://www.rmef.org/elk-network/wyoming-2021-fall-hunting-forecast/>

Elk overpopulation in Wyoming: <https://www.outdoorlife.com/conservation/wyoming-elk-population-problem/>

Wyoming elk hunting: <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Hunting/Harvest-Reports/>

Idaho elk hunting: <https://idfg.idaho.gov/hunt/elk>

Montana elk hunting: <https://fwp.mt.gov/hunt/regulations/elk>

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Scientific References

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The Wildlife Society, and the Boone and Crockett Club. 2012. [The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation](#). Technical Review 12-04. 47 p.