

The Southern Rockies



Gothic Mountain, Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado

Wolves from the north and south historically met, interbred and thrived in the Southern Rockies. Today, appropriate and suitable wolf habitat and prey still abound in this region that includes southern Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, northern New Mexico and Arizona (see map on back).

The Potential

Colorado alone is home to almost 300,000 elk, twice as many as any other western state (Colorado Parks and Wildlife 2012; Bishop 2012). According to a 2006 study, Colorado could host nearly 1,000 wolves (Carroll et al. 2006). And public support for wolves is strong in the state. A statewide survey commissioned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1994 found that a majority of residents (71 percent) favored wolf reintroduction in the state (Manfredo et al 1994; Pate et al 1996). A 2013 Defenders of Wildlife poll of Coloradans showed 72 percent in favor of protecting wolves that cross into the state from other areas and 70 percent supportive of restoring wolves in Colorado wilderness areas if they do not naturally recolonize the state (Peak Campaigns 2013). The National Park Service considered reintroducing wolves to Rocky Mountain National Park to control an overabundance of elk, but in 2008 ultimately decided to rely on sharpshooters instead.

A particularly promising area for wolves in the Southern Rockies is media executive Ted Turner's Vermejo Ranch, which straddles the Colorado-New Mexico border and nearby Carson National Forest. Turner, a long-time supporter of restoring native biodiversity—wolves included—to his lands, exemplifies the potential of private landowners to contribute to wolf restoration. His interest

also underscores the need to develop mechanisms at state and federal levels to encourage more private participation in wolf conservation and recovery efforts.

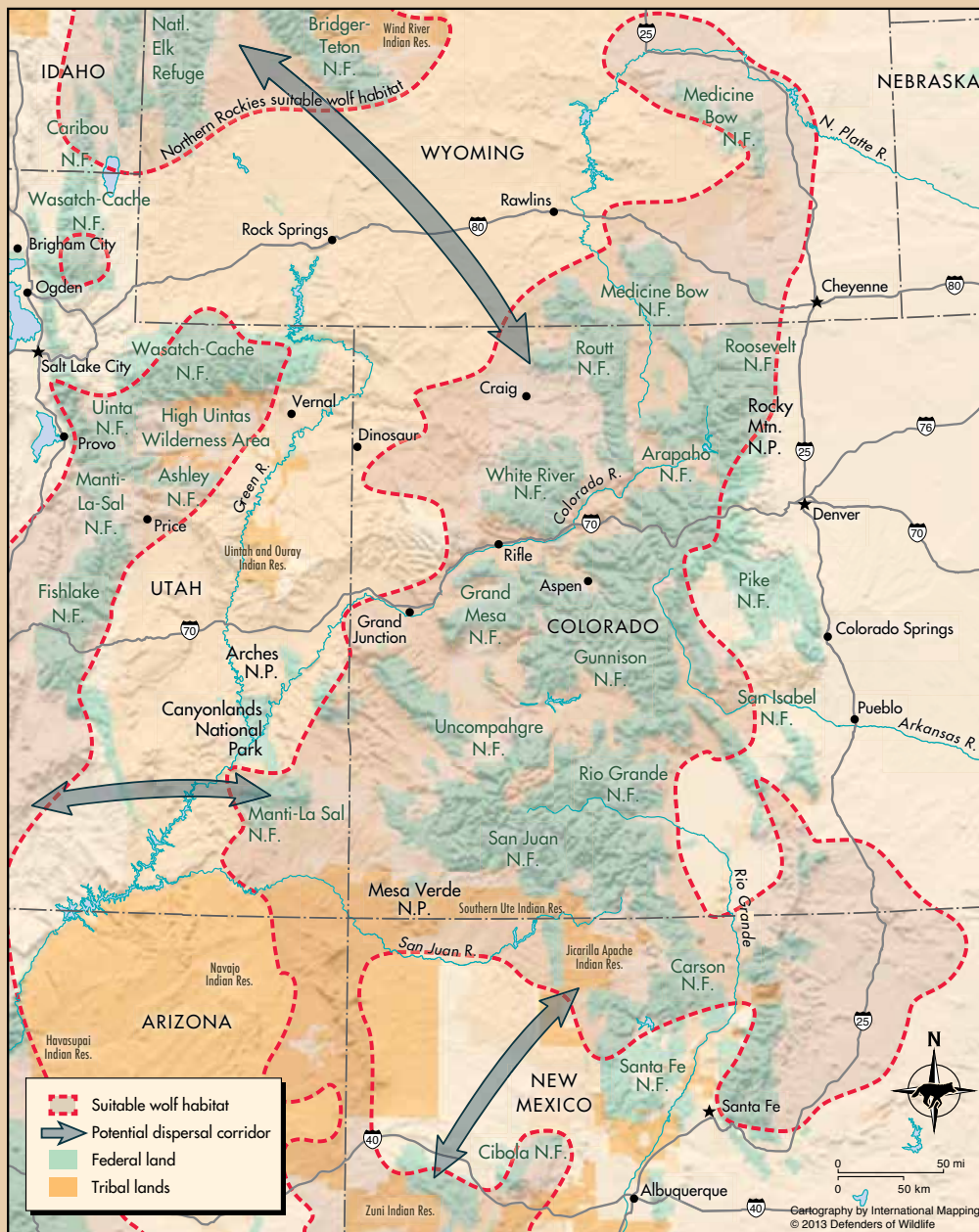
Northeast Utah is important as a corridor for connecting wolf populations from the northern to the central Rockies, allowing wolves to expand their range south and continue to fulfill their role in enhancing the ecological integrity of the landscape.

The Challenges

The Southern Rockies region is difficult for wolves to recolonize on their own. Wyoming has removed all protections for wolves outside of its northwest corner. This means wolves can be eradicated again from most of the state, which severely limits any chance of wolf dispersal from the north into Utah and Colorado. Even if wolves do overcome these obstacles, Utah's anti-wolf laws and policies do not bode well for balanced management of wolves arriving from either Wyoming or the Grand Canyon ecoregion, if wolves lose federal protections throughout the state.

Unfortunately, no plans to restore wolves in the Southern Rockies are currently on the table. But if Wyoming, Utah and Colorado residents who welcome wolves make their voices heard, wolf policies and plans can change for the better.

Suitable Wolf Habitat and Potential Dispersal Corridors in the Southern Rockies



Defenders advocates for the protection and restoration efforts necessary to re-establish wolf populations in suitable Southern Rockies habitat in Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado and Utah (dashed red lines on the map) at densities sufficient to ensure the long-term survival of wolves and maintenance of the critical role they play in the ecosystem.

There are two ways this can happen: the release of wolves from other areas and natural recolonization by wolves dispersing from existing populations (gray arrows indicate potential dispersal corridors).

Note: The suitable habitat for wolves designated on the map is an approximation based on peer-reviewed studies, expert opinion of our staff and habitat modeling, a complex science that involves superimposing multiple factors such as wolf range and dispersal routes, road density and usage, vegetation types, prey density, presence of livestock, development, slope and elevation.

References

- Bishop, C. J. 2012. Colorado Parks and Wildlife: Understanding Elk in Colorado. Accessed 10/2/2012 <http://wildlife.state.co.us/Hunting/ElkHuntingUniversity/2/Pages/UnderstandingElkHabitat.aspx>.
- Carroll, C., Phillips, M. K., Lopez-Gonzalez, C. A., and N. H. Schumaker. 2006. Defining recovery goals and strategies for endangered species: the wolf as a case study. *Bioscience* 56(1): 25-37.
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife. 2012. Big Game Hunting Harvest Reports & Hunting Recap Summaries: 2011 Elk Report. Accessed 10/2/2012 <http://wildlife.state.co.us/hunting/biggame/statistics/Pages/Statistics.aspx#elk>.
- Manfredo, M. J., A. D. Bright, J. Pate, and G. Tishbein. 1994. Colorado residents' attitudes and perceptions toward reintroduction of the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) into Colorado. Project Report No. 21: Project report for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Ft. Collins: Colorado State University, Human Dimensions in Natural Resources Unit. 99 pp.
- Pate, J., M. J. Manfredo, A. D. Bright, and G. Tishbein. 1996. Coloradans' attitudes toward reintroducing the gray wolf into Colorado. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* (24): 421-428.
- Peak Campaigns. 2013. Poll conducted for Defenders of Wildlife, February 10-11, 2013.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/wolf/annualrpt11/figures/021012_FINAL_Fig1_NRM.pdf

