



# RESTORING WOLVES TO COLORADO

## Wolves and Livestock



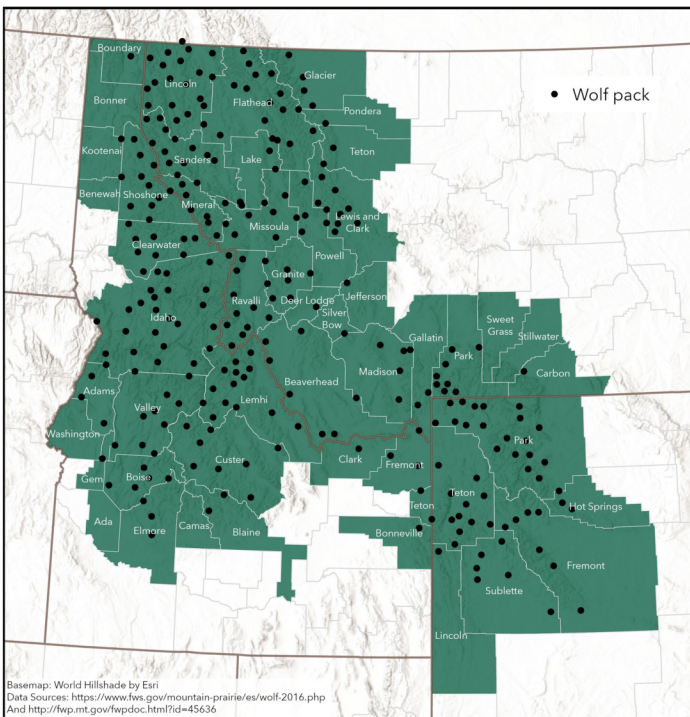
Gray wolves were reintroduced to the northern Rockies in 1995, providing Colorado with over 28 years of lessons learned as the state prepares for its own reintroduction effort – particularly around conflicts between livestock and wolves. Then and now, Defenders of Wildlife has been a leader in wildlife coexistence and will be on the ground with livestock producers to continue minimizing conflicts in Colorado.

### Livestock Losses are Very Rare

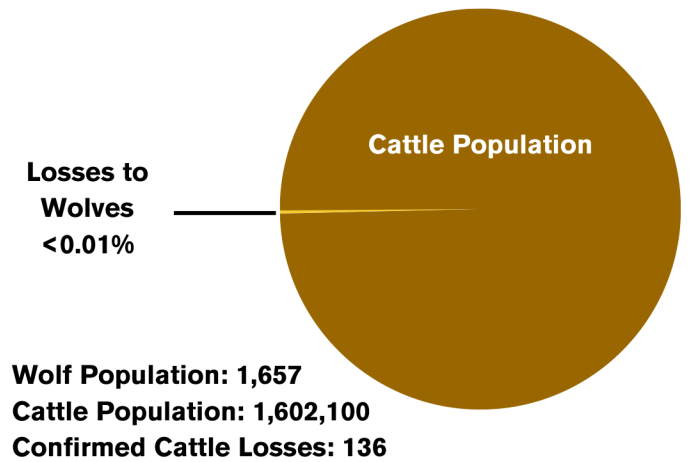
One reasonable concern to many people is the potential impact of wolves on livestock. Data from the three northern Rockies states—Idaho, Montana and Wyoming—show what we might expect in Colorado.

According to the most recent interagency data published on wolf recovery in the northern Rockies, there were approximately 1,600,000 cattle and 1,600 wolves living in wolf-occupied counties in 2015.<sup>1,2</sup> Of that total, **less than 0.01% of cattle (136 cattle) were lost to wolves that year** (Figures 1 and 2).<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Colorado's western slope, which contains

**Figure 1. 2015 Wolf Packs by County**  
(Idaho, Wyoming and Montana)



**Figure 2. Cattle Losses to Wolves**  
(Counties in Idaho, Wyoming and Montana with both wolves and cattle, 2015)



the state's suitable wolf habitat, held nearly 364,000 cattle in 2021, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife plans to release 30-50 wolves by 2028.<sup>3</sup> With less cattle and fewer wolves, Colorado may experience an even lower percentage of losses. However, even though wolf depredations are a small economic cost to the livestock industry as a whole, the strain on individual producers can be significant. Impacted operations also face indirect costs that are difficult to estimate and offset. There are two main ways of mitigating losses from wildlife: compensation and conflict minimization.

### Sources

- <sup>1</sup> U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery Program 2015 Interagency Annual Report.
- <sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agriculture Statistics Service (<https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov/>).
- <sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture Colorado Agriculture Statistics Report 2021 ([https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics\\_by\\_State/Colorado/Publications/Annual\\_Statistical\\_Bulletin/Bulletin2021.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Colorado/Publications/Annual_Statistical_Bulletin/Bulletin2021.pdf))



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**Defenders of Wildlife staff help install turbo fladry, an electrified rope barrier affixed with red flags that flap in the breeze. This common deterrent method can temporarily scare wolves away from a small area.**

## Compensation

While the vast majority of ranchers living with wolves will never experience direct losses of livestock, losses do occur. To partially mitigate the economic impact to individuals, compensation funds are available from government and private sources to reimburse reported losses. In Montana, for example, funding for compensation has evolved over time:

- From 1987 to 2009, Defenders of Wildlife created the first compensation fund in the western U.S. that paid livestock owners 100% market value for confirmed losses and 50% for “probable” losses.
- In 2007, the Montana legislature created the Montana Livestock Loss Board to compensate for livestock losses to wolves. Defenders of Wildlife contributed \$100,000 to this new program to help transition this role to the state before ending our compensation program.
- In 2010, Congress began providing “tester funds” to states and tribes for wolf compensation through the Wolf Livestock Demonstration Project.

In Colorado, producers receive fair market value (up to \$15,000) for each confirmed wolf depredation.

Funding for these payments is secured in the Wolf Livestock Depredation Fund, created by Senate Bill 23-255. Notably, the reintroduction and management of wolves in Colorado cannot be funded from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, per another legislative bill.

## Conflict Minimization

While compensation is an important part of wolf recovery, payments do not settle the emotional loss producers face, nor prevent future depredations from occurring. Therefore, the key to long-term success is the implementation of conflict mitigation measures.

Proactive approaches for sustainable results include:

- Rekindling herd instincts with low-stress livestock handling and other stockmanship practices
- Prescribed grazing
- Carcass removal

Physical deterrents to supplement these efforts include:

- Range riding or increased human presence
- Livestock guardian dogs
- Turbo fladry and night penning
- Fox lights, RAG boxes, and other scare devices

Colorado Parks and Wildlife will loan producers turbo fladry and scare devices through their Conflict Minimization Program. Additionally, several nonprofit organizations, including Defenders of Wildlife, offer funding and resources through their own programs.

For more information on conflict minimization tools and techniques, visit these online guides:

[https://defenders.org/sites/default/files/publications/livestock\\_and\\_wolves.pdf](https://defenders.org/sites/default/files/publications/livestock_and_wolves.pdf)

<https://westernlandowners.org/publication/reducing-conflict-with-grizzly-bears-wolves-and-elk/>



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