



May 16, 2023

The Honorable Colorado Senate
74th General Assembly
First Regular Session
State Capitol
200 E. Colfax Ave.
Denver, CO 80203

Dear Honorable Members of the Colorado Senate:

Today I vetoed Senate Bill 23-256, "Concerning Prerequisites to the Management of Gray Wolves Prior to the Wolves Being Reintroduced" at 1:32pm.

Senate Bill 23-256 ("SB 23-256") prevents the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission from authorizing the release of gray wolves into designated lands until after the effective date of a federal final rule that deems the gray wolf population a non-essential experimental population in accordance with 16 U.S.C. § 1539(j) ("10j") of the Endangered Species Act.

I am supportive of the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission and the Executive Director of the Department of Natural Resources continuing to work towards our preferred approach of reintroducing gray wolves under a 10j rule. SB23-256, however, is unnecessary and undermines the voters' intent and the hard work of the Parks and Wildlife Commission, the expertise of the Colorado Parks and Wildlife staff, the extensive stakeholding undertaken by the Technical Working Group and the Stakeholder Advisory Group, and the ongoing collaborative work with our Federal partners, and could actually interfere with successfully receiving experimental population designation, which is the purported purpose of the bill.

On November 3, 2020, Colorado voters passed Proposition 114, now codified at C.R.S. § 33-2-105.8, directing the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission to restore gray wolves to the State. Proposition 114 required the Commission to hold statewide hearings and use scientific data to develop and implement a plan to begin restoring and managing gray wolves by December 31, 2023, with the goals of establishing and maintaining a viable, self-sustaining gray wolf population and minimizing wolf-related conflict with ranchers and farmers. Proposition 114 also requires payment of fair compensation to owners of livestock for any losses of livestock caused by gray wolves.

Since the passage of Proposition 114, the Parks and Wildlife Commission has held 18 field and virtual hearings across the State, received over 4,000 comments, and worked tirelessly to create the Colorado Wolf Restoration and Management Plan ("Plan") through a robust public engagement process with ample opportunity for public comment and careful attention to the communities most impacted by the restoration of gray wolves to Colorado. The Plan was unanimously adopted on May 3, 2023, and precisely adheres to the requirements and processes mandated under the Endangered Species Act, including seeking 10j experimental population designation prior to reintroduction. Department of Natural Resources and Colorado Parks and Wildlife staff and the Commission are working closely with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to take the steps necessary toward issuance of the 10j, including completion of an Environmental Impact Statement and adhering to the process mandated under the National Environmental Policy Act. If signed into law, this bill impedes the coordination that has been underway for over two years by the US

Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Natural Resources and Colorado Parks and Wildlife that includes a one million dollar commitment from the State of Colorado to complete the 10J draft rule and draft environmental impact statement (DEIS). This could also lead to unnecessary delays and revisions to the rule. The Parks and Wildlife Commission has already invested significant resources into this process and, due to their hard work, Colorado is on track to secure the 10j before the end of the year. The management of the reintroduction of gray wolves into Colorado is best left to the Parks and Wildlife Commission as the voters explicitly mandated.

Therefore, SB23-256 is disapproved and vetoed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jared Polis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jared Polis
Governor
State of Colorado