

GRAY WOLF

Canis lupus (Endangered Colorado, Federally)



Colorado's wolf population was eliminated in the 1940s. Pictured is a captive wolf pack.

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THE LARGEST MEMBER OF the dog family, wolves may weigh as much as 170 pounds, but males weigh an average of about 90 pounds and females weigh about 10 pounds less.

Although wolves are occasionally encountered singly, they usually live in packs. The group's size consists of 2-8 animals, but packs as large as 30 individuals have been recorded. A wolf pack, which preys primarily on deer, elk and moose, occupies a large area called a territory, and other wolves are excluded from that area.

Two subspecies of wolves once roamed Colorado, the Mexican and gray wolf, but pressure from man resulted in their disappearance from the state. Many wolves were trapped for their fur during the 1800s and during the first quarter of the 20th century. Intensive private and governmental poisoning further decimated Colorado's wolf population.

The last remnants of Colorado's native wolf population were probably eliminated in the early 1940s. The Division of Wildlife receives some reports of sightings, but there is no evidence to indicate that these animals survive in Colorado.

In the western United States, the federal government has recently reintroduced wolves into Wyoming's Yellowstone National Park and Idaho's Frank Church - River of No Return Wilderness Area, while other wolves are moving into northern Montana from Canada. The federal government also has an active reintroduction program for the Mexican wolf in Arizona and Mexico.

In Sept. 1989, the Colorado Wildlife Commission passed a resolution opposing the reintroduction of wolves into Colorado until the state is included in a federal recovery plan and the plan has received favorable public review. Colorado recently began to develop a management plan to be prepared for the possibility of wolves moving into state from the north or south.