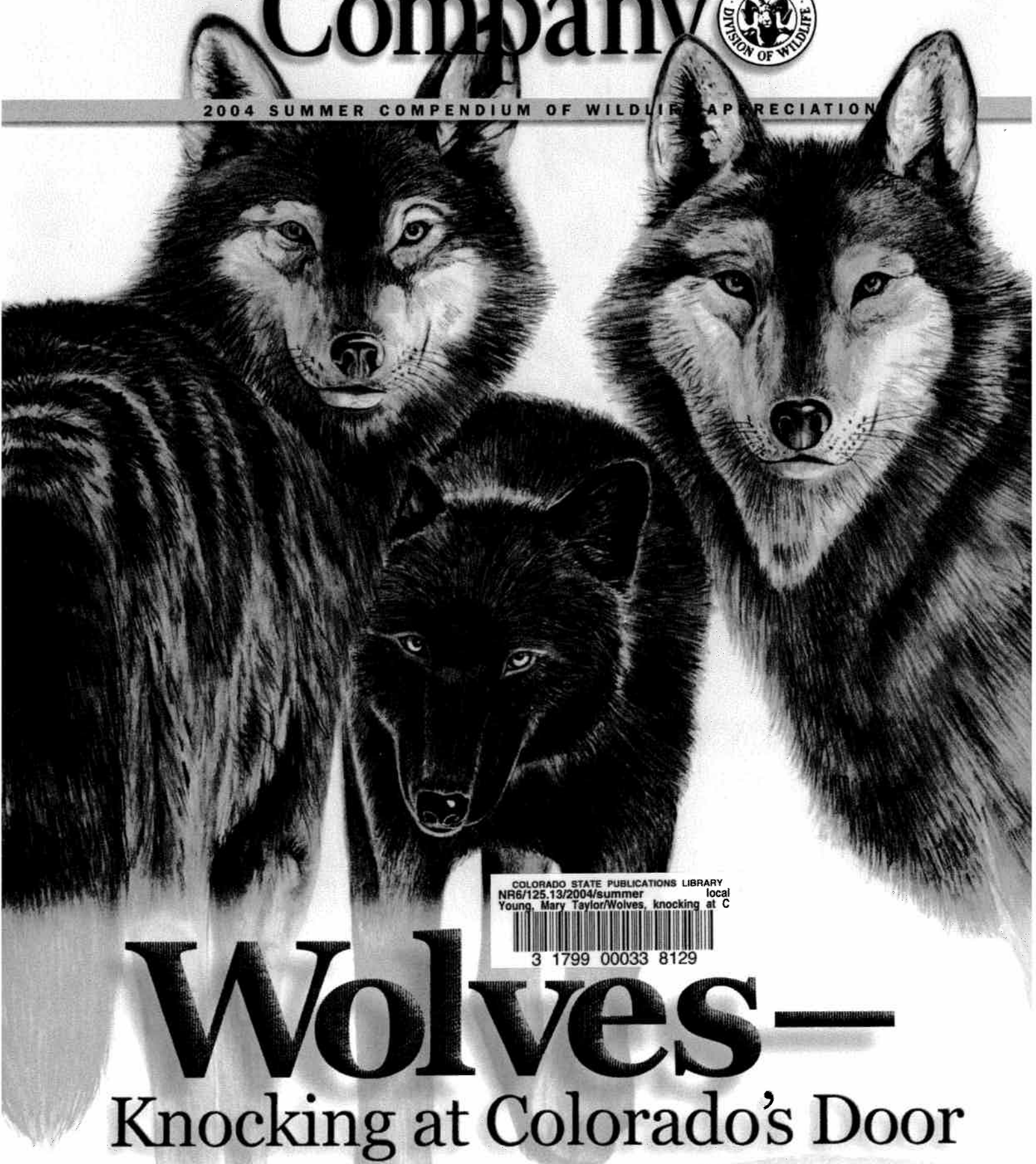


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Colorado's Wildlife Company



2004 SUMMER COMPENDIUM OF WILDLIFE APPRECIATION

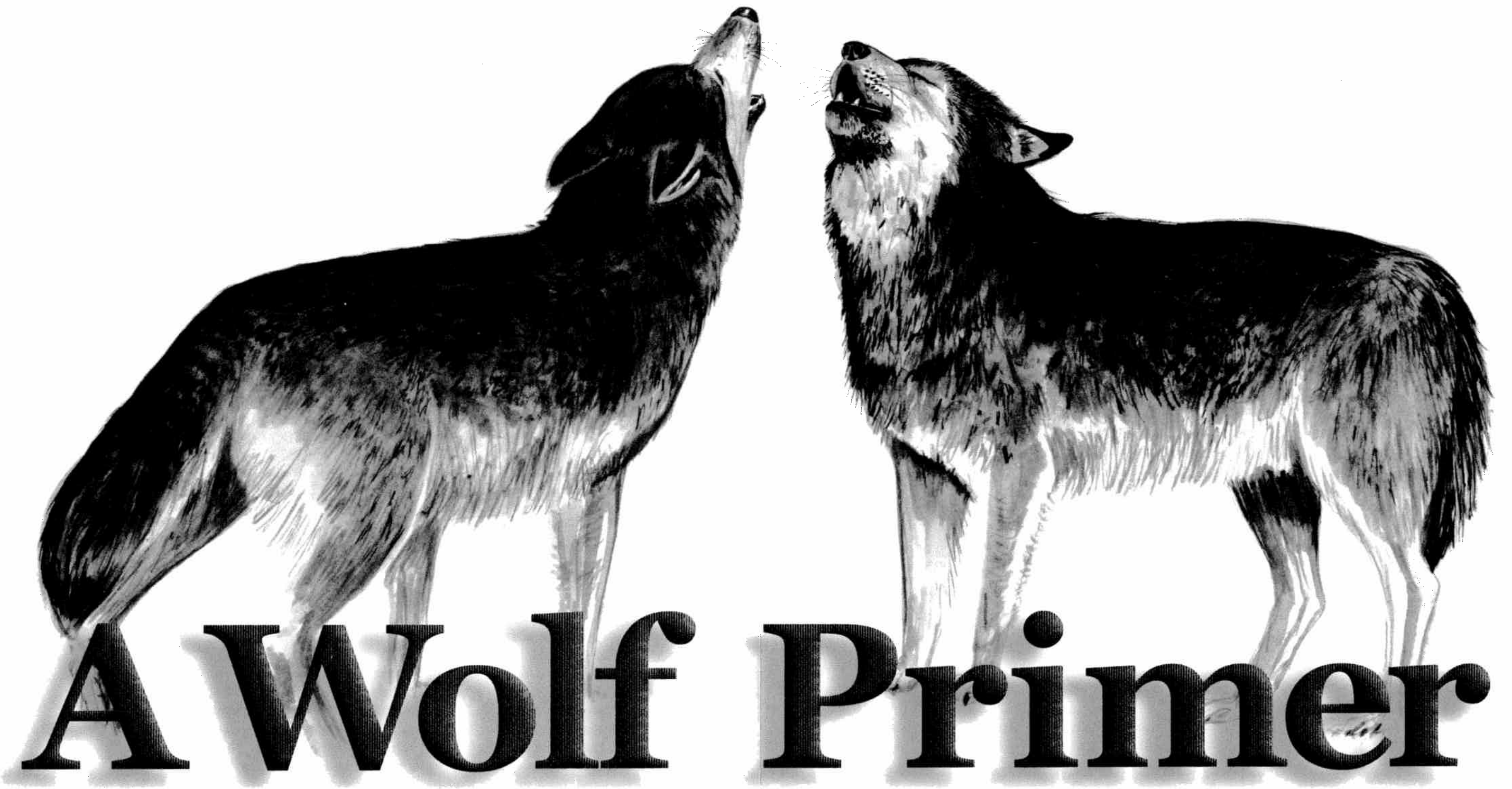


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Wolves— Knocking at Colorado's Door



A Wolf Primer

BIG DOG

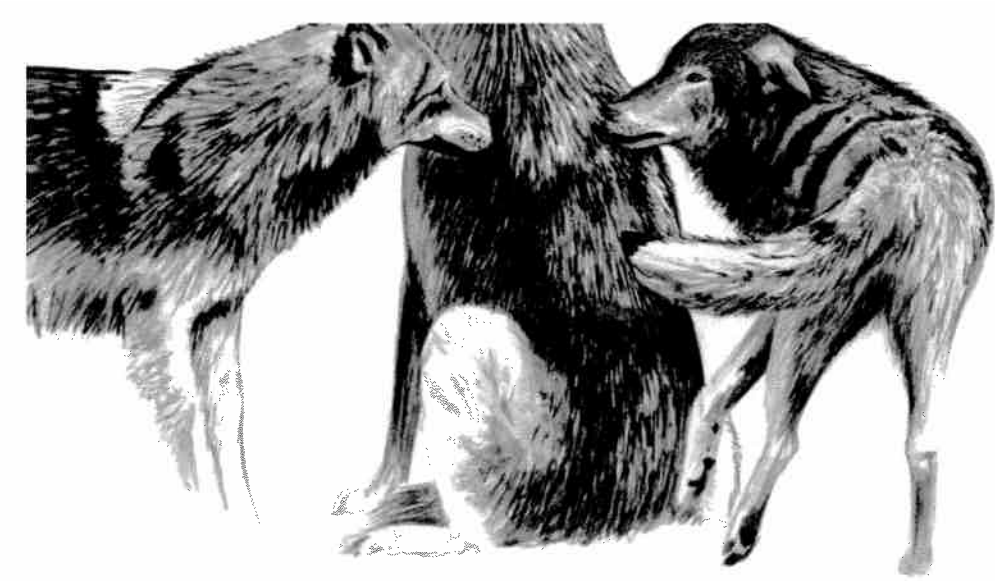
The gray wolf, *Canis lupus*, is the largest member of the canid or dog family, which includes coyotes, foxes and domestic dogs. Adult wolves may weigh from 80 to 120 pounds and measure as much as six feet from tip of nose to tip of tail. They are very doglike in appearance, with upright ears, long muzzles and long tails. Like dogs, they walk on their toes, with five toes on the front paws and four on the back paws.



READY TO HOWL

Few natural sounds have the ability to move humans the way the howl of a wolf does. For countless generations, a wolf howl evoked fear and uncertainty, but also a sense of the wild and free. Howling is as much a part of a wolf as its tail. Pups begin to howl when they are only a month old, well before they can hunt. Among wolves, howling can be a greeting, a rallying cry to gather the pack, a call to get ready for hunting, a warning to other wolves to get out of their territory, a spontaneous response to play, or a way to build bonds among pack members. The lonesome howl of a wolf can be heard up to six miles away. Folklore notwithstanding, there is no proof that wolves howl at the moon.





WOLF PACK

Wolves typically live and hunt in packs of from two to eight animals, though packs of as many as 36 animals have been recorded in Alaska. An alpha, or dominant, pair lead the pack in hunting, choosing den sites and establishing territory. Pack members include pups, yearlings and two-year olds of the pack, as well as other subordinate adults. Wolves are highly social animals and communicate with each other through body posture, ear position, facial expression, tail movement and posture, vocalizations, and scent marking. Many of the wolf's postures, behaviors and expressions are familiar to dog owners. Submissive wolves crouch to make themselves small, curl their tail between their legs, flatten their ears and roll on their backs to expose their bellies. Aggressive animals raise their hackles and expose their teeth in a snarl and growl. Greeting each other, wolves wag their tails vigorously and lick each other's faces. They solicit play by bowing down on the front legs. Puppies play by stalking, chasing, wrestling and pouncing on each other. Scent marking is important in defining territory, warning other wolves and marking trails.

WISE GUYS

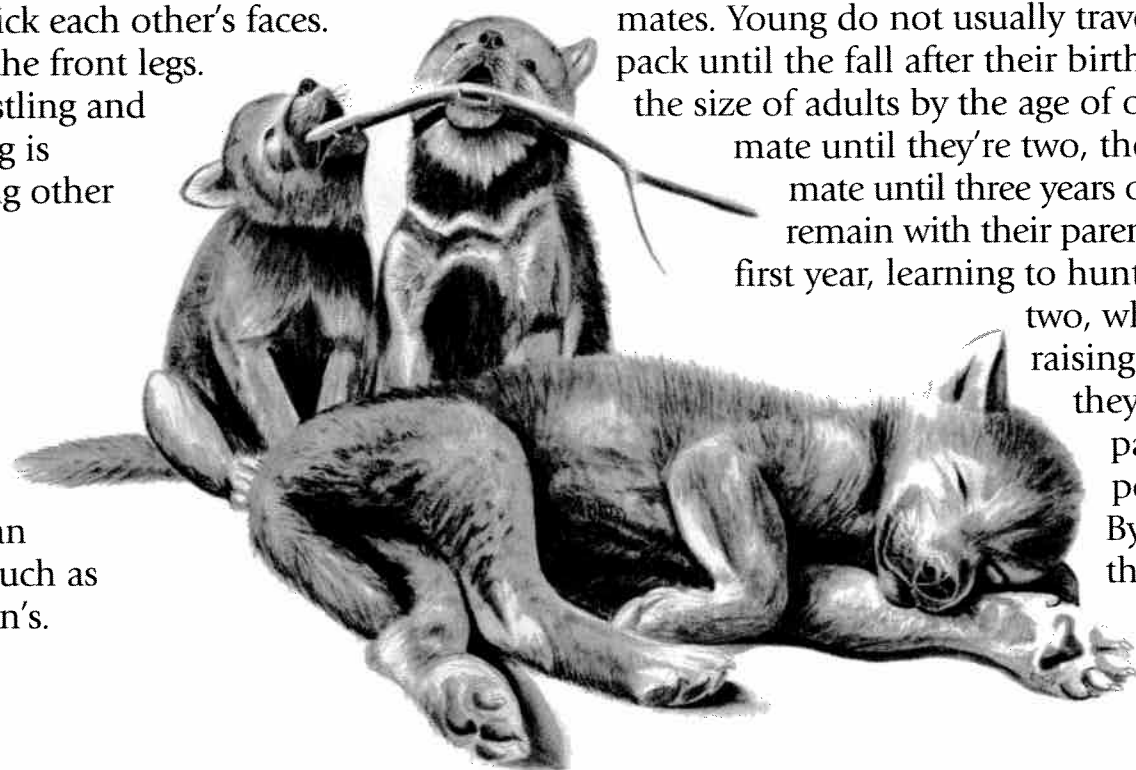
Like most members of the dog family, wolves are highly intelligent, adaptable, and good at problem solving. They have acute hearing and an exceptional sense of smell that is as much as 100 times more sensitive than a human's.

WHAT'S FOR DINNER

Large hooped mammals such as elk and deer are the main prey of wolves, though they will hunt small mammals such as rabbits and beavers and even mice. They will prey on livestock but wild animals are their preferred food. Individual wolves catch small prey such as mice by pouncing and pinning with the front paws, as foxes and coyotes do. Larger prey are chased and brought down cooperatively by the pack. Contrary to belief, hamstringing prey by biting the tendons of the back legs is too dangerous and not a common hunting strategy. Wolves tend to attack the neck, throat and sides of an animal. Most healthy large mammals can outrun or stand their ground against wolves, so wolf packs most often kill the weak, old and sick. Even then, wolves have a low success rate. In one study, less than one out of 10 chases of moose resulted in a successful kill.

FAMILY LIFE

Wolves mate between January and April, and pups are born about two months later, in a den dug out by the adults. Litters range in size from one to eleven, with an average of six. By about three weeks of age, the young emerge from the den and are weaned by five weeks. The female usually remains with the pups and is fed by her mate and other pack members until the pups are four to six weeks old. Only one or two of every five pups survives to the age of 10 months, and only half of those live to the age when they leave the pack to find their own mates. Young do not usually travel and hunt with the pack until the fall after their birth. Young wolves are the size of adults by the age of one but not ready to mate until they're two, though most do not mate until three years of age. Young wolves remain with their parents throughout their first year, learning to hunt. By the age of two, when their parents are raising a new litter of pups, they may stay with the pack or leave to spend periods on their own. By age three, they leave the pack for good.



WOLVES AND NATIVE AMERICANS

Wolves figure in the legends and cosmology of many Native American tribes. Many revere wolves, seeing the devotion of the wolf pack as a parallel for human ties among family and tribe. They also admire the wolf's prowess as a hunter. Legends from various tribes tell of people transformed into wolves, and vice versa. Among Northwest Coast people, wolves are often powerful totem animals, and several tribes have Wolf clans. The Lakota name for wolf translates as "animal that looks like a dog, but is a powerful spirit." Among the Cheyenne, the Wolf Soldiers were a powerful warrior society, and Cheyenne medicine men rubbed arrows with wolf fur for success in the hunt. Many tribes thought wolves howled after eating to invite ravens and other scavengers to come and eat. Some tribes considered wolf howls the cries of lost spirits. Many Plains Indians identified the compass points with animals—bears represented west, mountain lions north, bobcats south and the wolves stood for the east, where the sun rises.



WOLVES IN COLORADO

At one time, wolves inhabited every county in the state. With the advent of ranching, conflicts over predation on livestock, as well as cultural fears of wolves, led to the species' eradication by the 1930s. There have been sporadic reports of wolves in Colorado over the decades, but none have been confirmed as wolves rather than wolf-hybrids or dogs. Now, wolves may become a part of the Colorado outdoors for the first time in nearly a century. The return of wolves to the state remains highly controversial, opposed by some but supported by those who feel wolves are a natural part of the Colorado landscape.

When the Pack Comes Back

by Mary Taylor Young

*The large Wolves are verry
numourous, they are of a light colr . . .
these wolves resort [in] the woodlands
and are also found in the plains . . .
we scarcely see a gang of buffaloe
without observing a parsel of those
faithfull shepherds on their skirts in
readiness to take care of the mamed
[and] wounded. The large wolf
never barks, but howls as those of
the atlantic states do.*

From the journals of the Lewis
and Clark expedition

Imagine sitting around a campfire on a summer night somewhere in the Colorado mountains. From beyond the firelight comes the howl of a wild animal, rising in a mournful wail that prickles the hair on the back of your neck. It's not the yipping yowl of a coyote but the soul-touching howl of a wolf, a voice not heard in this state for 70 years.

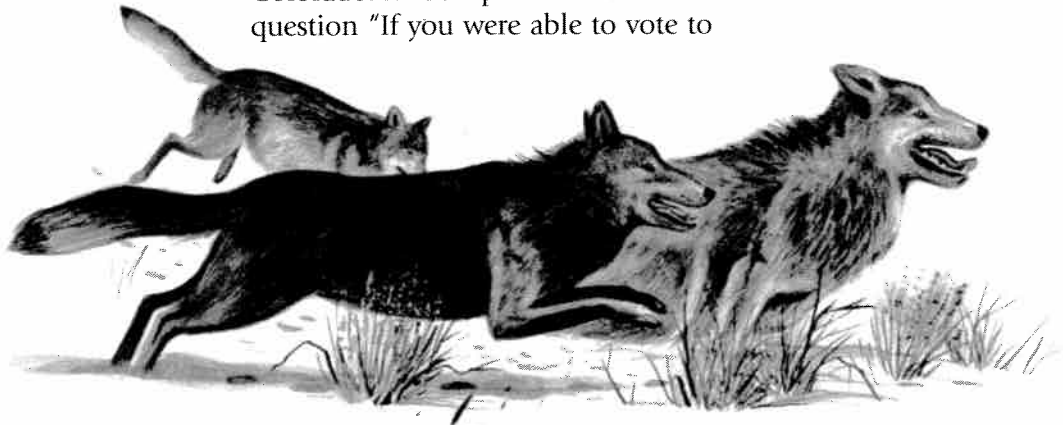
Sound like a fairy tale? This scene may be a reality in the not-too-distant future. Wolves are well-established in Yellowstone National Park and surrounding areas, and will likely soon migrate naturally into Colorado. A wolf was spotted recently near Baggs, Wyoming, which is north of Craig, Colorado. There have been numerous unconfirmed wolf sightings in our state, so wolves may already be here. Whether it happens in one year or ten, Colorado needs to be prepared before the wolf is at the door.

Few animals carry the degree of controversy and the ability to trigger passionate responses, both pro and con, as does the wolf. For the wolf-lover sitting around that campfire, the wolf's howl might touch a spiritual chord connecting the listener to the natural world. For the rancher sitting at the campfire, the howl might trigger anger, trepidation, and a feeling of threat to his way of life. In past centuries, public reaction to wolves was overwhelmingly negative. This led to the eradication of wolves from Colorado and most of the U.S. by the early 20th century. The last authentic record of a wolf in the state dates back to 1935. But attitudes change, and in the 21st century, there is public support for returning wolves to Colorado. A 1994 poll that asked the question "If you were able to vote to

reintroduce wolves to Colorado, how would you vote?" returned surprising results. The response was strongly positive—71 percent in favor statewide, with 74 percent in favor on the Front Range and 65 percent in favor on the Western Slope.

With the arrival of the wolf almost inevitable, and public support for it strong, the Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW) is establishing a working group that will formulate a wolf management plan by the end of 2004. The group will bring together people with different opinions and perspectives on wolves, including livestock producers, environmental or wildlife advocates, local government officials, wildlife biologists and sportsmen. State and federal wildlife agency personnel will act as advisors. The plan this group devises must address a variety of questions. Will wolves be allowed to live in Colorado? If so, how many can the state realistically support, and where? The answer to the first question is unclear, but it may be that wolves will be allowed to establish here because a majority of Coloradans want them. But how many and where remains a big question. A recent study found that the state's big game herds could support 1,000 wolves. But while Colorado offers plenty of habitat, said DOW biologist Gary Skiba, the limiting factor to wolf numbers will be human tolerance for them.

"There's no question wolves can survive in Colorado biologically," he says. "They're such habitat generalists and there's plenty of prey for them to eat. But in many areas there would be too much human conflict. They could kill pets and some people feel attacks on livestock would be a real problem."



That leads to another major issue—how to deal with the inevitable killing of livestock by wolves. While not the cattle and sheep slaughterers they have been portrayed as in the past, wolves will prey on livestock, and ranchers need the ability to protect their animals.

“If we decide to allow wolves to establish a population in Colorado, we can’t have open season on them, but we must have a way to allow wolves to be killed if there is depredation on livestock,” explained Skiba. Current state statute only allows compensation for wildlife damage to property from big game animals. Presently, the Defenders of Wildlife

killed off too many elk, but, said Skiba, it’s probably the behavior changes that make the elk harder to find more than the effect of predation. The return of a major predator to Colorado’s ecosystem will likely have a cascade of effects. Elk in Yellowstone began avoiding narrow stream corridors where they felt hemmed in and vulnerable, allowing the riparian habitat in these areas, which had been heavily browsed, to recover. While this recovery isn’t complete, re-growth of willows would benefit birds that nest in streamside vegetation. The presence of wolves could be good for populations of birds and small mammals

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As Coloradans debate the wolf issue—some rejoicing, some bemoaning—the wolves are out there, slowly making their way toward our state. A single viewpoint on wolves no longer prevails, but by working together to reach consensus, Coloradans can come up with a plan for wolves in our state that we can all live with.

has a program to compensate ranchers for losses to wolves that is being used throughout the wolf’s range in the U.S. outside Alaska. They have already agreed to extend this program to Colorado.

A question of particular concern to sportsmen is, how will wolves affect big game populations? No one is sure, because no definitive studies have been done. Wolves have definitely impacted elk in Yellowstone, not only by preying upon them, but by affecting their behavior. “Wolves will definitely change the behavior of elk,” explained Skiba. “We won’t see the huge collections of elk in meadows as often because they’ll be hiding.” Some sportsmen in Wyoming and Montana complain that wolves have

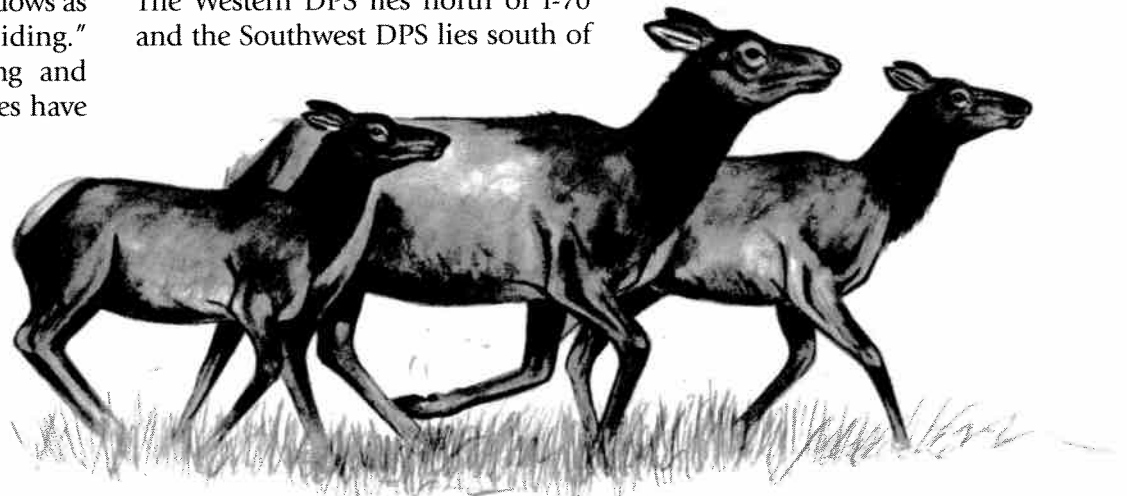
because wolves tend to reduce coyote populations, which prey on these smaller animals. When wolves were eradicated in the last century, coyotes expanded in numbers and range. Ironically, the return of wolves could be a positive for livestock producers by reducing coyote numbers.

Geography has given Colorado wolf management a split personality. In 2003, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) reclassified wolves in the western U.S. into two Distinct Population Segments (DPS), with I-70 the dividing line between the two. The Western DPS lies north of I-70 and the Southwest DPS lies south of

I-70. Wolves within the Western DPS are currently listed as threatened. Because the Western DPS has met its population goals, it will likely be removed from the Endangered Species List. This would give complete management authority for wolves north of I-70 to DOW. The Southwest DPS will likely continue to be classified as endangered and remain under federal management by the USFWS.

What is the chance wolves will be intentionally reintroduced to the state? The working group could consider it, said Skiba, but it’s not likely, since wolves will probably arrive on their own. In addition, the Colorado Wildlife Commission passed a resolution in 1989 opposing the reintroduction of wolves. There is a chance wolves could be released in southern Colorado by the USFWS sometime in the future, as part of the federal recovery plan for the Southwest DPS.

As Coloradans debate the wolf issue—some rejoicing, some bemoaning—the wolves are out there, slowly making their way toward our state. A single viewpoint on wolves no longer prevails, but by working together to reach consensus, Coloradans can come up with a plan for wolves in our state that we can all live with.



Living with Wolves

With the prospect of wolves returning to Colorado, ranchers understandably worry that wolves might kill their livestock. But should hikers and campers be concerned about wolves? Would hunters need to alter their behavior? What about people living in wolf country? The "Little Red Riding Hood" perception of wolves as dangerous killers is a myth. There are no documented cases of a healthy, wild wolf killing a person in North America. By contrast, dogs kill 20 or more people each year, and bite three million. There is a greater chance of being killed by mountain lions, lightning, bee stings, or an auto collision with a deer than being injured by a wolf.

Coloradans are already living and recreating in areas inhabited by bears, mountain lions, coyotes, and other predators. The advice for living with these animals applies to wolves. **First, don't feed them.** Wolves are naturally afraid of humans but can become habituated to people. In Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario, Canada, the feeding of wolves by campers has led to five biting incidents by fearless wolves since 1987.

Don't feed other wildlife. The presence of small mammals could attract wolves (and lions and bears). Pets should be fed indoors and not left unattended outdoors, since pets attract predators. Bird feeders should

be hung at least seven feet high (this should be done for bears, also).

Wolves are active hunters rather than foragers like bears. This makes them less of a potential problem around campsites. Nevertheless, when camping, cook and wash dishes away from sleeping areas. Suspend food and garbage out of reach of wildlife, and away from tents, and pack out garbage and leftover food.

Hunters are probably safe but wolves may object to hunting dogs entering their territories. Hound dogs are at greatest risk because they range far from their owners and their baying may challenge a wolf. Hunters should avoid known areas of wolf activity. They should check for wolf tracks and sign before letting their dogs loose.

If you encounter a wolf and it approaches or acts aggressively, wave your arms and make yourself look larger. Back away slowly without turning your back on the animal. Shout, make noise and throw objects at the wolf. Those at greatest risk of injury from wolves may be the people who love them most, people who feed them or try to approach them. Wolves may resemble dogs, but they are wild predators. Like bears and mountain lions, wolves should be respected and left wild.



The Division of Wildlife's mission is to manage the state's wildlife for all the people of Colorado. The Watchable Wildlife program promotes wildlife viewing recreation by creating wildlife viewing sites, offering information through books, brochures and interpretive signs, sponsoring the Wildlife Watch viewing-skills workshops, and publishing this compendium to wildlife appreciation.

Colorado's Wildlife Company and accompanying educator's guide are available online at WWW.WILDLIFE.STATE.CO.US/COLO_WILD_CO/HOMEPG/CWCINDEX.HTM

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