

COLORADO PARKS & WILDLIFE

# Living With Wolves

HOW TO AVOID WILDLIFE CONFLICTS



# What to Do if You Live in Wolf Country

Generally, wolves are calm and elusive. Wolves are habitat generalists, but are most commonly found in areas with plentiful deer and elk populations. Wolves avoid humans and are unlikely to approach people or homes.

We can live with these native predators if we respect gray wolves and their habitat. To reduce the risk of problems with wolves on or near your property, we urge you to follow these simple precautions.



**It is very rare for wolves to cause a direct threat to humans.**

- Make lots of noise if you come and go during the times when wolves are most active—dusk to dawn.
- Don't feed wolves or any other wildlife.
- Keep pets close to your home at all times of day, and bring them in at night. Don't feed pets outside. Store all garbage securely.
- Place livestock in enclosed sheds or barns at night when available/appropriate. Close doors to all outbuildings so wildlife cannot get inside.
- Please see CPW's Wolf Resource Guide ([cpw.info/Wolf-Resource-Guide](http://cpw.info/Wolf-Resource-Guide)) for more information about protecting livestock.

# Recreating in Wolf Country

To reduce the likelihood of an encounter, or of an encounter turning into an attack, general alertness of surroundings is highly recommended.



**Look around — scan the sides of hills, forests or open meadows.**

- ▶ Make noise so you don't surprise wildlife.
- ▶ Hike with a sturdy walking stick or bear spray.
- ▶ Keep pet dogs on a leash or close to you with voice control at all times.

# What to Do if You Encounter a Wolf

Aggressive behavior from wild wolves toward humans is very rare. Encounters with wolves are an interaction—you should follow these guidelines and assess how the wolf responds to your action so you can choose what to do next. Each situation is unique.



Do not approach a wolf, especially one that is feeding or with pups, or if you have a dog with you. Most wolves will try to avoid a confrontation. Give them a way to escape.



Maintain visual contact with the wolf so you can see what it is doing and where it is. Talk calmly yet firmly to it and make enough eye contact so that it knows you have seen it. Most wolves will run away.



If you have a dog with you, keep the dog away from the wolf. Dogs can aggravate wolves, and the situation can escalate if dogs are acting aggressively toward wolves.



If there is shelter or a vehicle nearby, face the wolf and stand upright while backing away slowly. Running may stimulate a predatory instinct to chase and attack.



If you cannot retreat, stand your ground, face the wolf and try to appear larger. For example, raise your arms, stand on a stump or a rock or open your jacket. Place obstacles you may have, like a bike, between you and the wolf.



If the wolf behaves more aggressively (eyes locked on you, ears forward or backwards), yell loudly, clap and wave your walking stick in front of you. An air horn may also be effective.



If the wolf gets even more aggressive (ears lowered, growling/snarling, baring teeth), be ready to fight back or deploy bear spray at an approaching wolf.



In the very unlikely event that a wolf attacks you, fight back. Remain standing, and try to get back up if you are knocked down. A wolf's underbelly and face, including its eyes, can be sensitive areas to target with fingers or sharp objects if you have to strike back.

Gray wolves are habitat generalists. If you live or recreate in the foothills or mountains of Colorado, you are in wolf country. Wolves are not normally a danger to humans, but you should treat wolves with the same respect you give any other wild animal. With a better understanding of wolves and their habitat, we can coexist with these magnificent animals.

## What We Know About Wolves

The gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) historically ranged across much of the Northern Hemisphere and beyond, from the Arctic to Mexico and from coast to coast. Once distributed statewide, the gray wolf was extirpated from the state in the 1940s. It took nearly 80 years before wild wolf pups were born again in Colorado, which occurred in 2021.

CPW's Wolf Restoration and Management Plan calls for wolves to be released over 3-5 years (10-15 animals per year) into select areas west of the Continental Divide. Release locations will not occur within 60 miles of neighboring states so that released wolves are more likely to remain in Colorado. It is anticipated that wolves will eventually inhabit many areas of Colorado, but releases will use this buffer with the intent of limiting immediate dispersal into neighboring states. Wolves are also likely to disperse to areas east of the Continental Divide.

## How Big Are Gray Wolves?

GRAY WOLF	
Species:	<i>Canis lupus</i>
Present in Colorado?	YES
Adult Weight:	80-110 pounds
Height (at shoulder):	26-34"
Total Length:	6 feet

## Physical appearance

The gray wolf is the largest of the wild canids. Wolves look like large dogs and their coloring ranges from black to pale gray. Wolves occasionally are more tawny colored or even white.

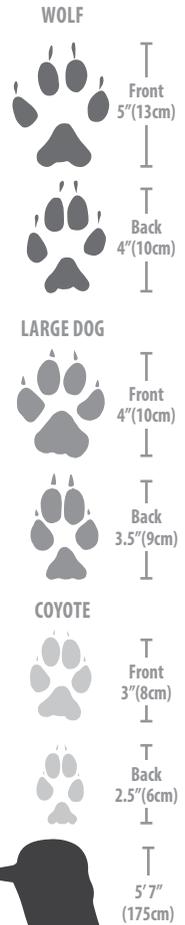
Gray wolves are about twice the size of coyotes. They can measure up to six feet in total length, including tail, and stand approximately 30 inches in height at the shoulder. Female wolves weigh around 80-90 pounds, while males weigh around 90-110 pounds.

The gray wolf has a long bushy tail and erect, slightly rounded ears. Its legs are longer, feet larger and chest narrower than a dog of similar size. Wolves have larger and blockier snouts/muzzles and shorter and more rounded ears than coyotes, who have longer, narrower features. Wolves also have distinctively bushier and shorter tails.

## Tracks

Depending on the substrate, wolf tracks are about 5 inches long by 4 inches wide, with four symmetrical toes and identifiable claws; coyote tracks are similar, but are only about half that size. Large dogs, such as livestock guardian dogs, can have tracks with similar dimensions to wolves.

COYOTE	
Species:	<i>Canis latrans</i>
Present in Colorado?	YES
Adult Weight:	30-50 pounds
Height (at shoulder):	18-24"
Total Length:	4.5 feet



## Habitat

Wolves may be found anywhere in Colorado, but are predominantly likely to be found in regions where elk and deer are abundant. Wolf habitat includes riparian areas, mountains, forests and open meadows. Wolves generally avoid steep and rocky terrain and areas of human activity.

Wolves are very territorial, meaning they protect the area where they hunt and raise young from wolves that are not in their pack. Wolves define their territory by scent marking, urinating and defecating. The size of the territory depends on the terrain, how much food is available and proximity to other wolf packs. Wolves also communicate through vocalizations and may let another pack know they are in the area by howling.

## Hunting and feeding

Wolves are most active from dusk to dawn, although they do travel and hunt in daylight. Wolves prefer to eat ungulates like deer, elk and moose; however they also eat other small mammals and, occasionally, livestock. In Colorado, elk will likely make up the majority of wolves' diets.

Wolves are cursorial hunters, meaning they chase their prey to capture them. Members of the same pack hunt together, and larger packs are better at killing large prey. The vast majority of wolf hunts are unsuccessful, and hunting is dangerous to the wolf. Injuries acquired during hunting are a leading cause of natural mortality for wolves, such as being kicked or gored.

## Habits

Wolves are social animals, living in a family group known as a pack. A pack usually consists of 6-10 animals: a male and female (the breeding pair), pups from the previous year (yearlings) and the current year's pups. Wolves disperse from the pack they were born in around age 2 or 3. Wolves that do not disperse may remain in the pack as subordinate adults, and occasionally, an unrelated adult will join the pack. The dominant pair tends to lead the pack by raising the young, selecting denning and rendezvous sites, and maintaining the territory. The territory may cover 20-120 square miles. The size of their territory depends on factors like suitable habitat, food availability and wolf density. Wolves naturally require a lot of space, which can sometimes lead to conflict with humans.

## Mating and breeding

A wolf's natural life span is about six years in the wild. Wolves are sexually mature at two years old, but may not breed until they are older. In each pack, the behaviorally dominant male and female are usually the breeders, and they prevent subordinate adults from mating by physically harassing them. Breeding occurs in February, and gestation is approximately nine weeks. In April, breeding females produce a litter of four to six pups, on average; typically only one litter is produced per pack per year. Wolves generally den in underground burrows that the breeding female digs out. The breeding male and other packmates provide food for the nursing mother.

At six weeks old, the pups are weaned and the adults begin to bring them meat. Adults eat the meat at a kill site, then return and regurgitate the food for the pups to eat. The hungry pups jump and nip at the adults' muzzle to stimulate regurgitation. The pack leaves the den when the pups are 6-12 weeks old. The female carries the pups in her mouth to a rendezvous site or nursery area. The rendezvous site is the focus of the pack's social activities for the summer months and is usually near water. By August, the pups wander up to 2 to 3 miles from the rendezvous site and use it less often. The pack leaves the site in September or October and the pups, now mobile, follow the adults.

## Report a sighting

CPW receives and investigates many potential wolf sightings each year.

We have a wolf sighting form available on our website and we encourage you to fill it out if you believe you have seen a wolf in your area.

We ask that any photos or videos be included with these reports if available.

Wolf Sighting Form ▼



[cpw.info/wolf-sighting](http://cpw.info/wolf-sighting)



## WE'RE HERE TO HELP

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) is responsible for managing, conserving and protecting wildlife. Your concerns are our concerns about wildlife as well.

If you have an encounter with a wolf or an attack occurs, please immediately contact your local CPW office, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., as listed below.

After hours, contact the Colorado State Patrol (303) 239-4501 or your local Sheriff's Department.

To report a sighting, please contact a CPW regional field office during normal business hours. Your information is very valuable to us.

## CPW REGIONAL FIELD OFFICES

Brush . . . . .	(970) 842-6300
Colorado Springs . . . . .	(719) 227-5200
Denver . . . . .	(303) 291-7227
Durango . . . . .	(970) 247-0855
Fort Collins . . . . .	(970) 472-4300
Glenwood Springs . . . . .	(970) 947-2920
Grand Junction. . . . .	(970) 255-6100
Gunnison . . . . .	(970) 641-7060
Hot Sulphur Springs . . . . .	(970) 725-6200
Lamar. . . . .	(719) 336-6600
Meeker. . . . .	(970) 878-6090
Monte Vista. . . . .	(719) 587-6900
Montrose. . . . .	(970) 252-6000
Pueblo . . . . .	(719) 561-5300
Salida . . . . .	(719) 530-5520
Steamboat Springs . . . . .	(970) 870-3333

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