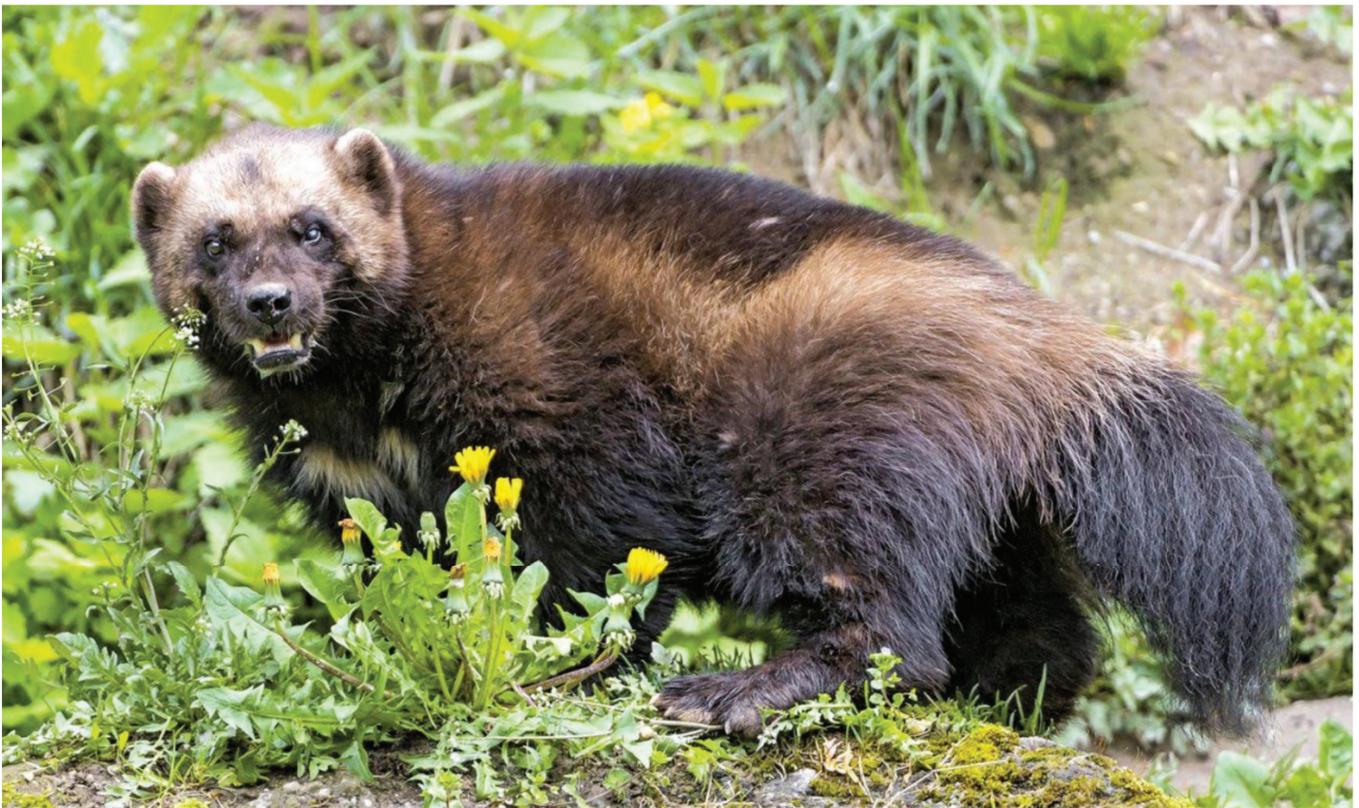


A case for wolverine reintroduction



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay



The wolverine may once again be calling Colorado home. Colorado Parks and Wildlife is working on it. (Courtesy photo/CPW)

For a number of years, I stood firm against the reintroduction of the wolf. Ballot box biology makes no sense in the real world of Mother Nature. There were a number of reasons why the wolf shouldn't be brought back. The most political was the damage the wolf does to ranchers and livestock. There is also the issue of all the deer and elk that fall victim to wolves.

Before you give me all that about how it used to be, and that elk and deer are natural prey to wolves, consider the fact there is really no room in the state. In 1900, when wolves were here, exact population is not known, but people were killing them at a rate of 10,000 a year. The population of people was around 540,000.

Fast forward to 2025, and the population of people is over 6 million. There just isn't enough wild space for wolves to live and interact in a favorable way with people. Wolves like to be around people because of the availability of an easy food source, like garbage, livestock, and pets.

Pets and cattle are much easier to take down than an elk.

The recent killing of a person by a mountain lion is further proof than man is on the menu. There is no doubt that wolves are maneaters when opportunity arises or they are forced to. If you doubt this, research wolves in Europe, especially during and after WWII. Some countries established wolf patrols, made up of service members, to exterminate dangerous populations of wolves, with one unit claiming 50,000 kills in a single year.

Not all reintroductions are a bad idea. The lynx reintroduction by Colorado Parks and Wildlife

(CPW) was a smashing success and is being used as a model around the country for other reintroductions in other states, of other species.

At one time, wolverines were native to Colorado but were wiped out by trapping and poisoning in the early 1900s, with the last native one killed in 1919. A single male was tracked, traveling from Wyoming to Colorado back in 2009, but hasn't been seen since. He was wearing a radio collar and wandered into Rocky Mountain National Park.

I have been very supportive of bringing the wolverine back to Colorado, and in 2024, the Colorado Legislature,

through bipartisan support, passed SB24-171, which called for CPW to restore these 20-to-35-pound members of the weasel family in our state. The plan calls for 15 of them a year, for 3 seasons, for a total of 45 individuals. Before you go counting those wolverines before they are hatched, remember that someone has to live-capture those 15 a year, and that is not easy task.

The wolverine will have no problem living around people, because they don't like us. They prefer a solitary life above 10,000 feet. The most suitable habitat will be in Wilderness areas, National Parks, and in Wilderness Study Areas. Even roadless expanses of U.S. Forest Service land will do. And they don't pose any threat to livestock, but will go after smaller critters, like dogs and cats, chickens, and even smaller pigs, but there isn't much of a domestic population where the wolverine chooses to live.

The scientific name for the wolverine is *Gulo gulo* which means glutton in Latin, reflecting its voracious appetite and scavenger nature. They are a very capable predator, and eat just about any meat, especially carrion from dead carcasses of large ungulates, like moose and elk, especially during the winter. Snowshoe hares, voles, marmots, and birds should probably watch their step around them too, lest they wind up a blue plate special.

The fur of a wolverine is hydrophobic, resisting water similar to a duck's back. Their fur is extremely thick and oily, and they are capable of

resting in a bare shelter in the harshest of climate conditions, making them a true survivor. That survivor characteristic is one of the reasons I nominate them for the animal of the year.

Male wolverines have an extremely large range, up to 500 miles, while the female may range 250 miles. They both have the ability to cover 20 to 30 miles a day. The wolverine is a true loner and very territorial by nature, but what a large territory.

The average lifespan of a wolverine in the wild is around 10 years but some have been known to live 15 years. They have only a few natural predators, including bears, mountain lions and wolves.

The paws of a wolverine have incredibly long and sharp claws. These claws make them great tree climbers. They have short legs, so they do not run down their prey, preferring to lie hidden in a tree and then pounce on the unsuspecting animal.

The wolverine is officially listed as threatened species in Colorado and continues to remain a candidate for federal protection. Colorado has an estimated 20% of the Lower 48 states wolverine habitat, much of which remains snowier and colder than other parts of the West. The reintroduction here is seen as crucial for the species long-term survival and could potentially increase the U.S. population by 20% or more.

Three sites for reintroduction have been identified, with one in Rocky Mountain National Park, one in the San Juan Range in the southwest

part of the state. The third area is in the Elk and West Elk Mountains between I-70 and Highway 50. CPW believes Colorado can sustain about 100 wolverines once the population becomes established.

While 100 wolverines doesn't sound like a lot, that is probably close to the historical capacity that was ever here. There are only around 300 in the entire lower 48 states, while some 15,000 call Canada home, and thousands more in Alaska. In those areas, the populations are low density, with only two to five individuals per 400 square miles. They are the most social creatures.

I am all for bringing them back to Colorado. In all my times afield, I have only seen a wolverine on two occasions, and both were in very remote areas of Canada, once in the Northwest Territories, and once in the mountains of Alberta. Seeing one in Colorado would be an incredible experience. Let's keep our fingers crossed it all works out.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for The Nautical Mile, and other saltwater fishing magazines. He is an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels around the world in search of adventure and serves as a Director and Public Information Officer for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. Personal email is elkhunter77@icloud.com For information about the Posse call 970-765-7033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

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Author Christopher Preston to speak at Black Canyon Audubon Society Annual Dinner

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

Black Canyon Audubon Society will host guest speaker Christopher Preston at Remington's, Bridges Golf and Country Club, 2500 Bridges Ave., in Montrose. The event is scheduled for March 5 from 5 — 8:30 p.m. The public is welcome and advance registration is required at <https://www.blackcanyonaudubon.org/news/notices>

The cost is \$50.00 per person for the event including dinner.

Christopher Preston, author of "Te-

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Christopher Preston, author of "Tenacious Beasts, Wildlife Recoveries that Change How We Think About Animals," is the keynote speaker for the 2026 Black Canyon Audubon Society Annual Dinner. (Courtesy photo)