

From: [L. Mech](#)
To: [Hansen, Craig](#)
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] Re: PEER REVIEW REQUEST | Proposed Establishment of a Nonessential Experimental Population of the Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*) in Colorado
Date: Friday, March 24, 2023 3:20:35 PM
Attachments: [Outlook-2ekr3twz.png](#)
[Outlook-nyw0tuu4.png](#)
[Outlook-irdgpczt.png](#)
[Replyto101.docx](#)

Craig,

Attached is my review.

Dave

On Thu, Feb 16, 2023 at 8:30 AM Hansen, Craig <Craig_Hansen@fws.gov> wrote:

Dear Dr. Mech:

Thank you for your willingness to participate as a scientific peer reviewer of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service's) **proposed rule to establish a nonessential experimental population (NEP) of the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) in the State of Colorado**, under section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act) (Docket No. FWS-R6-ES-2022-0100). Following the 60-day public comment period, which closes on **April 18, 2023**, we will review and address all peer and public comments, and work to finalize this rulemaking.

Thank you for completing your conflict of interest form. I have reviewed and approved your submission.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In accordance with our July 1, 1994, peer review policy (59 FR 34270), the Service's August 22, 2016, Director's Memo on the Peer Review Process, and the Office of Management and Budget's December 16, 2004, Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, we now invite your assistance in conducting an independent peer review of this proposed rule. The purpose of this peer review is to ensure that our proposed rule is based on scientifically sound data, assumptions, and analyses. The [Peer Review Plan](#) for this rulemaking provides additional information.

During this peer review process, we invite you to comment on the specific assumptions and scientific assessments included in proposed rule. The opinions of all peer reviewers will be incorporated or summarized, and your input will be taken into consideration as part of our rulemaking process.

Additionally, we ask that you focus your review of the document on the scientific information and analyses relevant to your area of expertise. Please note that we are not

asking for and will not accept input on the policy determinations that we are charged with making under the Act. The Service retains full control over relevant policy determinations and no pre-decisional assumptions regarding those determinations will be discussed. You were selected as peer reviewer based solely on your scientific qualifications, rather than as a representative of any particular position of an agency, employer, or other interested party.

We ask that you consider the following questions about the content of the documents, and we welcome any other relevant comments:

1. Is our description and analysis of the biology, habitat, population trends, conservation status, and historical and current distribution of the species accurate?
2. Are there any significant oversights, omissions, or inconsistencies?
3. Are the conclusions we reach logical and supported by the evidence we provide?
4. Did we include all the necessary and pertinent literature to support our assumptions, arguments, and conclusions?
5. Are there additional considerations regarding the geographic boundary of the NEP, the adequacy of the proposed regulations for the NEP, or additional management that may be needed to address expanding gray wolf populations?

If you find that our data are inadequate, please identify additional data or studies that may be needed. Please provide literature, data, and full citations, if appropriate.

Please be aware that your comments, including your name and address, will be included in the administrative record for this action, which will be available to the public, upon request. Per our peer review policy, we must also post your complete conflict of interest forms to our agency's [peer review webpage](#); the policy also directs us to make your comments available to the public, either on our own website or on [Regulations.gov](#) with the associated docket (FWS-R6-ES-2022-0100).

DOCUMENTS NEEDED FOR YOUR PEER REVIEW:

You may access the proposed rule, the references cited, and the peer review plan using the following hyperlinks:

- [Peer Review Plan](#):
- [Proposed rule for your peer review](#)
- [References Cited in the Proposed Rule](#)

DUE DATE:

We would appreciate receiving your peer review in 60 days from the publication in the *Federal Register*, so by **April 18, 2023**, **returned by email to me at craig_hansen@fws.gov**. No need to also submit your peer review through Regulations.gov.

Thank you again for your time and expertise to help us ensure that our proposed rule includes the best possible scientific information and analyses. I look forward to receiving your review. Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time by telephone or email if I can answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Craig Hansen
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
(303) 236-4749; craig_hansen@fws.gov

From: Hansen, Craig <Craig_Hansen@fws.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, February 14, 2023 8:45 AM
To: L Mech <mechx002@umn.edu>
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] Re: PEER REVIEW REQUEST | Proposed Establishment of a Nonessential Experimental Population of the Gray Wolf (Canis lupus) in Colorado

Wonderful! Most appreciated.

At your convenience, please complete this conflict of interest form:

- **COI Form:** <https://forms.office.com/g/fEq1hk41Ls>
 - **ID Number:** Leave blank
 - **Rulemaking name:** Colorado gray wolf 10(j)
 - **Point of Contact email:** craig_hansen@fws.gov

I expect to be able to distribute the document later this week. You would have 60 days for your peer review.

Thank you!

Craig Hansen

From: L Mech <mechx002@umn.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, February 14, 2023 8:00 AM
To: Hansen, Craig <Craig_Hansen@fws.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: PEER REVIEW REQUEST | Proposed Establishment of a Nonessential Experimental Population of the Gray Wolf (Canis lupus) in Colorado

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Hello, Craig,

Yes; I would be willing to do this review.
Dave Mech

On Mon, Feb 13, 2023 at 3:29 PM Hansen, Craig <Craig_Hansen@fws.gov> wrote:
PEER REVIEW REQUEST | Proposed Establishment of a Nonessential Experimental Population of the Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*) in Colorado

Greetings:

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) has drafted a proposed rule to establish a nonessential experimental population (NEP) of the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) in the State of Colorado, under section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act). You have been recommended as a potential peer reviewer of the proposed rule based on your area of scientific expertise. I am writing to to ask whether you would be willing and available to serve as a peer reviewer of this document.

Peer review will run concurrently with the proposed rule's public comment period. If you agree to participate as a peer reviewer, I anticipate distributing the document within the next week, or as soon as the document publishes in the *Federal Register*. You would then have **60 days** to provide your peer review back to me by email. We will not be providing financial compensation to peer reviewers. Before receiving the document, you would be asked to complete and return an online conflict of interest form.

Additional information about this peer review process and specific questions to help focus the peer review can be found in the attached peer review plan. Please let me know as soon as possible, preferably by **this Friday, February 17, 2023**, whether you would be willing and able to participate as a peer reviewer. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

We would greatly appreciate your input, expertise, and time. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Craig Hansen

Regional Recovery Coordinator - Mountain-Prairie Region

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



Craig Hansen

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Region 6

Ecological Services - Branch of Classification & Recovery

Recovery Coordinator / Fish & Wildlife Biologist

Phone: (303) 236-4749 **Fax:** (303) 236-0027

Email: craig_hansen@fws.gov



NOTE: This e-mail correspondence and any attachments to and from this sender are subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and may be disclosed to third parties

Review of

Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Establishment of a Nonessential Experimental Population of the Gray Wolf in Colorado

L. David Mech, Senior Research Scientist,

Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, U. S. Geological Survey

March 24, 2023

I have thoroughly read the February 17, 2023 proposed rule “Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Establishment of a Nonessential Experimental Population of the Gray Wolf in Colorado.” Following are my replies to the questions reviewers were asked to address:

1. Is our description and analysis of the biology, habitat, population trends, conservation status, and historical and current distribution of the species accurate? **Yes, except as below.**
2. Are there any significant oversights, omissions, or inconsistencies? **See below.**
3. Are the conclusions we reach logical and supported by the evidence we provide? **Yes.**
4. Did we include all the necessary and pertinent literature to support our assumptions, arguments, and conclusions? **Yes, except as below.**
5. Are there additional considerations regarding the geographic boundary of the NEP, the adequacy of the proposed regulations for the NEP, or additional management that may be needed to address expanding gray wolf populations? **Yes. At least some of the released wolves will disperse beyond the NEP and presumably settle and reproduce outside the NEP. That will give rise to confusion as to the legal status of the dispersed individuals because they can be identified as reintroduced individuals originally subject to the 10j rule. In other words, they are subject to 10j regulations while within the NEP but are considered strictly endangered when outside of the NEP. Thus this proposed rule should prominently (in a special section) address that question.**

Otherwise, I have only a few minor suggestions for improving the rule as follow:

p.10262, column 1. 12 -Until recently, we did not know the actual range of sexual maturity for wolves, except that some, but not many, can breed when 10-months old, and others at 22 months, all based on anecdotal evidence. However, two recent studies have documented that the age of sexual maturity ranges from 1-4 years for males and 1-5 years for females (Mech et al. 2015; Wikenros et al. 2021).

p. 10265, Fig. 3 -Locations of prominent cities such as Denver, Vail, Aspen, Durango, etc. would make this map more readable and useful.

p. 10267, column 1, 2nd full par., line 3 –Needs updating. No more than 3 wolves were last documented.

p. 10267, column 2 bottom and column 3 -Consider mentioning the state's official mammal, the bighorn sheep, of which the estimate is 7,000, as potential prey.

p. 10276, column 1, 8th line from bottom -delete "this."

p. 10278, column 1, 6th line from bottom -Should "opportunistic harassment" be defined?

Literature Cited

Mech L.D., S. M. Barber-Meyer, and J. Erb. 2016. Wolf (*Canis lupus*) generation time and proportion of current breeding females by age. PLoS ONE 11(6): e0156682.
<https://doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0156682>

Wikenros C, Gicquel M, Zimmermann B, Flagstad Ø, Åkesson M. 2021. Age at first reproduction in wolves: different patterns of density dependence for females and males. Proc. R. Soc. B 288: 20210207. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2021.0207>