

**From:** [Turner, Ed](#)  
**To:** [Betty Grizzle](#)  
**Subject:** Utah Info  
**Date:** Thursday, January 19, 2017 3:15:56 PM  
**Attachments:** [Amethyst Lake Wolverine Sighting 2010.docx](#)  
[Southern Rockies Wolverine Reintroduction Notes Aug2010.doc](#)

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To: Participants and others interested in restoring wolverines to Colorado

From: David Gaillard (Defenders of Wildlife, Bozeman), Paige Bonacker and Megan Mueller (Center for Native Ecosystems, Denver)

Date: August 4, 2010

Re: Notes from our Colorado wolverine conference call, July 29, 2010

Qualifier—these notes are incomplete and likely inaccurate as well. Please contact the relevant participants about any specific questions and comments.

Participants:

Eric Odell – Colorado Division of Wildlife (“CDOW”)

Bob Inman, Jeff Burrell – Wildlife Conservation Society (“WCS” in Bozeman/Ennis, MT)

Megan Mueller, Paige Bonaker, Josh Pollock – Center for Native Ecosystems

Ryan Demmy-Bidwell, Rocky Smith – Colorado Wild

Dave Gaillard, Mike Leahy, John Motsinger – Defenders of Wildlife

Jeff Parrish, Julia Kintsch – Freedom to Roam

Matt Reed – High Country Citizen’s Alliance

Wendy Keefover-Ring, Dave Jones—WildEarth Guardians

Peter Hart – Wilderness Workshop

Deborah McCauley – Unaffiliated wildlife veterinarian (Bozeman)

### **Dave and Megan - Introductions and welcome, agenda overview**

Dave presented his history with the issue.

First learned about it from WCS last December, they were considering applying for a multi-state wildlife grant and needed to match govt funds with private dollars. CDOW supported idea, but could not endorse project in time for SWG deadline in early January.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (“FWS”) contacted Dave in May to inquire about possible “experimental, non-essential” status for wolverines in CO: Would Defenders support this? Ideas for how to implement it? Dave consulted with Tim Preso at Earthjustice in Bozeman, responded to FWS that we may support it, but we do not believe it is feasible until the wolverine is already listed. Same issue came up with the lynx, and did not work at that time.

Dave learned from Bob at WCS that the project was to come before the CDOW Commission this summer, suggested generating support among Defenders' members and other groups, but Bob said to hold off until the issue became public, for fear of backlash from potential opponents.

Dave learned from Wendy that the project was on the agenda of the July 8 CDOW Commission meeting, and approval was needed for CDOW staff to develop a specific proposal. Defenders and other groups spread the word among supporters in the area in case testimony was solicited. It turned out that no testimony was taken and after a presentation by CDOW biologist Eric Odell and the endorsement by Director Tom Remington, the measure passed the Commission by a unanimous vote. Important to note that the Commission did NOT yet approve a wolverine reintroduction. It merely approved investigation of the idea by CDOW staff. The soonest the Commission may consider and vote upon a specific wolverine reintroduction proposal is at its November 2010 meeting. The Commission was also informed by Director Remington that support from the CO legislature would be sought, even though it is not technically required in this case (the legislature's approval is required to reintroduce federally listed or candidate, extirpated species to CO, and at least one wolverine (M56) already occurs in Colorado and the species is not yet listed or candidate status).

Dave had follow up conversations with Megan and Paige at CNE who agreed to organize this call, and invite Eric Odell and Bob Inman to join us and answer questions.

Goals for call:

- Update everyone on the issue
- Discuss key biological, administrative/legal, funding, and public outreach issues
- Assess interest and capacity among the NGO's
- Assign Steering Committee, action items to go forward

### **Eric Odell, CDOW - Current status of the wolverine reintroduction idea**

Eric explained restoring wolverines to Colorado was considered alongside lynx in 1998 (contact Dave G. or Paige for a pdf copy of this "draft strategy"). He said lynx were pursued because they were abundant in northern Canada at the time, and CDOW lacked capacity to do wolverines at the same time. CDOW learned a lot from the lynx project that will help with wolverines.

In July, Eric stressed that the Commission approved research into the reintroduction, not an actual reintroduction. Two commissioners expressed concerns/questions, but all nine voted in favor of the research. Remington or Eric will likely give an update to the Commission in September.

CDOW Director Tom Remington established two conditions for CDOW pursuing the project: (1) the funds cannot come from license sales ("game cash"), and (2) assurances are needed from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that if the wolverine is listed, full Endangered Species Act protections will not apply to Colorado (via designation of the population as "experimental, non-essential" under Sec. 10(j) of the Act or some equivalent). For the former (funding), CDOW will need help from NGO's to raise needed funds. For the latter (ESA assurances), CDOW is in discussions with USFWS, and Eric stressed that CDOW needs these assurances before it is ready to take the proposal to the public. He said it is important for the

agency to proceed slowly and deliberately, and for NGOs to follow CDOW's lead, since "going public" too soon is likely to kill the whole thing. Remington is currently in the process of meeting with regional directors.

Eric also explained that CDOW will seek approval for the project from the state legislature. Wendy asked why not just inform them rather than seek permission, sets up a roadblock you don't need. Eric said they want to be above-board and address any concerns on the front end. Only case CDOW would not seek legislature's permission is if FWS issues a "not warranted" listing decision in December. Funding and political support will be important roles for NGOs.

Wendy asked about the biological protocol for the reintroduction. Eric said WCS convened a workshop in May to address this, yet they still have not yet developed a specific proposal. CDOW has learned a lot from the lynx, and though Tanya Shenk (lead CDOW lynx biologist) now works for NPS, she will participate in the wolverine project. Eric noted that the workshop in May was about how to do a reintroduction to the Southern Rockies, not just Colorado.

Rocky asked how CDOW became the lead for this project instead of USFWS. Eric and Bob explained that wolverines are under state jurisdiction until/unless listed, whereupon FWS has authority. Both were clear that FWS has participated in meetings, but is unlikely to "lead" this project any time in foreseeable future, has to come from CDOW instead. Bob suggested we focus on pursuing this project if it is the right thing to do for the wolverine, whether it is listed or not.

Wendy asked what source population would be used. Eric said wolverine populations in Canada or Alaska.

Mike Leahy (Defenders) asked why generating early public support and attention was a bad idea. Eric conceded he did not have a good answer to this. CDOW is focused on first ensuring the ESA will not be a stumbling block.

Jeff Parrish agreed with Mike that importance of generating public awareness and support is obvious, whereas the negative consequences feared by CDOW are not. Eric said it was less about the process and more about the timing, concluding that we are not at that point in time yet.

Bob Inman asked Eric how much support there is for the project within CDOW—are they committed to doing it if they possibly can, or are they ambivalent? Eric said CDOW staff are very enthusiastic about the project and want to make it happen.

Julia asked what is needed before CDOW returns to the Commission with a specific proposal in November:

- Biological protocols? Eric answered they need a final plan [in a follow-up conversation he corrected this and told me that a draft proposal would be sufficient. He said the best role for NGO's is to appear before the Commission in November with whatever we can offer to help with this project—Dave G.]
- Political/public support? Eric answered that they don't necessarily need a gauge on the legislature at that point since the session is later.
- Funding? Eric answered a demonstration of financial support would be very helpful

Someone asked for an estimated budget of the project. Eric said he did not know. Less than \$10 million, perhaps \$3-5 million?

### **Bob Inman, WCS, Scientific basis for restoring the wolverine to Colorado**

Colorado contains 20% of suitable wolverine habitat in the lower 48, and could increase the current population in the lower-48 by 33%, according to WCS analysis. Restoring wolverines to Colorado (and the Southern Rockies) is “the most significant positive step forward we can make” for wolverines in the western U.S., equivalent to restoring grizzly bears in central Idaho. Most of their habitat (high-elevation alpine areas) is mostly on public land (except when dispersing).

Bob described the evolution of the project as follows. Montana changed to landscape-level management in designing its wolverine trapping units and quotas. Colorado has come to the completion of its lynx restoration project. Wolverine research animal “M56” dispersed from the Tetons in Wyoming to Colorado in spring 2009.

Why move wolverines south if climate change is likely to shift their habitat north? Bob explained that high elevations are likely to retain their snowpack better than northerly areas at low elevations. Colorado could become a “continental-level” refuge for wolverines within 50-100 years. With a reintroduction we also have the opportunity to influence the genetic composition of the new population, which can improve its fitness.

Wolverines in Colorado would contribute to the “redundancy” of the lower-48 population, since it is mostly disjunct from the other populations (i.e., could be buffered against a disease outbreak in the N. Rockies). Wolverines in Colorado could also increase the resiliency of the lower-48 population, since periodic dispersals to the other populations could provide a “rescue” effect.

Rocky asked why snowpack is important to wolverines. Bob answered their feet are huge, separates them from other carnivores, and moms give birth in mid-February near avalanche chutes, snow dens provide thermal cover for the young.

Wendy asked if wolverines will do well without wolves. Bob answered yes, since wolverines tend to avoid the winter range frequented by wolves in the northern Rockies, and instead stick to timberline and range huge territories of unproductive habitat that has snow cover into May and June. They seem to key into areas neglected by other carnivores. Plus, hunter kill can provide significant carrion for them.

Dave G asked how many wolverines would be translocated to Colorado, of what sex, and would they seek or avoid pregnant females. Bob said they prefer not to move any pregnant females for fear of public outcry if any young were aborted or lost (even though this naturally occurs with the majority of pregnant female wolverines in the wild). The wolverines could be trapped in April to eliminate this risk. [I just realized the regular wolverine trapping season is in mid-Winter when fur is at its premium—would a Spring live-trapping season increase the risk that animals taken would be on top of (additive) rather than instead of (compensatory) animals taken during the regular trapping season? Something to

consider and balance with the “public outcry” concern, since NGO’s should be able to help reduce that concern—Dave G]

As for how many wolverines would be translocated, Bob said he does not know yet, maybe 12 per year for two years? He said significantly fewer numbers than lynx, and thinks Colorado could support a population of about 100 wolverines.

Mike L. pointed out that WCS and CDOW have been the leads so far, but can they suggest a role for the rest of the NGO community going forward? Eric said the project will definitely be a partnership among all other organizations with expertise and experience with wolverines (e.g., Canada, Alaska, Montana officials), or NGO’s who can help with funding, public outreach, legislative affairs, etc.

Dave G. said the project should not stay in a “secret, black box” for much longer. Funds, public support and proper scientific review all require publicizing the project and raising awareness. NGO’s can only help if we are partners, not just pawns.

Eric appreciated the feedback, said he would convey it to CDOW leadership. Yet said the November is not a vital deadline to hit, just the best case scenario. Project could be delayed another year and still succeed. He noted that though he has been thinking about this for a long time, it is a new idea for others (Commissioners, etc.).

Wendy said she agreed with Dave, reiterated her concern that a legislative campaign is risky and unnecessary. Also mentioned the lynx project was very popular, and that the ESA protections were no big deal. She said CDOW cannot expect to be able to tell everyone what to do, especially if seeking funds for the project.

Eric appreciated this feedback, acknowledged it is tough to trust CDOW will be open and collaborative at the same time that they are asking everyone to follow their lead, but urged the NGO’s to be patient.

Bob reiterated that November Commission meeting is the best case scenario, not a “do or die” date. He questioned how the Commission could endorse the program anyway before the FWS listing decision due in December. He suggested CDOW come up with a list of steps, action items with some tentative dates, basically a plan so NGO’s could understand the process and their role in it.

Dave G. added that a communications plan is an important part of the overall plan, so NGO’s know when and how to help publicize the project.

Jeff agreed that a plan and publicity are needed for his organization to seek funding for the project.

Wendy suggested an email listserv for communications among NGO’s involved in the project. She also mentioned the need for the biological protocol to address the threat posed to wolverines by “M-44” and snare predator traps in Colorado.

Megan asked about CDOW’s experience with the lynx. She said CDOW considers it a highly successful project, even though lynx in Colorado were fully protected under the ESA. She acknowledged that the lynx project did not need support from the CO legislature and 10(j) status was unreachable. [Rich

Reading from the Denver Zoo was unable to join our call, but told me later that the CO legislature did approve the second lynx translocations, again despite no exemptions from the ESA—Dave G.]

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Both Eric and Bob left the call at this point to provide the advocacy NGO's the opportunity to share feedback and discuss next steps. Many comments and a summary of this discussion is captured below

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FTR is a coalition, so needs to check with everyone else, but expects to fully support this project, and complement the role of other NGO's. Wolverines are iconic to FTR mission. FTR will likely focus on: (1) telling story (and to broader audience than just greens), and (2) help raise funds.

Deborah McCauley introduced herself as a wildlife vet who has helped with WCS field research and is a diehard wolverine fan, excited to get behind this project, mentioned the Wolverine Network coalition as an ally to raise awareness and funds (website to be launched in Sept).

One group said they are excited to return wolverines to Colorado, do have concerns about "assurances" CDOW wants from FWS, since (1) habitat pressures/impacts do exist in Colorado that may need to be dealt with, and (2) a likely "warranted but precluded" decision by FWS in December could put the project in purgatory indefinitely, since it would remain neither listed nor unlisted for the foreseeable future. One regulatory option is a "Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances"—typically done between FWS and private landowners to replace ESA regulations with voluntary mitigation measures. Yet it is unclear how this would work until wolverines are listed, and how Colorado could secure this when they have no control over the Forest Service and other land management agencies.

WildEarth Guardians is very excited about restoring wolverines to Colorado, looking forward to participating in an open process and reviewing the scientific protocols.

Colorado Wild wants to be involved, possibly on Steering Committee, willing to set up a listserv.

Suggestion that NGO's volunteer for working groups by email to reflect different skills and interests—fundraising, legislature, science, policy...

Suggestion for a face-to-face meeting with CDOW, show NGO support and offer specific resources in exchange for a role in the process, include DNR also. Julia asked for ideas of corporations to approach for funds. Josh suggested bringing a list of possible funding sources to in-person meeting with CDOW. Possible timeline: Detailed plan from CDOW by Oct 1, Commission approval in November, FWS listing decision in December.

Suggestion to approach Marvel Comics or Hugh Jackson himself to use The Wolverine as our figurehead?

Also talked about showing PBS nature movie that will air on Nov. 14 at wolverine education events in Denver (and/or around the state, to introduce wolverines and the project to rural communities).

Overall great enthusiasm and support for the project, though questions on the details and NGO's role, look forward to following up with CDOW in the weeks and months ahead!

Amethyst Lake (Evanston-Mountain View RD) Wolverine Sighting  
August 20, 2010

Michael Buxton (Professor at Brigham Young University)  
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Hi Nate

My siting of the wolverine took place around 8pm on Friday, August 20, 2010. The location was near the southwest corner of Amethyst Lake. Fishing had become poorer due to wind, so I hiked up a rocky 100ft incline directly up from the lake at this corner. I did not have any camera with me. At the top of this incline is a rocky ledge which is probably a few hundred feet wide before inclining again westward up the mountain. I began walking toward the north along this ridge and maybe 200 feet along this ridge I saw the wolverine, walking about 60 feet in front of me, crossing my path so I could see its right side perfectly. I was alone in the siting; my 25 year old son was on the south side of the lake.

The first thing I noticed was its size--it was as large as a small-to-medium sized dog. It was quite round around the belly, furry and what seemed a little fat. When I saw it, it was obvious to me it was not a badger or marmot, and certainly not a bear cub. The other thing I quickly noticed was its strange way of walking--kind of a slow trot and loping side to side. It seemed almost comical. I stopped immediately and stood still. It stopped at the east edge of the ledge and stopped, standing still, and looking at me. It appeared it was heading into some brush, but was interested in me. This was the amazing thing to me--it was just as curious about me as I was about it, so we stood there and stared at each other for more than 10 minutes. It kept looking over at me and then away. I inched forward at times and it noticed this but it stayed put. Eventually I got too close for its comfort (about 50 feet) and it quickly moved into the brush and I did not see it again.

It's head was black. Most of it's body fur was dark brown, but there was golden color on it's neck and behind it's ears. At the top of it's tail was golden/tan color and about 1/4 of the way down it became dark brown through to the end. It's feet were very dark brown/black. I did not smell a scent.

I have never seen a wolverine before so this was a wonderful experience for me, I was certainly not expecting it. If anyone has further questions, please email me or contact me at 801-318-1900. I live in Orem, UT and work as a professor at BYU.

Michael Buxton