



May 2, 2023

Re. Colorado Wildlife Conservation Project support for the recommended Big Game License reductions (agenda item 16) based on recently published data by Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Dear Members of the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission,

We, the undersigned organizations, write to you on behalf of tens-of-thousands of Colorado hunters, anglers, conservationists and outdoor enthusiasts. We do so to respectfully express our support for the recommended Big Game License reductions based on recently published data by Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW). We believe this is in the best interest of wildlife conservation in Colorado for the present and future. We wholeheartedly support the agency’s recommendations on license reductions and believe we have an alarming emergency – particularly in the northwest region – as it relates to the long-term sustainability of our ungulate herds. With wildlife conservation as our top priority, we believe that additional license cuts could be necessary to restore populations to levels that would support historical hunter opportunity. That being said, there are a number of considerations we believe the commission should immediately take into account.

Colorado, specifically the Western Slope, experienced an unprecedented winter with severe repercussions for our wildlife. Due to snowpack and snow water equivalent (SWE) being far above average (see Figure 1), the winter habitat in many areas became uninhabitable. Food was sparse and winter conditions were severe, pushing game toward roads and disrupting migration patterns. As a result, many animals did not survive due to starvation or were forced to leave the state in search of better habitat and food – all concerning markers for wildlife conservation in Colorado.¹

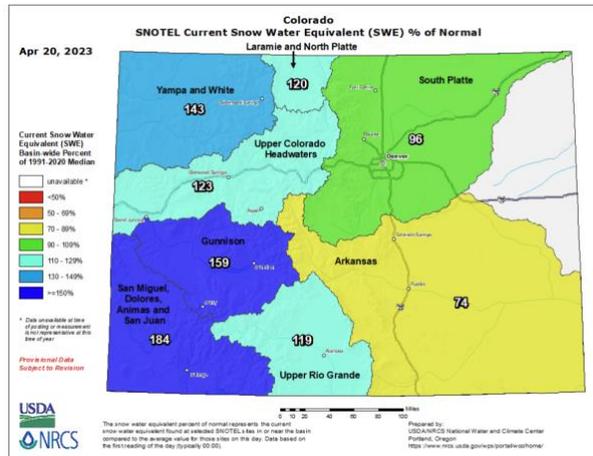


Figure 1 (Source: USDA - NRCS)²

In response to these concerning factors, we strongly support and appreciate CPW’s recommended license reductions for the 2023 season, especially in the northwest part of the state (refer to CPW elk, pronghorn, and deer DAU data).³ As conservationists, we are willing to take further measures to protect the resource until herds are restored to typical historical levels. In the short term, aggressive cuts to license allocations for the 2023 season in the northwest part of the state might be necessary. This could include further reductions to limited license opportunities and/or temporary suspensions or caps on over-the-counter licenses. It is possible that temporary license cuts in the 80+% range and/or limiting license allocations to the minimum required thresholds to retain hunting privileges in each respective GMU will be necessary. Some combination of license reductions may be needed until herds have stabilized and begun to return to levels that can support historical hunter opportunity/harvest. It will also be necessary to protect females and the calf/fawn age class.

Additionally, we request that any licenses issued for the 2023 season be followed up by a full, mandatory hunter harvest survey, and additional big game flights/surveys. The penalty for not participating in the hunter-harvest survey would mean that draw privileges are revoked for the following year. Furthermore, we strongly recommend that the Commission proceeds with caution with wolf reintroduction plans in the northwest region. Plans to release wolves in this portion of the state should be delayed until the prey they need is better positioned to deal with an additional predator.

These license reduction suggestions are quite drastic, but could certainly be necessary given the severity of the winter. Serious consideration should be given to the fact that hunting and license sales generate considerable revenue for the state and provide an important economic driver in rural, western Colorado communities. Fewer hunting opportunities mean fewer trips and lost revenue for the state and rural communities on multiple fronts, including sales and lodging taxes, spending, the “ripple effect,” etc. but we wish to see these opportunities return as soon as possible and believe it necessary to take precautionary steps now.⁴ We also expect license reductions to impact budget projections for CPW and recommend the Commission begin

exploring ways to offset these losses. This might include declaring a state of emergency, tapping into other funding streams, and cutting costs at the agency.

Unfortunately, severe winter conditions can change the way wildlife is managed. We recognize and support this effort, even though it adds complexity to how wildlife will be managed in the years to come. We ask that you continue to support and utilize the data and science available from CPW to make informed decisions about wildlife management moving forward. We also ask that you consider the ways in which this could impact individuals, businesses, and other entities. It is more important now than ever that we commit to habitat restoration efforts and conservation projects across the state to give our wildlife the best opportunity for future resiliency. Importantly, we are collectively in agreement to do whatever is necessary for the short-term, with the longer-term goal of restoring hunter opportunity in the future.

CWCP members are committed to conserving wildlife and wildlife habitat for generations to come. For the reasons stated above, we strongly support CPW's ability to utilize an aggressive strategy of license reductions when/where necessary, particularly in the northwest region. We recognize the impact it will have on funding streams for CPW, the hunting community, and the future of wildlife management in Colorado, but believe the short-term sacrifices will have long-term benefits.

We are happy to provide additional information at your request.

Sincerely,

Members of the Colorado Wildlife Conservation Project

[Colorado Conservation Alliance](#)
[Coloradans for Responsible Wildlife Management](#)
[Colorado Outfitters Association](#)
[Colorado State Muzzle Loading Association](#)
[Colorado Trappers & Predator Hunters Association](#)
[Colorado Wildlife Federation](#)
[Keep Routt Wild](#)
[Muley Fanatic Foundation](#)
[National Wildlife Federation](#)
[Safari Club International](#)
[Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership](#)

The Colorado Wildlife Conservation Project is an alliance of diverse wildlife organizations with a common interest in conserving wildlife and wildlife habitats, and in preserving our hunting, angling, and conservation heritage. We are steadfast in our efforts to continue the state's long history of responsible, science-based wildlife management.

Learn more about us at our website: <https://www.cowildlifeconservationproject.org/>

References

1. Gonzales, Rachel. 2023. "Winter In The Northwest: Surviving Today And After The Snow Melts." March 27, 2023. <https://coloradooutdoorsmag.com/2023/03/27/winter-in-the-northwest-part-2/>
2. USDA -NCRS. "Colorado Snow Survey." Accessed April 21, 2023. <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/wcc/home/quicklinks/states/colorado>
3. CPW. 2023. "2023 Big Game License Recommendation Summary By Species." April 14, 2023. https://cpw.state.co.us/Documents/Commission/2023/May/DRAFT_2023_Big_Game_License+Recommendation_Summary-Preview.pdf
4. International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. 2002. "International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies." <https://buffalo.extension.wisc.edu/files/2011/01/Economic-Importance-of-Hunting-in-America.pdf>