



## Background Information on Wolf Reintroduction in Western Colorado and the Tribal Membership Opinion Survey

A Denver-based non-profit organization known as the *Rocky Mountain Wolf Project* is presently working to generate public support for reintroducing wolves into Western Colorado. At this stage of its campaign, the Project is poised to have a wolf reintroduction initiative on the Colorado ballot in 2020. As 2020 approaches, the Project is reaching out to more individuals and organizations across the State – including the Southern Ute Tribe – to garner support. Whether the Tribe should *support*, *oppose*, or *remain neutral* on wolf reintroduction remains to be determined. Recognizing the wide range of opinions that probably exist within the membership, the Wildlife Division and Advisory Board, with the support of Council, decided to conduct a survey to better understand the Tribal membership's views.

Here are some important facts and information you should know at this time:

- The Southern Ute Tribe does *not* have an official position on wolf reintroduction. The Tribe is simply evaluating whether it will support, oppose, or remain neutral on the subject.
- At this time there is no government-approved wolf reintroduction plan in place that details where, when, or how wolf reintroduction would occur. However, it is *highly likely* that part of a wolf reintroduction effort would occur very close to the Southern Ute Reservation, and perhaps even within the Tribe's Brunot Treaty Area, immediately north of the Reservation.
- Wolf reintroduction, if approved, would be led by the State of Colorado, and the Tribe would *in no way* be insulated from the effects of such a program. It is important for the Tribe to engage politically in matters that could directly or indirectly affect the Tribe, its people, and its resources. Wolf reintroduction in Western Colorado falls squarely in that category.

Here are some of the commonly cited pros and cons of wolf reintroduction:

- *Ecological Benefit* – Many scientists suggest that returning a “keystone species” like the wolf can help restore a more natural ecological balance to the land and improve fitness of prey populations like elk.
- *Cultural Connection* – Many Utes may experience a spiritual connection with having the wolf restored back to its native range. Wolf is part of the natural heritage of Colorado and the cultural heritage of the Ute people.
- *Elk Hunting Impact* – Restoring a top-predator to the landscape will unquestionably affect elk populations and elk hunting. Wolves would not decimate elk populations, nor would their impact to elk be discountable.
- *Livestock Impact* – Wolves are known to opportunistically prey upon sheep and cattle, which can result in economic loss and hardship for the livestock producer.

As the Tribe moves forward with gathering information on wolf reintroduction, Tribal Members are encouraged to submit their opinions via the online survey or directly at the Wildlife Division office in Ignacio. Tribal Members can also contact the Wildlife Division with any questions on the biology and management of wolves, or where the Tribe is at with its decision-making on wolf reintroduction.