



Mexican Gray Wolves 2013: The Time For Recovery Is Now

With a single wild population comprising only 75 individuals, all descendants of just seven wild founders of a captive breeding program, the Mexican gray wolf is one of America's most imperiled animals. In the wild these wolves are threatened by illegal killings, legal removals due to conflicts with livestock, and a lack of genetic diversity; but, the biggest threat to their survival is bureaucratic inertia: Those responsible for saving the Mexican gray wolf are not doing what scientists say must be done to recover this rarest wolf. And with so few individuals and such a small genetic base, the clock is running on saving the Mexican gray wolf. Delay means extinction.

Scientific research shows the path to recovery

The Mexican gray wolf is lucky in one respect – recovering the *lobo*, the world's most endangered wolf, has captured the attention of some of the most highly regarded scientists in the field. Published scientific research suggests that the best remaining habitats for Mexican gray wolves are on the northern edge of their historic range – in the Grand Canyon ecoregion, and in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) recovery team has done extensive analyses and population modeling to determine the conditions under which the Mexican gray wolf will be secure enough to be removed from the endangered species list. A draft of the recovery plan that was widely leaked on the Internet and distributed at a public meeting in Arizona indicates that, in order for the Mexican gray wolf to be safe from extinction, at least three core populations are needed, with dispersal among these populations and a total of at least 750 wolves.



Courtesy U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



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FWS proposal ignores science

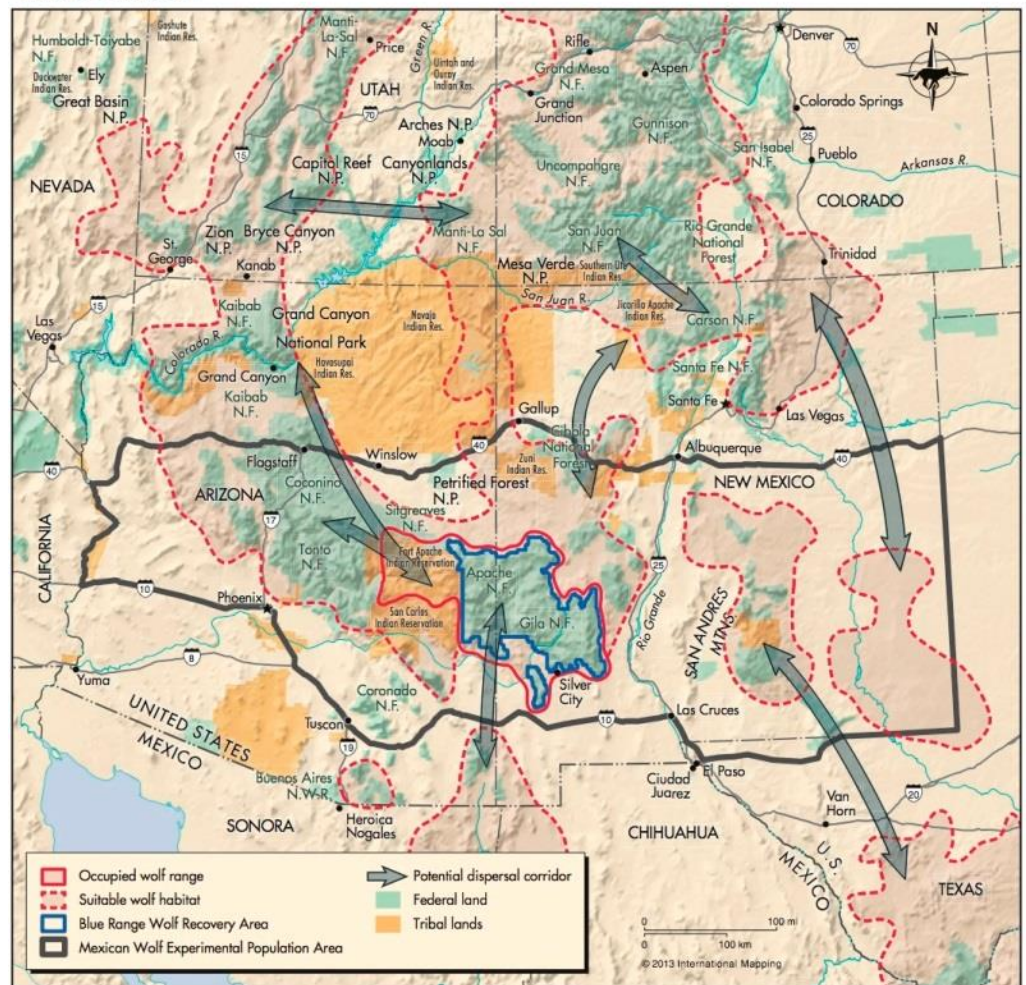
Unfortunately, FWS has introduced a proposal that, while doing some good for the current population, ignores the recovery team's best science and obstructs wolves' moving into suitable habitat

- Currently, wolves are allowed to roam within the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area (BRWRA), a small region in Arizona and New Mexico. The proposal would expand this "box" in which the wolves are allowed to live, but still keep them contained within a bigger "box" called the Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Area (MWEPA).
- Any wolf that leaves the bigger box would be trapped and moved back into it, making the dispersal necessary for recovery impossible.
- Recovery will require at least three core populations, and the habitats that can support the two additional populations are outside of the proposal's box. There is no reason to advance a proposal that continues to place barriers on the road to recovery. This wastes critical time that the wolves just don't have.

What Mexican gray wolves need NOW to recover:

- ***A comprehensive recovery plan.***
Mexican gray wolves haven't had an up-to-date recovery plan in 31 years (1982). The current recovery team has done extensive, rigorous work to determine what needs to be done to save the Mexican gray wolf. A new plan, based on this best science, must be completed and implemented.
- ***Release of new breeding pairs into the wild.***
Numbers are important, but new genes are crucial. In order to overcome the challenges of a severely limited genetic heritage, more of the wolves currently in the captive breeding program need to be released in to the wild.
- ***New core populations.***
Wolves are currently barred from a significant amount of suitable habitat and they need help to establish the new populations that are key to their recovery.

The Southwest



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service needs to take immediate action

The proposal offered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is not a recovery plan for Mexican gray wolves. Instead, it offers the current single population a little breathing room, but at the cost of undercutting and postponing the possibility of recovery.

Time is running out for Mexican gray wolves. The Service cannot continue to take baby steps, further delaying the real and challenging task of establishing the additional populations that Mexican gray wolves so desperately need. While a larger recovery area is helpful, the current single population is unlikely to ever be self-sustaining or viable until it is linked with additional populations. And, although the Service is proposing to classify Mexican gray wolves as “endangered where found,” this label is pointless when the wolves are trapped and picked up if “found” anywhere outside the MWEPA.

Years of research – including that conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s own recovery team scientists – has shown that to recover, Mexican gray wolves will require the establishment of at least three populations, linked by dispersing wolves, in areas with ample suitable habitat. There is no way for this to be a possibility, let alone a reality, when the wolves are forced to remain within the confines of arbitrary map lines, and are punished for stepping toward what instinct tells them is the direction of survival and recovery.