FACT SHEET

Mexican Gray Wolves 2015

The Time for Recovery is NOW!

The Mexican gray wolf is one of America's most imperiled animals – the single wild U.S. population of only 109 individuals, and the handful newly reintroduced in Mexico are all descendants of just seven wild founders of a captive breeding program. In the wild these wolves are threatened by illegal killings, removals from the landscape 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 lobos are not doing what scientists say must be done to recover this rare 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 gray wolf, has captured the attention of some of the most highly regarded scientists in the field, and they have documented what the wolves need to recover. 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 lobo will be secure enough to be removed from the endangered species list. This work has now been peer-reviewed and published, and indicates that, in order for the Mexican gray wolf to be safe from extinction, at least three core populations of lobos are needed, with travel among these populations and a total of at least 750 wolves.

Courtesy U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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Recent FWS actions ignore science

Unfortunately, FWS has adopted new wolf management rules which do some good for the current wild population, but ignore the recovery team's best science and keep wolves from moving into suitable habitat.

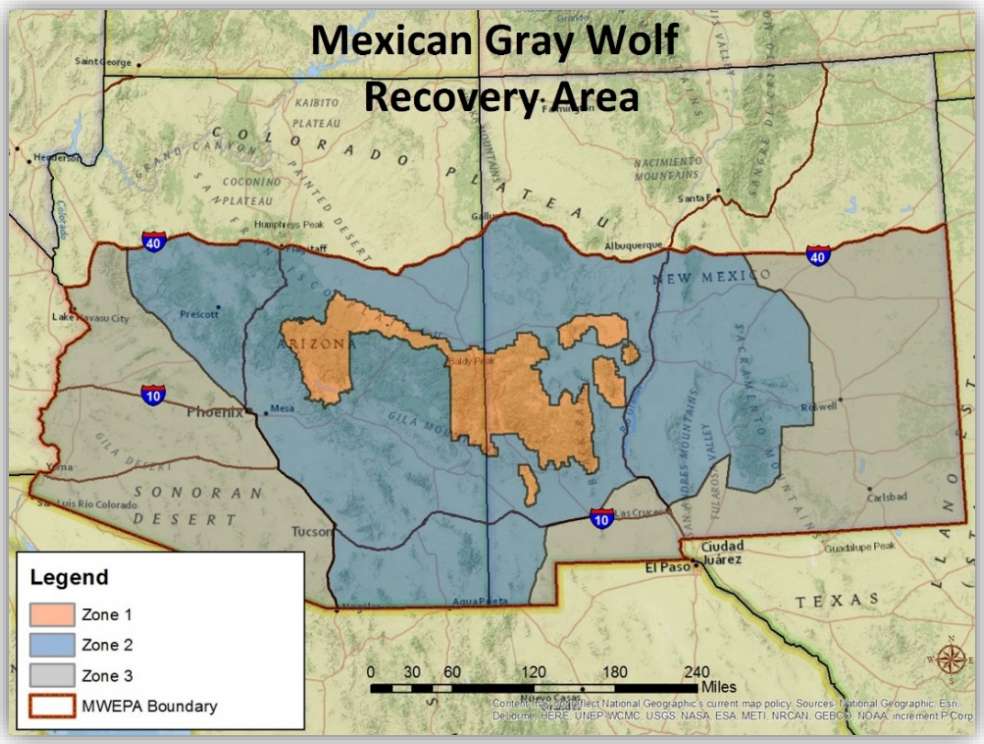
- Currently, wolves can live within the Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Area (MWEPA) in Arizona and New Mexico, but are not allowed to travel into the best areas remaining in the Southwest – which scientists say are essential for their recovery.
- Any wolf that leaves the MWEPA would be trapped 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 MWEPA.
- The new rules allow wolves to be killed for more reasons – even allowing wolves to be killed because the population has reached an arbitrary cap of 325 wolves, a number which is far below the number of wolves that scientists agree is necessary for recovery.

WHAT MEXICAN GRAY WOLVES NEED *NOW* TO RECOVER:

- ***A comprehensive recovery plan.***
  Almost 40 years after ESA listing, the lobos still don't have a legally-required recovery plan. 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 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service must take immediate action

The new rule adopted 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 successful recovery.

Rules that place barriers on the road to recovery are useless. They waste critical time that the wolves just don't have. 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 the new 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. Similarly, the new "release sites" established by the rule are useless as long as the Service drags its feet on actually releasing new wolves.

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.