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Contact: Kevin Bixby, (575) 522-5552, Southwest Environmental Center  
Maggie Howell, (914) 763-2373, Wolf Conservation Center  
Sandy Bahr, (602) 999-5790, Sierra Club – Grand Canyon Chapter  
Emily Renn, (928) 202-1325, Grand Canyon Wolf Recovery Project  
Kirk Robinson, (801) 468-1535, Western Wildlife Conservancy  
Kim Crumbo, (928) 606-5850, Grand Canyon Wildlands Council

## **Endangered Mexican gray wolf population reaches 109**

### **Numbers encouraging, but wolves still far from recovered**

Phoenix, AZ - Today the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) announced that the wild Mexican wolf population has increased to 109 from 83 wolves counted at the end of 2013. While conservationists cheer this good news, they point out that the agency projected there would be 100 wolves in the wilds of eastern Arizona and western New Mexico by 2006. More than a decade later, the total population has finally reached that milestone, still a whisker away from extinction. Due to USFWS's failure to release new wolves from the captive breeding population, the genetic diversity of the wild population remains low, in spite of the increase in numbers.

"More wolves from the same breeding pairs will most likely condemn these wild wolves to eventual extinction," said Southwest Environmental Center executive director Kevin Bixby. "Without new releases into the wild of wolves from captivity, inbreeding poses a significant, but avoidable threat to their survival and recovery."

"With [recent changes to the rules governing the Mexican gray wolf reintroduction](#), the US Fish and Wildlife Service now has the ability to release genetically valuable wolves into New Mexico's Gila Wilderness and they should do so immediately," said Wolf Conservation Center executive director Maggie Howell. Howell's organization is an important participant in the captive breeding program for the Mexican wolf.

"An increase in numbers is always cause for celebration, but a single population of 109 wolves with similar genetics is still a long way from what the best available science says is needed for recovery," said Sandy Bahr, chapter director for Sierra Club's Grand Canyon Chapter. "We need a diversity of wolves in more areas in the wild, and soon."

In a peer-reviewed [article published in Conservation Biology](#) in 2013, scientists wrote that, in order to achieve recovery, there must be at least two more populations of Mexican gray wolves north of I-40 in the Grand Canyon region and the southern Rockies, with movement possible among all three. The scientists also stated that human-caused mortality of the wolves must decrease.

According to Grand Canyon Wolf Recovery Project executive director Emily Renn, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has made these necessary changes impossible with the recently completed revision to the Mexican gray wolf reintroduction rule.

“For years, the Service has stalled completion of a mandatory recovery plan for the Mexican wolf, and, in direct contradiction to the recommendations of scientists on the recovery planning science subgroup, has established rules that keep the wolves below I-40, set a cap on numbers far below what the science says is needed, and loosen restrictions on take, which will result in increased mortality,” said Renn.

Western Wildlife Conservancy Executive Director Kirk Robinson said federal proposals to remove Endangered Species Act protections pose additional threats to the wolves’ recovery.

“The Obama administration has proposed stripping gray wolves’ Endangered Species Act protections nationwide, making it nearly impossible for wolves to resume their natural role in excellent habitats in Utah and Colorado that scientists say are necessary for Mexican wolves to recover,” said Robinson.

Anti-wolf bills sponsored by [Representative Reid Ribble \(R-WI\)](#) and [Representative John Kline \(R-MN\)](#) were introduced February 12, 2015, and wolf supporters fear that between the administration and federal legislation, decisions about wolf management will be turned over to states that are hostile to wolf recovery.

“Pressure is being applied to many members of Congress for legislation to push wolves, even the small, struggling population of Mexican gray wolves, toward extinction. Wolf extinction bills and riders threaten all wolves and undermine the Endangered Species Act. These decisions should be based on the best available science, not politics,” said Kim Crumbo, Grand Canyon Wildlands Council’s conservation director.

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