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## **Endangered Mexican Gray Wolf Rule Would Hinder Species Recovery**

### **Revised Management of Reintroduced Lobos a Risky Roadmap to Extinction**

FLAGSTAFF, ARIZ—The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) released revisions to the federal rule governing endangered Mexican gray wolf reintroduction, which would obstruct the imperiled subspecies' recovery. The Service's [Final Environmental Impact Statement](#) (EIS) and draft record of decision propose alterations to government management of America's only wild population of one of the world's most critically endangered mammals. The changes would expand the wild Mexican wolves' territory but restrict them from repopulating large areas of their former native range, and increase shooting, trapping and removals of the iconic animals.

The EIS and rule differ significantly from the draft versions the Service offered last September for public comment. They ignore much of the best available science on Mexican wolf recovery, instead incorporating demands made by Mexican wolf reintroduction opponents that would threaten the wolves' return to and recovery in the wild.

"We are disappointed in the Fish and Wildlife Service for taking one small step forward and many leaps backward in its approach to recovering one of America's most critically endangered carnivore species," said Drew Kerr, carnivore advocate for WildEarth Guardians. "The federal government is betraying its responsibility by caving to political pressure, ignoring the experts and the best available science, and allowing long-time opponents of the recovery effort to set the agenda for Mexican wolf management."

Many of the new changes to the EIS result from significant pressure from hunting and livestock industry interests hostile to Mexican wolf reintroduction. The Arizona Game and Fish Department even threatened the Service with litigation and retaliatory legislation if their preferred extreme management options were not included in the rule change. As a result, the most recent proposal would allow more killing of endangered Mexican wolves, which already number only 83 confirmed individuals in the wild. Among the new threats to the subspecies' recovery is a provision delegating to state game managers undue influence over deciding

when endangered wolves are “unacceptably impacting” abundant natural prey species, triggering the wolves’ removal.

“Once again, the agency whose responsibility it is to protect endangered species, has refused, for obviously political reasons, to take the actions that the best science identifies as necessary for successful Mexican wolf recovery,” said Kim Vacariu, western director for Wildlands Network.

One of the few positive changes proposed by the Service would finally allow Mexican wolves to be released into and inhabit a larger area of central Arizona and New Mexico. Scientists and Mexican wolf advocates have called for this change for years. However, the Service undermines this improvement by setting a strict restriction on the wolves’ movements north of Interstate 40, eliminating large areas of the subspecies’ historic range from its available habitat.

“The Service’s proposal sets scientifically unsupported, politically based boundaries on the wolves’ movements, ignoring peer-reviewed studies identifying areas north of the artificial and arbitrary I-40 boundary in the Grand Canyon and Southern Rockies regions as necessary for the subspecies’ recovery,” said Emily Renn, executive director of the Grand Canyon Wolf Recovery Project.

The Service’s proposed multi-phase implementation approach would further restrict the expanded reintroduction area by prohibiting Mexican wolves from moving throughout the revised Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Area for another twelve years.

“The Fish and Wildlife Service eliminating two-thirds of the habitat that scientific experts determined to be essential to Mexican wolf recovery has resulted in a rule that is deeply flawed and very disappointing,” said Kim Crumbo, conservation director for the Grand Canyon Wildlands Council. “Ignoring the best available science for political reasons guarantees the Mexican wolf will not fully recover.”

The Service would also restrict the number of Mexican wolves allowed to roam the wild by capping the reintroduced population at 300 to 325 individuals regardless of the impact to the subspecies’ prospects for recovery. This change is particularly troubling because the Service has stonewalled completion of an Endangered Species Act-required Mexican wolf recovery plan, delaying the adoption of scientifically supported and legally vetted population goals for the subspecies. A recent lawsuit—brought by conservationists, facilities that house and breed captive Mexican wolves, and a former federal Mexican wolf reintroduction coordinator—seeks to compel the Service to develop a plan that would set the long overdue scientifically and legally based objectives for the subspecies’ recovery.

“It is disappointing that the Fish and Wildlife Service is failing these endangered wolves by ignoring what they need to truly recover,” said Sandy Bahr, chapter director for the Sierra Club’s Grand Canyon (Arizona) Chapter. “Arbitrary borders and population caps, and excessive killing and removal of wolves solely to benefit the hunting and livestock industries are the last things Mexican wolves need. The Service should take a hard look at the Endangered Species Act and take actions that are consistent with the law rather than appeasing interests that would prefer to see wolves eliminated from the wild once again.”

“Many Great Old Broads for Wilderness live in the White Mountains or frequently visit hoping to catch a glimpse of a wolf, but with only 83 in the wild we rarely, if ever, see one,” said Billie Hughes of Great Old Broads for Wilderness. “I fear this management proposal dooms our grandchildren to live in a world without wild Mexican wolves as I did as a child. Wolves belong here and we can live with them.”

[A thirty-day comment period for the EIS and draft rule commences today and will close on December 27, 2014.](#)

#### BACKGROUND:

Mexican gray wolves are the most distinct subspecies of gray wolf. Once found throughout northern Mexico and the American Southwest, humans drove the subspecies to extinction in the wild in the United States by 1970. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service protected Mexican wolves under the Endangered Species Act in 1976. At that time, only a handful of Mexican wolves remained in the world.

The entire remaining population stems from only seven founders. The subspecies’ close encounter with extinction left a lasting legacy of dangerously impoverished genetic diversity, leading to decreased resilience to further threats. A captive breeding program increased their numbers and in 1998 the Service began reintroducing them to the wild. Despite an initial federal reintroduction project timeline that called for at least 100 wild Mexican wolves by 2006, sixteen years after reintroduction commenced only 83 confirmed Mexican wolves, including only five breeding pairs, roam a small part of their native range.

The best scientific evidence calls for a minimum of three genetically linked subpopulations of Mexican wolves in the Southwest—including the Southern Rockies and Grand Canyon regions—numbering at least 750 individuals for the subspecies to approach a viable wild population. The Service has acknowledged that killing and permanent removal of reintroduced wolves have contributed significantly to the agency’s failure to meet reintroduction goals.

Read the Environmental Impact Statement

here: [http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/mexicanwolf/pdf/EIS\\_for\\_the\\_Proposed\\_Revision\\_to\\_the\\_Regulations\\_for\\_the\\_Nonessential\\_Experimental\\_Population\\_of\\_the\\_Mexican\\_Wolf.pdf](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/mexicanwolf/pdf/EIS_for_the_Proposed_Revision_to_the_Regulations_for_the_Nonessential_Experimental_Population_of_the_Mexican_Wolf.pdf)

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