

# Goals discussed at wolf recovery meeting

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Scott Turner - El Defensor Chieftain Editor Jul 21, 2017

If the Mexican gray wolf population averages 320 in the wild in the United States over an eight-year period, the animal could be removed from the endangered species list.

That is one of the goals of the Mexican Wolf draft recovery plan, said Tracy Melbihess of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at a meeting in Truth or Consequences on Thursday night.

The figure might be a bit high for those representing the ranching, farming, hunting and outfitter guide industries.

And it's a bit low for wildlife activists in attendance.

Melbihess said the number could take between 25 to 35 years to reach. The plan also includes genetic diversity goals.

Socorro County resident Mary Katherine Ray said she was troubled by the number set for the goal.

"It does seem really, really low," Ray said.

Socorro County Manager Bruce Swingle, who also serves as the chair of the Middle Rio Grande Valley Economic Development Association, voiced a concern about how a growing population of the wolves could affect the local economy.

Melbihess said if the Mexican gray wolf is removed from the endangered species list, control will be returned to the states and Native American tribes in the region.

The plan also sets a goal for 170 Mexican wolves living in the wild. The Mexican wolf population in Mexico is considered to be more genetically diverse.

The count at the end of 2016 had the U.S. population at 113. Wolves released through 1998 have been released in areas of the Apache National Forest, Cibola National Forest and Gila National Forest in Arizona and New Mexico, including areas in Catron and Socorro counties.

In Mexico, federal agencies are focusing on the Sierra Madre Occidental Mountains in Sonora, Durango, and Chihuahua. The current population is 23.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is now seeking public input and peer review on the draft revised plan through a public comment period and series of public meetings. The comment period will remain open through August 29.

Another public meeting is scheduled Saturday in Albuquerque from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. at the Crowne Plaza at 1901 University Boulevard NE.

More details on the Mexican wolf draft recovery plan meeting will be featured in next Thursday's edition of El Defensor Chieftain.

For more information on the Mexican Wolf Reintroduction Program, visit:  
<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/mexicanwolf/> or [www.azgfd.gov/wolf](http://www.azgfd.gov/wolf)