

For immediate release
October 27, 2021

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Mexican wolves see improved but imperfect management rule

Unscientific population cap is removed but lobos remain barred from their historical range

SILVER CITY, NM—Today, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed a [new rule](#) for managing the recovery of endangered Mexican gray wolves. In a major improvement for *lobos*, the wild population would no longer be arbitrarily capped at 320 wolves. And the Service would have more specific objectives for improving the genetic health of the population. Finally, there would be increased restrictions on wolf killings as those objectives are being met.

But wildlife advocates and conservationists remain unconvinced that the rule is adequate to achieve full recovery of the species. Mexican wolves will continue to be removed or killed if they re-enter their historic habitat north of Interstate 40. And, in an exercise in mental gymnastics, the new proposed rule continues to classify the only wild population of Mexican wolves in the U.S. — 186 at last count — as “nonessential” to the recovery of the species in the wild.

“While the proposed rule is an improvement over the blatantly illegal 2015 version, it’s clear that anti-wolf politics still override science in certain aspects of the rule,” said Chris Smith, Southwest wildlife advocate for WildEarth Guardians. “Killing or removing wolves who go into their home range north of Interstate 40 is so obviously political — not to mention completely disconnected from science — that we have no choice but to remain skeptical that this rule is in the best interest of *lobos*’ recovery.”

“We’re analyzing the Service’s proposed revision, and while at first glance, it appears to address some of the concerns that led to our 2018 court victory – such as the arbitrary population cap and excessive levels of legal killing at the behest of livestock and hunting interests – it still inhibits Mexican wolves’ ability to truly recover throughout their suitable, historic habitats across the Southwest,” said Kelly Nokes, Shared Earth wildlife attorney for the Western Environmental Law Center. “We are eager to provide our perspective in the upcoming 90-day comment period and we stand ready to return to court on behalf of *lobos* if the final rule is insufficient to conserve this critically imperiled species.”

“We appreciate the many steps forward this rule revision would take for the recovery of the Lobo,” said Logan Glasenapp, staff attorney for New Mexico Wild, “but we remain concerned that anti-wolf interests continue to dominate the thinking, strategy, and discourse around the ever-uphill battle this species faces. Wolves belong.”

WildEarth Guardians, New Mexico Wild, Friends of Animals, and the Western Environmental Law Center were among groups that [successfully sued](#) the Service over its 2015 rule, leading to the new, court-ordered proposal.

The Service will take public comments on the proposed rule for 90 days after it is officially published in the coming days. Wildlife advocates hope that wolves will be allowed to roam free and protected north of Interstate 40 boundary in the final rule.

Mexican gray wolves face tremendous barriers to recovery in their historical range. Human-caused mortalities (including poaching and illegal killings), Trump's border wall, and an incredibly small gene pool all have *lobos* clinging to survival. The best available science indicates that real recovery would see three distinct but interconnected populations of at least 200 wolves each spanning the Southwest. The southern Rockies and the Grand Canyon area are both deemed highly suitable for Mexican wolves.

BACKGROUND:

The *lobo*, or Mexican wolf, is the smallest, most genetically distinct, and one of the rarest subspecies of gray wolf. The species was listed under the Endangered Species Act in 1978, but recovery efforts have largely foundered because the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has yet to implement scientifically recommended recovery actions.

Although *lobos* once widely roamed across the southwestern U.S. and Mexico, the Mexican wolf was purposefully eradicated from the U.S. on behalf of American livestock, hunting, and trapping interests. Recognizing the Mexican gray wolf's extreme risk of extinction, the Service placed it on the federal endangered species list in 1976.

In 1998, after the few remaining wolves were put into captivity in an attempt to save the species, the Service released 11 Mexican wolves to a small area on the border of Arizona and New Mexico now known as the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area. The reintroduced population has limped along ever since, with illegal killings and sanctioned removals subverting recovery.

Mexican wolves are at tremendous risk due to their small population size, limited gene pool, government shooting and trapping, and illegal killings.

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