

Mexican wolf numbers allowed to rise; legislators call for lethal removal

<https://dchieftain.com/mexican-wolf-numbers-allowed-to-rise-legislators-call-for-lethal-removal/>

Story by [John Larson, El Defensor Chieftain](#) | May 19, 2022

A revision to the regulation limiting the number of Mexican gray wolves in the wild was released by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on Friday. The service had capped the population of wolves that were allowed to roam the wild in New Mexico and Arizona. Under the new plan, the wolf population will be allowed to grow beyond its current limit of 325 wolves over eight years.

Additionally, 22 wolves will be released from captivity to foster greater genetic diversity.

A final environmental impact statement is the basis for the ruling, which also temporarily restricts some federal, state and private wolf-killing.

“Based on end-of-year counts, we will manage to achieve and sustain a population average greater than or equal to 320 wolves in Arizona and New Mexico,” the decision states. “This average must be achieved over an eight-year period, the population must exceed 320 Mexican wolves each of the last three years of the eight years, and the annual population growth rate averaged over the eight-year period must demonstrate a stable or increasing population, as calculated by a geometric mean.”

The agency’s action follows a 2018 court order that U.S. Fish and Wildlife rewrite parts of its Mexican wolf recovery plan. It also temporarily restricts some justifications for killing the animals.

Conservations groups, including two plaintiffs in the lawsuit, Defenders of Wildlife and the Center for Biological Diversity, endorsed the inclusion of additional measures to minimize vehicle accidents.

The Center for Biological Diversity described the rule change as a step forward, but one that lacks the urgency needed to realistically help the wolves, claiming that it is unclear whether the newly introduced wolves will successfully breed with wild populations.

“Mexican gray wolves have won a reprieve from a planned massacre, but their hopes to find unrelated mates are being dashed at the same time,” said Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity in a statement. “It’s disappointing that the federal government still refuses to replenish the priceless genetic diversity lost through its own mismanagement of these wolves.”

The proposal outlines several additions to the recovery action plan that includes increasing education and outreach to communities where Mexican wolves live, adding a greater law enforcement presence in so-called “mortality hot spots,” installing signage near roads to reduce vehicle deaths, and using livestock avoidance measures near ranches to reduce conflict with cattle.

Another outreach effort will be to distribute materials that emphasize the difference between coyotes and wolves to avoid confusion. Since coyotes are hunted year-round, this could reduce instances where hunters shoot endangered Mexican wolves by mistake.

“The most important measure is to end the U.S. government facilitation of these illegal killings,” Robinson stated. “And they’re facilitating it through providing telemetry receivers, that are pre-programmed by the government to the radio frequencies from the wolves’ radio collars, to nongovernmental individuals, including to people who have sworn their enmity to the wolves.”

Two people who had such receivers have pled guilty to crimes associated with illegally killing Mexican wolves, Robinson said.

Meanwhile, State Representative Rebecca Dow sent a letter in March to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service asking that a ranching constituent be given a permit to kill wolves on account of two reported depredations, “on the North Palomas Allotment ... near the Seco release site in my district. Specifically, my constituents lost a yearling heifer and a calf as a result of the two separate kill incidents.”

Dow also requested that the owners of the cattle be compensated for their losses as a result of the depredation.

“Ranching is a critical part of the culture and economy of New Mexico and logically, as reintroduced packs of Mexican Gray wolves have grown, so have the number of depredations, leaving New Mexican ranchers increasingly more vulnerable to losses,” Dow stated in the letter. “The depredation problem is growing increasingly worse and it is time to address the problem through the mechanisms provided via federal regulations.”

Likewise, two weeks ago, 2nd District U.S. Representative Yvette Herrell appealed in a letter to the USFWS to kill the entire Seco Creek Pack.

“The Seco Creek Pack is now terrorizing constituents of mine in Sierra County and is responsible for at least five confirmed livestock depredations and most likely countless others that are yet to be confirmed,” Herrell’s letter stated.

“Mitigation measures, like hazing and the usage of range riders, have not worked in protecting my constituents from harm. In fact, they usually just move the problem to the property or grazing allotment of another of my constituents,” Herrell stated. “For these reasons, along with the fact these wolves have been non-lethally removed in the past, I call on the USFWS to take the necessary action of lethally removing the Seco Creek Pack.”

Mexican wolves were once widespread throughout the American Southwest. In the late 1800s, however, they were the subject of an eradication campaign because of conflicts with the ranching industry. By the mid-1900s, Mexican wolves had been effectively eliminated from the United States, and populations in Mexico were severely reduced. Following the passage of the Endangered Species Act in 1973, Mexican wolves were listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as an endangered species in 1976, thereby prompting recovery efforts to save the species from extinction.

Pups are now being born, including in places that wolves last consistently occupied in the 1920s. Multiple wolves now live in the San Mateo Mountains of west-central New Mexico. A lone female has established a home range west of Albuquerque. USFWS loans telemetry devices to ranchers so they’re empowered to know when wolves are near.

Today, 196 Mexican gray wolves remain in the wild in New Mexico and Arizona.