



## MEXICAN WOLF

### Introduction

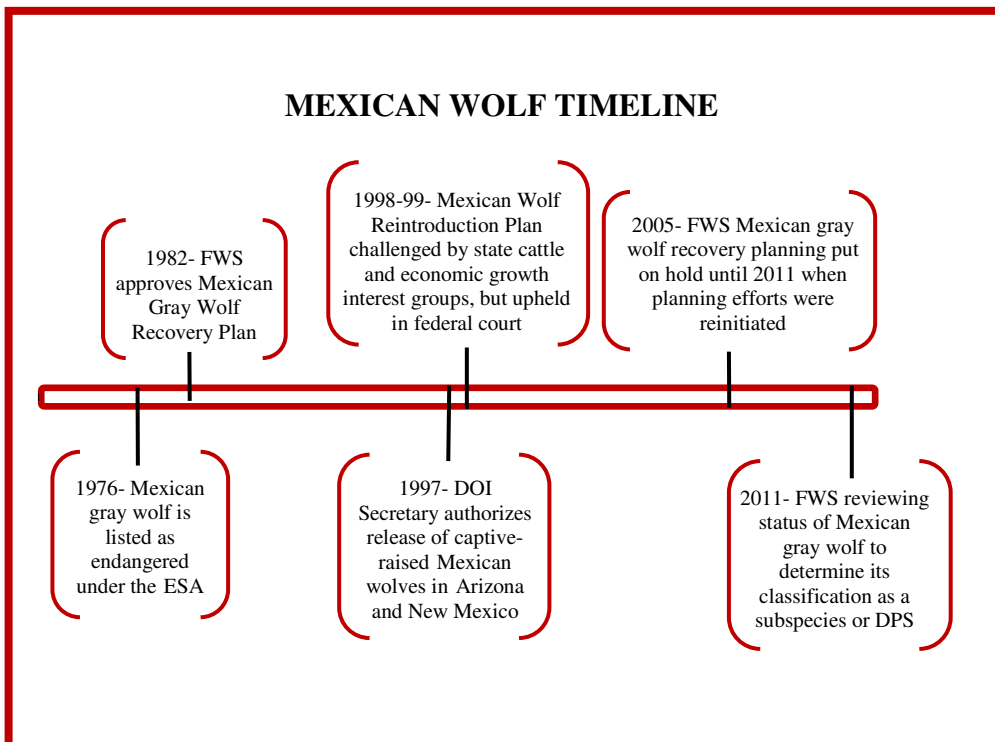
The Mexican wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*) historically ranged across portions of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Mexico.<sup>1</sup> These wolves were effectively eliminated from the U.S. by 1970 as a result of prey and habitat loss combined with extermination efforts by citizens and government entities desiring to decrease predation on livestock and game animals.<sup>2</sup> In 1979, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) established a Mexican Wolf Recovery Team, which began a captive breeding program in 1981 using the last remaining wild wolves in Mexico. Active reintroductions of these wolves into the United States began in 1998.<sup>3</sup> All wild Mexican wolves currently found in the southwestern U.S.—a minimum population of 50 individuals at the end of 2010<sup>4</sup>—are the product of that reintroduction program.

### Ecology

Mexican wolves are the smallest and most genetically distinct of all gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) subspecies.<sup>1</sup> Adults weigh between 23 to 37 kg (50-80 lbs) and are approximately 1.7 m (5.5 ft) long from head to tail—about the size of a German shepherd dog. Mexican wolves are patchy black, brown to cinnamon, or cream colored. Although individual coloration varies, there are no entirely black Mexican wolves.<sup>4</sup> These wolves live in extended family groups with only one pair of adults reproducing.<sup>1</sup> They typically are the top predators within their ecosystem and have a diverse diet, primarily comprised of medium- to large-hoofed mammals and occasionally small mammals.<sup>1</sup>



**Mexican Wolf**

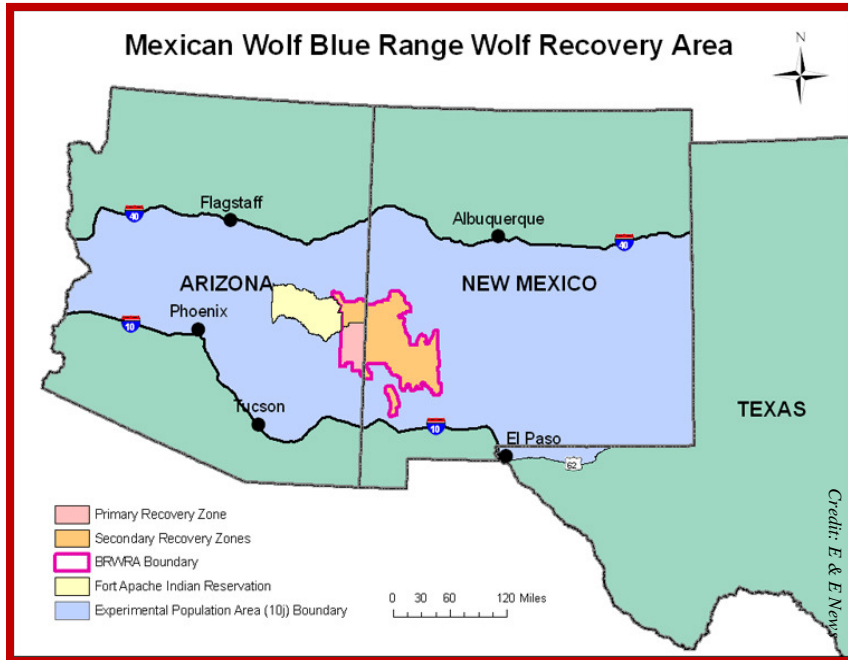


### Classification

The gray wolf was listed as endangered in 1974, with the Mexican gray wolf subspecies listed in 1976.<sup>5</sup> The gray wolf has since undergone delisting and relisting in parts of the Northwestern and Midwestern U. S.<sup>6</sup> In August 2010, the FWS issued a notice to review whether the Mexican wolf, though protected under the ESA, should be classified as a separate subspecies or a distinct population segment (DPS) of gray wolf.<sup>7</sup> In October 2011, 5 Mexican gray wolves were released just south of the U.S.-Mexico border in an effort to boost the wolves' population throughout its historic range.

*"We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes—something known only to her and to the mountain. I was young then, and full of trigger-itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters' paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view."*

– Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (1949)



## Conservation

Conservation efforts began in 1981 with a bi-national captive breeding program between the U.S. and Mexico, established with several wolves captured in Mexico. The FWS approved the Mexican Gray Wolf Recovery Plan in 1982. In 1998, the first Mexican wolves from the program were released into the wild in the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area in eastern Arizona, with the primary goal of establishing a self-sustaining population of at least 100 individuals.<sup>8</sup> The released wolves and their offspring are classified as a “non-essential, experimental population” by the FWS. A non-essential, experimental population is treated as “threatened” under the ESA when on federal lands, but has no special protections elsewhere. This designation

indicates that the population is not essential to the continued existence of the species (i.e., gray wolf) and provides for greater leeway in management strategies, including those that reduce stakeholder conflicts (e.g., euthanizing wolves that come into direct contact with livestock or private property owners).

Despite reintroduction efforts by federal, state, and tribal partners, the current population of Mexican wolves remains small. With a current minimum population of 50 wild wolves and a minimum of two breeding pairs, there is little buffer between Mexican wolves and extinction in the wild.<sup>9</sup> Even the goal of at least 100 wolves in the designated recovery area may be insufficient. Genetic evidence suggests that a much larger population size and range would be more appropriate to ensure adequate recovery of this subspecies of gray wolf.<sup>10,11</sup>

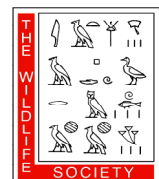
The FWS recently convened a new Recovery Team that will determine recovery criteria for the Mexican wolf.<sup>12</sup> Currently the greatest cause of decline among wild Mexican wolves is direct mortality by humans. Despite broad public support for Mexican wolf recovery in Arizona (77% ± 4.4%)<sup>13</sup> and New Mexico (69% ± 4.4%),<sup>13</sup> greater efforts must be made to minimize negative encounters with humans.



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## THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

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For a complete bibliography of references for this fact sheet and others related to wolf biology and management in the United States and Canada, please visit The Wildlife Society's Human-Wildlife Conflict page at [www.wildlife.org](http://www.wildlife.org).