



# Mexican Gray Wolf

## Fact Sheet

### Southwest Region

#### Mexican Gray Wolf

The Mexican gray wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*) is the southernmost occurring, rarest, and most genetically distinct subspecies of gray wolf in North America. It once occurred in the mountainous regions of the Southwest from central Mexico throughout portions of Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. Aggressive predator control programs nearly eliminated the Mexican wolf, or “lobo” as the Spanish-speaking people called it. A captive-breeding program, implemented in 1980, saved the Mexican wolf from extinction.

Most of our information about the Mexican wolf comes from trappers’ journals and reports because wild Mexican wolf populations were exterminated before they were scientifically studied. A typical Mexican wolf weighs between 50-80 pounds, is about 5 ½ feet in length including the tail (German Shepard size), and has a richly-colored coat of buff, gray, rust, and black. Like all wolves, the Mexican wolf is a social creature with a complex system of communication maintained through vocalizations, body posture, and scent marking. Known prey for Mexican wolves includes elk, mule deer, and white-tailed deer, but wolves will also occasionally kill livestock.

Recovery efforts for the Mexican wolf began when it was listed as endangered in 1976. A Mexican wolf recovery team was convened in 1979 to write the Recovery Plan, which was approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) in 1982. A new recovery team was formed in 2003 to conduct recovery planning in the southwest and revise the Recovery Plan to include downlisting and delisting criteria, which were lacking in the original plan.

The captive population numbers about 275 animals, and is managed by over 45 zoos and wildlife sanctuaries throughout the United States and Mexico. In March 1997, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Interior approved a plan to restore Mexican wolves to a portion

of their historic range in Arizona and New Mexico. The final environmental impact statement was completed in December 1996 after 14 public meetings, three formal public hearings, and analysis of over 18,000 comments from other agencies, organizations, and citizens.

In March 1998, the Service and its cooperators, Arizona Game and Fish Department, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services, and USDA-Forest Service released three family groups of Mexican wolves into the “primary recovery zone” on public lands within the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest in eastern Arizona. Since then, family groups have been released as necessary and will continue until natural reproduction sustains wild population growth. In 2002, the White Mountain Apache Tribe also became a formal cooperator, and the first release of wolves onto the Fort Apache Indian Reservation occurred in 2003.

Reintroduced wolves are allowed to disperse throughout the “secondary recovery zone” in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest and the adjacent Gila National Forest in New Mexico. The two forests are designated the “Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area.” Additionally, the 2002 cooperative agreement with the White Mountain Apache Tribe allows for wolf dispersal onto the Fort Apache Indian Reservation. Released wolves and their offspring are designated a “nonessential experimental population” in a special regulation (rule), which defines management guidelines, including provisions for removal of wolves that depredate livestock.

In April 2003, the Service changed the classification of the gray wolf under the Endangered Species Act from endangered to threatened in portions of the lower 48 states. They also established three “Distinct Population Segments” (DPS) for the gray wolf that encompasses the entire historic range of wolves in the lower 48 states and Mexico. This action did not change the status of Mexican wolves, and they continue to be classified as nonessential or endangered under the Southwestern Gray Wolf DPS. Please visit <http://midwest.fws.gov/wolf/fnl-rule> for more information regarding the reclassification rule.



*Mexican gray wolf at the California Wolf Center.*

Photograph by California Wolf Center

For more information on the Mexican wolf program, contact the Interagency Field Office at 928/339-4329 or 1-888-459-9653, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at 505/346-2525, the Arizona Game and Fish Department at 928/367-4281, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish at 505/476-8101, the Fort Apache Indian Reservation at 928/338-4385, or visit the Mexican gray wolf web page: <http://mexicanwolf.fws.gov> or at <http://azgfd.com>.