

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Southwest Region
July 2014

Fact Sheet #2

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the *Proposed Revision to the Nonessential Experimental Population of the Mexican Wolf (Canis lupus baileyi)*



Scoping

On June 13, 2013 we published a proposed rule in the Federal Register to revise our existing Mexican wolf nonessential experimental population designation in Arizona and New Mexico, *Proposed Revision To the Nonessential Experimental Population of the Mexican Wolf* (78 FR 35719) (proposed rule). A new Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS for the *Proposed Revision to the Nonessential Experimental Population of the Mexican Wolf (Canis lupus baileyi)* with an accompanying news release was published in the Federal Register on August 5, 2013 (78 FR 47268). We announced that we were continuing the scoping process for this EIS that we began in 2007 and we solicited comments from the public, government agencies, Tribes, industry, the scientific community, or any other interested parties concerning the scope of the EIS, pertinent issues to address, and alternatives that should be analyzed. Specifically, we were interested in comments on the preliminary draft EIS statement of our purpose and need, our proposed action and alternatives, and the alternatives that we considered but were not bringing forward for further analysis in a draft EIS.

Two public hearings on the proposed rule were held during the scoping period. The first was held in Albuquerque, New Mexico on November 20, 2013, and the second in Pinetop, Arizona on December 3, 2013.

Twenty seven federal and state agencies, local governments, and tribes formalized their participation as a Cooperating Agency by signing Memorandums of Understanding with the Service in 2013. As part of our scoping process, we established an Interdisciplinary Project Team with representatives from cooperating agencies, tribes and stakeholders, and local governments. We also attended formal and informal meetings with representatives of the potentially affected public, local governments, tribes, agencies, and organizations.

We received over 7000 comments during scoping. Substantive comments were considered in making new revisions to the proposed 10(j) rule and the preparation of the Draft EIS, including our development of the proposed action and alternatives and our analysis of potential environmental impacts.

Our Revised Proposed Rule and our Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)

We are now proposing a new revision to the existing nonessential experimental population designation of the Mexican wolf under section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act (1998 Final 10(j) rule). Our Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) analyzes the possible impacts on the human environment from

our proposed revisions and from our proposal to extend the authority of the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program's ESA Section 10(a)(1)(A) research and recovery permit to areas that are outside of the Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Area. On July 25, 2014 we published a Notice of Availability (NOA) for the proposed rule *Proposed Revision to the Nonessential Experimental Population of the Mexican Wolf* in the Federal Register and announced the availability of the Draft EIS (DEIS) for the *Proposed Revision to the Nonessential Experimental Population of the Mexican Wolf (Canis lupus bailey)*.

Our Purpose and Need for Action

The **purpose** of our proposed action is to further the conservation of the Mexican wolf by improving the effectiveness of the Reintroduction Project in managing the experimental population. We intend to do this by: (1) modifying the geographic boundaries in which Mexican wolves are managed south of Interstate-40 in Arizona and New Mexico under section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act; (2) modifying the management regulations that govern the initial release, translocation, removal and take (see the definition of "take" provided in the List of Definitions) of Mexican wolves, and; (3) issuing a section 10(a)(1)(A) permit for the MWEPA and areas outside of the MWEPA.

Revisions to the 1998 Final Rule and the section 10(a)(1)(A) permit are **needed** because: (1) under the current regulations we will not be able to achieve the necessary population growth, distribution and recruitment that would contribute to the persistence of, and improve the genetic variation within, the experimental population; (2) there is a potential for Mexican wolves to disperse into southern Arizona and New Mexico from reintroduction areas in the states of Sonora and Chihuahua in northern Mexico, and; (3) certain provisions lack clarity, are inadequate, and/or limit the efficacy and flexibility of our management of the experimental population of Mexican wolves.

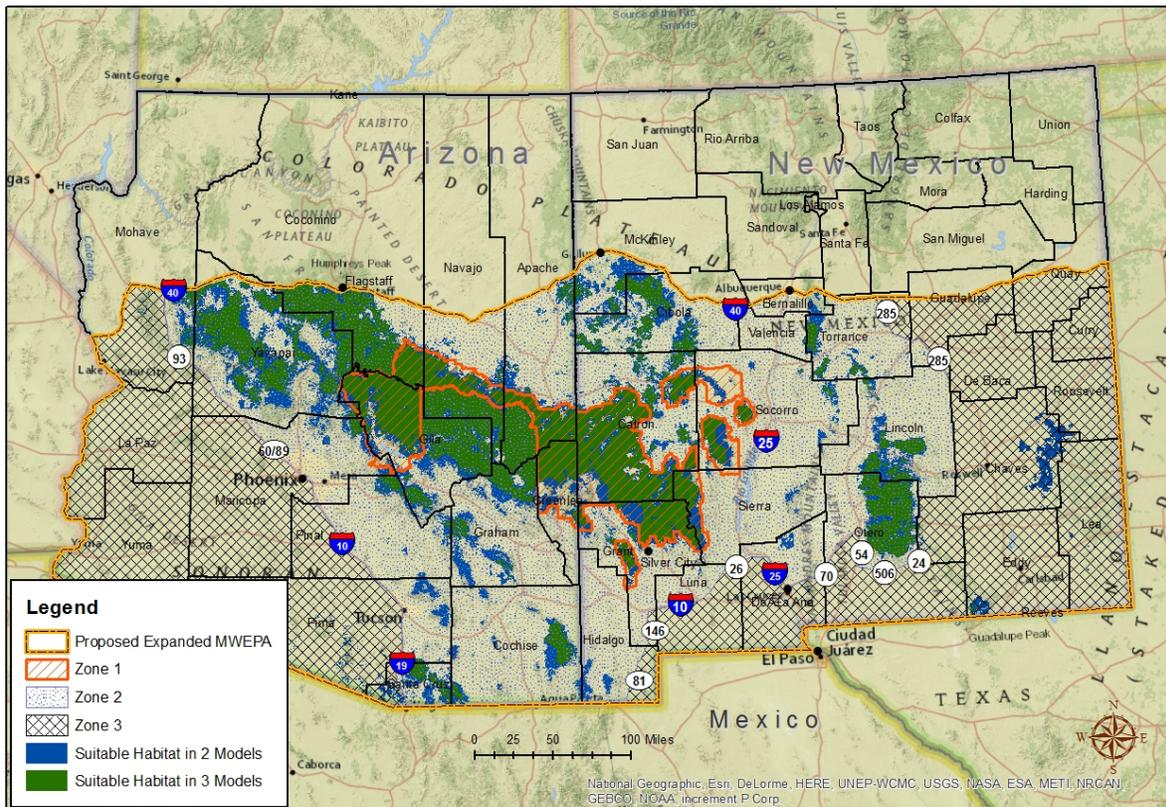
Our Proposed Action and Alternatives

We are proposing revisions to the regulations established for the Mexican wolf reintroduction in the 1998 Final Rule and the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program's section 10(a)(1)(A) research and recovery permit (TE-091551-8 dated 04/04/2013). In summary we propose to:

- Modify the geographic boundaries in which Mexican wolves are managed south of Interstate-40 in Arizona and New Mexico under section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act
- Modify the management regulations that govern the initial release, translocation, removal and take of Mexican wolves.
- Issue a section 10(a)(1)(A) permit for the MWEPA and areas outside of the MWEPA.

These actions would be implemented through a Final Nonessential Experimental Rule, an Endangered Species Act (Act) Section 10(a)(1)(A) research and recovery permit, and provision of federal funding. Four alternatives, including the no action alternative, are brought forward for further analysis in the DEIS.

ALTERNATIVE ONE: BRWRA Expansion; MWEPA Expansion with Management Zones; Modified Provisions for Take of Mexican Wolves. Alternative One is our proposed action and preferred alternative. It includes the proposed revisions to the 1998 Final Rule that are in our revised proposed rule. It also includes our proposal to revise and reissue the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program section 10(a)(1)(A) permit so that it applies to both the MWEPA and areas outside the MWEPA.



ALTERNATIVE TWO: MWEPA Expansion with Management Zones; Modified Provisions for Take of Mexican Wolves. Alternative Two would include all the initiatives proposed under Alternative One except under this alternative we would **not** expand the geographic boundaries of the BRWRA.

ALTERNATIVE THREE: BRWRA Expansion, MWEPA Expansion with Management Zones. Alternative Three would include all the initiatives proposed under Alternative One except under this alternative we would **not** include proposed management changes that would modify the regulations for take of Mexican wolves within the MWEPA.

ALTERNATIVE FOUR: No Action. Under Alternative Four no changes to the 1998 Final 10(j) Rule for the Mexican wolf or the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program’s section 10(a)(1)(A) research and recovery permit (TE-091551-8 dated 04/04/2013) would be made.

Environmental Consequences

We determined that the proposed action and alternatives would have no effects on aesthetics/visual resources, air quality, cultural/historic resources, climate change, community services, geology/soils, noise, resident population, solid/hazardous waste, transportation/parking, utilities, and water resources. No further analysis of impacts to these resources areas was made in the DEIS. We focused the description of the affected environment only on those resource areas potentially subject to impacts in the project study area. These resource areas were Land Use, Biological Resources, Economic Activity, Human Health/Public Safety and Environmental Justice.

We expect implementation of our proposed action and alternatives to, over time, result in both the growth and the wider distribution of the experimental population of Mexican wolves. We expect the intensity of the potential effects to vary, both temporally and spatially, within the regional and local context of the project study area. Based on our analysis the proposed action and alternatives would have no significant direct or indirect effects in proposed management Zone 1 or 2 on Biological Resources (Vegetation), Biological Resources (Other predator and non-ungulate wild prey species), Economic Activity (Tourism), Land Use, and Human Health/Public Safety. We do predict that implementation of the proposed action and alternatives could have less than significant direct adverse effects in proposed management Zones 1 and 2 on: Biological Resources (native wild prey species, specifically elk) and Economic Activity (Ranching/Livestock Production). We also predict that implementation of the proposed action and alternatives will have less than significant indirect beneficial effects to Biological Resources (scavenger species) and direct beneficial effects to Biological Resources (Special status species, specifically the federally listed Mexican wolf). We do not expect any of our alternatives to result in disproportionately high and adverse impacts to any population groups of concern identified in our environmental justice analysis. We predict that less than significant adverse cumulative impacts on ranching/livestock production would occur from the proposed action and alternatives when added to the aggregate effects of human caused global climate change. We do not expect that implementation of the proposed action and alternatives would permanently narrow the range of beneficial uses of the human environment or adversely affect the long term productivity of the project area nor do we expect that it would result in a significant irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources.

Public Involvement

Public participation and input is an essential element of the NEPA process. We have made the DEIS and the proposed 10(j) rule available for public review for a 60 days. Two public informational sessions and two public hearings on the proposed rule and DEIS are scheduled:

- Aug. 11, 2014 at Hon-Dah Conference Center, 777 Highway 260, Pinetop, Ariz. (3 miles outside of Pinetop at the Junction of Hwy 260 and Hwy 73)
- Aug. 13, 2014 at the Civic Center, 400 W. Fourth Street, Truth or Consequences, N.M.

Informational session will be held from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., followed by a public hearing for the recording of oral comments from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

We will use comments received on the Draft EIS in our development of a Final EIS.

For More Information and to Provide Comments

We have developed a webpage for NEPA planning on the FWS Southwest Region Ecological Services Mexican Wolf Recovery Program website. In cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Southwest Region, we have also established information repositories at the Supervisor Offices for the National Forests throughout the project study area. Links to the National Forests with the addresses of the supervisor offices are available on: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/r3>. For additional information or to access documents that we have made available for review with instructions on how to submit comments please visit our website:

http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/mexicanwolf/NEPA_713.cfm

Photographs courtesy of: the Endangered Wolf Center, the Mexican Wolf Interagency Field Team, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.