

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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ANOTHER ENDANGERED WOLF

Three subspecies of the gray or timber wolf now are on the list of endangered wildlife, Keith M. Schreiner, Associate Director of Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today, as the Service published final rules in the Federal Register determining the Mexican wolf officially to be an endangered species.

"We hope this action can do for the Mexican wolf what similar attention appears to be doing for its northern cousin, the eastern timber wolf," Schreiner said.

Only about 200 Mexican wolves--the smallest of the timber wolf clan in North America--are estimated to exist in widely scattered packs in the high country of Mexico and perhaps the Southwest United States. These all are subject to intensive human pressure.

The animal originally ranged from southern Arizona to west Texas and throughout the northern part of Mexico except Baja California and the coastal lowlands. Although they were essentially eliminated from the United States many years ago, Mexican wolves regularly crossed the border into Arizona and New Mexico through the early 1950's. Today, north of the border the species is a rare wanderer.

This wolf is protected by national law in Mexico and cannot be taken lawfully except by special permit issued by the Federal Director General of Wildlife, but the regulation is difficult to enforce and not generally

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applied. In Arizona it has been protected by regulation, but it has received no legal protection in Texas or New Mexico.

As recently as 1944 the animals still occurred over the greater part of their original range in Mexico, and little effort had been made by the Mexican people to eliminate them. With the sale by lumber companies of extensive tracts of land to cattle ranchers, however, the situation began to change. Within a few years the wolf reportedly was eliminated from the eastern part of its former range in Mexico and was decreasing in the western portion.

The spread of agriculture and livestock, and the construction of new roads giving access to remote areas led to a decline in wild prey--deer, antelope, and bighorn sheep--as well as to intensified efforts to eradicate the wolves. They were poisoned and trapped in large numbers. A joint Mexican-U.S. predator control program under the auspices of the World Health Organization initially worked with traps and strychnine, but in 1954 compound 1080 came into widespread use and was distributed to stockmen by the Pan American Sanitary Bureau.

Despite intensive persecution, however, the Mexican wolf may still be holding its own in some areas and may be a promising candidate for captive propagation efforts.

An official determination that an animal is an endangered species affords it the protection of the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Among other things this means that it is unlawful for any person subject to the jurisdiction of the United States to:

- import or export the animal from the United States;
- take any such animal within the United States or on its territorial seas;
- take any such animal upon the high seas;
- possess, sell, deliver, carry, transport, or ship by any means any animals taken in violation of the above;
- deliver, receive, carry, transport, or ship any such animals in interstate or foreign commerce in the course of a commercial activity;
- sell or offer for sale in interstate or foreign commerce any such animal.

This formal listing action brings the total number of animals officially listed as endangered to 428. A total of 139 of these are species found in the United States and its territories. In addition, the official list of threatened species now numbers 11 animals.