

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Southwest Region
March 2015

Fact Sheet

2015 Final Rule: Revision to the Regulations for the Nonessential Experimental Population of the Mexican Wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*)



Background

We began reintroducing Mexican wolves into the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area (BRWRA) within the Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Area (MWEPA) in 1998, under the authority of section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA, the Act) and our final rule for the *Establishment of a Nonessential Experimental Population of the Mexican Gray Wolf in Arizona and New Mexico* (1998 Final Rule). We have now revised the regulations under which we will continue the reintroduction of the Mexican wolf in Arizona and New Mexico.

On January 6, 2015, the Southwest Regional Director signed the Record of Decision for the Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS) for the *Proposed Revision to the Regulations for the Nonessential Experimental Population of the Mexican Wolf (Canis lupus baileyi)*. On January 16, 2015, we published in the Federal Register the final rule for *Revision to the Regulations for the Nonessential Experimental Population of the Mexican Wolf (Canis lupus baileyi)* (80 FR 2512) (2015 Final Rule).

Revision to the Regulations for the Nonessential Experimental Population of the Mexican Wolf

The 2015 Final Rule under which the experimental population of Mexican wolves will be managed in Arizona and New Mexico became effective on February 17, 2015. It replaces the 1998 Final Rule. The most significant changes we made include:

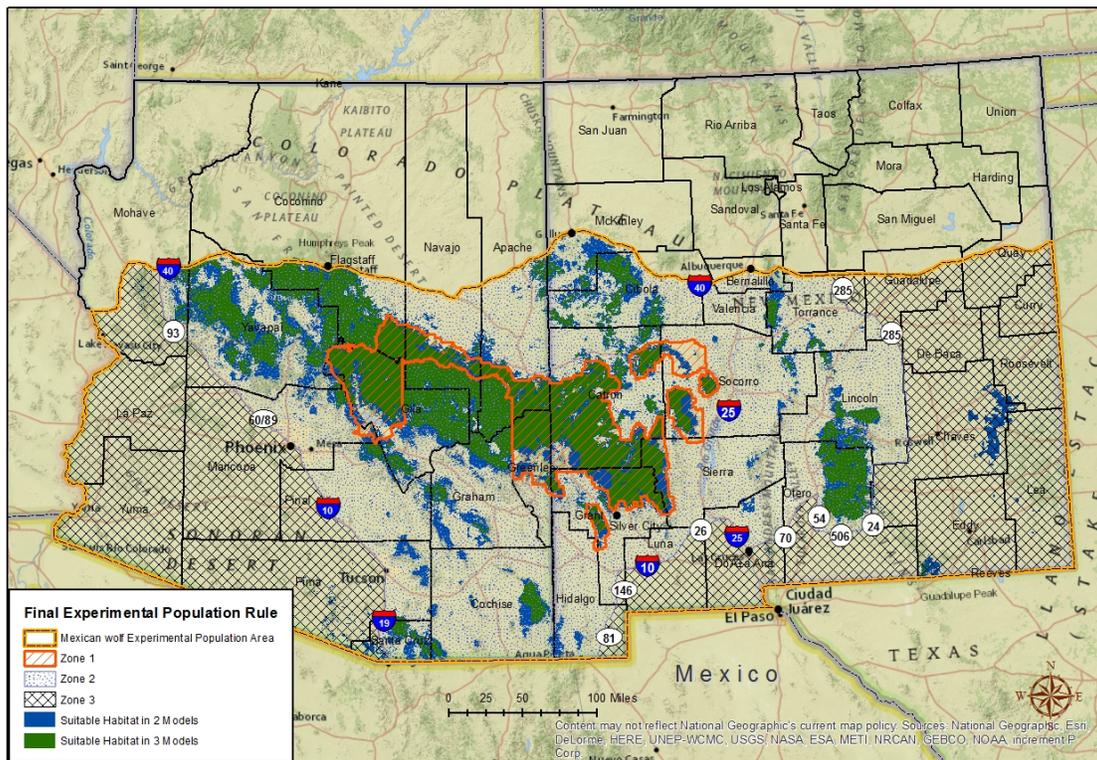
- **Expanding the MWEPA to include all of Arizona and New Mexico south of Interstate-40.** This change extends the MWEPA's southern boundary from Interstate-10 to the international border with Mexico.
- **Eliminating the designation of the BRWRA and establishing three wolf management zones within the expanded MWEPA:**
 - Zone 1 is an area of 12,507mi² (32,392 km²) within the MWEPA where Mexican wolves are allowed to naturally disperse and occupy, and where Mexican wolves may be initially released from captivity or translocated. Zone 1 includes all of the Apache and Gila National Forests (the former BRWRA); the Sitgreaves National Forest; the Payson, Pleasant Valley, and Tonto Basin Ranger Districts of the Tonto National Forest; and the Magdalena Ranger District of the Cibola

National Forest. Approximately 83 percent of Zone 1(10,359 mi²/26,830 km²) has suitable habitat for wolves.

- Zone 2 is an area of 78,756 mi² (203,978 km²) within the MWEPA where Mexican wolves are allowed to naturally disperse and occupy, and where Mexican wolves may be translocated. On Federal land in Zone 2, initial releases of Mexican wolves are limited to pups less than five months old to allow for the cross-fostering of pups from the captive population into the wild, and to enable translocation-eligible adults to be re-released with pups born in captivity. On private and tribal land in Zone 2, Mexican wolves of any age, including adults, can also be initially released under Service and state approved management agreements with private landowners or under Service approved management agreements with tribal governments. Approximately 27 percent (21,004mi²/54,339 km²) of Zone 2 has suitable habitat for wolves.
- Zone 3 is an area of 62,590 mi² (162,108 km²) within the MWEPA where Mexican wolves are allowed to disperse and occupy, but neither initial releases nor translocations will occur. Zone 3 is an area of less suitable habitat for wolves where Mexican wolves are more actively managed under the authorities of the rule to reduce human conflict. Approximately 1 percent (881 mi²/2,283 km²) of Zone 3 has suitable habitat for wolves.

This change increases the area within which Mexican wolves can naturally disperse and occupy from 7,197 mi²/18,639 km² (the former BRWRA) to approximately 153,871 mi²/398,524 km² , which includes 32,244 mi²/83,512 km² of suitable habitat for wolves (the expanded MWEPA). It also expands the area available for the initial release of Mexican wolves more than tenfold from 1,171 mi²/3,033 km²(the former primary recovery zone) to 12,507 mi²/32,392 km² (Zone 1).

- **Adopting a phased management approach in Arizona west of Highway 87 for a period of up to 12 years.** Under this phased approach, for at least the first 5 years (and up to 12 years) we will limit the initial release and translocation of wolves and their natural dispersal and occupancy in portions of western Arizona (west of Highway 87) in Zones 1 and 2.
- **Providing additional or revised provisions for take of Mexican wolves under narrowly defined circumstances to protect livestock and non-feral dogs, or as needed to manage wild ungulate populations (particularly elk and deer).**
- **Providing for the development of management actions on tribal trust land or on private land in management Zones 1 and 2.**
- **Adopting a population objective of 300-325 Mexican wolves in the MWEPA.**



The changes we have made will improve our opportunities to strengthen the genetic fitness and the probability of persistence of the experimental population so it can contribute to the future recovery of the endangered Mexican wolf subspecies. We expect to:

- **Increase the likelihood that initial releases of captive wolves will be successful.** A successful release is defined as a wolf that breeds and produces pups in the wild. There are now many more suitable release sites available in a larger area. The release of wolves from captivity at sites that have relatively abundant wild prey, have limited or no livestock calving in the area, are remote from areas of human use and are not within established wolf pack territories will increase their chances of survival in the wild.
- **Improve the genetic variation within the experimental population.** The captive population of Mexican wolves has genetically valuable animals from lineages that are underrepresented in the experimental population. The larger area available for the initial release of wolves will facilitate the movement of these animals from captivity into the wild. Wolves released from captivity that successfully breed and produce offspring will improve the genetic variation within the experimental population.
- **Allow the experimental population to grow and establish territories in areas of suitable habitat throughout an expanded MWEPA.** Natural dispersal and colonization that lead to the establishment of wolf packs in new areas will improve the probability of persistence of the experimental population. A Mexican wolf population that is numerically larger and more widely dispersed across a broader landscape will be more resilient to unpredictable events such as a loss of prey, catastrophic fire, drought, or disease epidemic as well as natural or human-caused mortality.

- **Effectively respond to the needs of local communities in cases of depredation or nuisance behavior by wolves.** We have modified the conditions that determine when we would issue a permit to allow livestock owners or their agents (e.g., employees, land manager, local officials) to take a Mexican wolf (including intentional harassment or killing) that is in the act of biting, killing, or wounding livestock on Federal land. The 2015 Final Rule also allows domestic animal (defined as livestock and non-feral dogs) owners or their agents to take any Mexican wolf in the act of biting, wounding or killing domestic animals on non-Federal land. Under the Final Rule we may also, pursuant to a removal action authorized by the Service, issue a permit to allow a domestic animal owner or their agent to take a Mexican wolf that is present on non-Federal land.

For More Information

You may download a copy of the Final EIS, Final Record of Decision, and 2015 Final Rule as well as other documents pertaining to the reintroduction and recovery of Mexican wolves, from the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program website at: <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/mexicanwolf/>. Alternatively, you may obtain a compact disk with an electronic copy of these documents by writing to Ms. Sherry Barrett, Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator, New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office, 2105 Osuna Road, NE, Albuquerque, NM 87113. Documents are also available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours (8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) at the New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office, 2105 Osuna Road, NE, Albuquerque, NM 87113.

Photographs courtesy of the Mexican Wolf Interagency Field Team.