



News Release

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Service Finalizes Changes to Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Rule in Arizona and New Mexico

Revises Mexican Wolf ESA Listing as Subspecies, Maintaining Endangered Status

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has finalized the revised rule under which Mexican wolves are managed in Arizona and New Mexico. The revised rule expands the area where wolves are allowed to occupy and increases the Service's ability to further the conservation of one of the nation's rarest mammals while being responsive to the needs of local communities. The final rule will be formally published in the *Federal Register* later this week.

Additionally, the Service has issued a final rule listing the Mexican wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*) as an endangered subspecies under the Endangered Species Act. The Mexican wolf had previously been protected under the listing for the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*). Under this listing revision, the experimental population will be associated with the Mexican wolf subspecies' listing rather than with the gray wolf species.

“This revision of the experimental population rule provides Mexican wolves the space they need to establish a larger and more genetically diverse population – a population that can meaningfully contribute to the subspecies' recovery,” said Benjamin Tuggle, the Service's Southwest Regional Director. “The revision also provides us with the necessary management tools to address negative interactions. The expanded area for the Mexican wolf experimental population is accompanied by clearer and more flexible rules to support the interests of local stakeholders. Successfully establishing a larger population of Mexican wolves in a wider working landscape requires striking an appropriate balance between enabling wolf population growth and minimizing impacts on livestock operators, local communities and wild ungulates. This new rule achieves that balance.”

The revised regulations for the experimental population of the Mexican wolf:

- provide for a fourfold expansion of the area where Mexican wolves primarily are expected to occur and a tenfold increase in the area where Mexican wolves can initially be released from captivity,

- allow management activities in Arizona to be methodically phased west of Highway 87 over a period of up to 12 years,
- extend the Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Area's (MWEPA) southern boundary from I-10 to the U.S.-Mexico border in Arizona and New Mexico to provide for a larger area where management flexibility applies,
- clarify definitions in the rule, including provisions for take of Mexican wolves if necessary to protect domestic animals (defined as livestock and non-feral dogs), or as needed to address unacceptable impacts to wild ungulate herds (particularly elk and deer), and
- provide for a population objective of 300-325 Mexican wolves in the MWEPA.

Since 1998, the Service and cooperating state, federal and tribal agencies have reintroduced and managed Mexican wolves under a rule designating the U.S. population as “non-essential experimental.” This designation provides for increased management flexibility for populations of threatened or endangered species that are reintroduced into a designated experimental area within their probable historical range.

The 1998 rule was established to determine whether a reintroduced population of at least 100 wolves could be established in the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area, but it limited releases of wolves from captivity to 16 percent of the Blue Range in Arizona. Those regulations constrained managers' ability to achieve the necessary population growth, distribution and recruitment that would improve genetic variation within the experimental population and establish a persistent experimental population of Mexican wolves – a population that could then be expected to substantively contribute to the Mexican wolf recovery in the wild.

“We are excited about the changes we are about to put in place,” said Sherry Barrett, the Service's Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator. “We are looking forward to working with our partners in the reintroduction, local communities, landowners and other interested parties to significantly improve the status of the experimental population.”

The final rule for *Revision to the Regulations for the Nonessential Experimental Population of the Mexican Wolf (Canis lupus baileyi)* implements the decision made by the Service following completion of a final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The rule revision was informed through input from 28 cooperating agencies that included federal and state agencies, local governments and tribes throughout Arizona and New Mexico. More than 40,000 public comments were submitted and considered in forming the revised rule.

The final rules, FAQs, etc., are posted at:

<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/mexicanwolf/PR10jM.cfm>. To learn more about the Mexican wolf recovery program, and experimental population rule revision, including maps of the MWEPA, visit <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/mexicanwolf/>.

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