

New Mexico Wilderness Alliance

All New Mexico All The Time

May 2015 Advisory Newsletter

People who kill wolves continue to claim they thought it was a different species, thereby escaping federal prosecution. Can something be done to stop the sabotage of the reintroduction of the Mexican Gray Wolf?

NM Wilderness Alliance follows best science and Wilderness ethics to stay the course with the reintroduction of the Mexican gray wolf in the Gila region.

Your Alliance is currently involved with the reintroduction of Mexican wolves to the Gila region and has been since the organization's inception in 1997. The Mexican gray wolf is an intelligent and powerful apex predator and keystone species in the wild. Their existence in an ecosystem causes crucial landscape changes, leading to better and healthier ungulate herds, and as such are to be respected. Our involvement rests on a twofold Wilderness-based platform:

- ▲ A species' right to inhabit its landscape – an ethical and moral imperative.
- ▲ Sound science on landscape health. After the reintroduction (see video url) of the wolf to Yellowstone in 1995, absent nearly 70 years, the most remarkable "trophic cascade" occurred, which is relevant to our wild Gila river now. [youtube.com/watch?v=ysa5OBhXz-Q&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysa5OBhXz-Q&feature=youtu.be)

Background—how an ecosystem was disrupted and the wolf was targeted for extermination

Prior to European settlers arriving in New Mexico, Mexican gray wolves (lobos) numbered in the thousands. In the 19th century increasing numbers of hunters reduced the wolf's prey population, deer and elk, far beyond the hunting levels of the original native inhabitants of the Southwest. So began the wolves' need to prey on newly introduced and increasing numbers of domestic stock herds in order to live.

As an incentive to allay fears and encourage settlements in the west, the government put bounties on wolves. Still the wolf survived, although in smaller numbers, and due to the "failure" of bounties, the livestock industry at the beginning of the 20th century pressured the government to exterminate wolves. This led to a beleaguered and harassed Mexican gray wolf population, hunted



VIC HARRIS, MEXICAN GRAY WOLF

down, or poisoned, until most were killed by 1970. As if that were not enough, having essentially exterminated the lobo in the U.S., the government also encouraged the country of Mexico to exterminate it within its boundaries. By 1980, only 10 years later, no wolves were known to exist in Mexico. In less than a century, the vast, historical lands of the lobo, were nearly empty of their presence altogether.

In 1973 the Endangered Species Act was signed into law and the Mexican wolf was listed in 1976, requiring the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to recover the Mexican wolf to self-sustaining population levels within its historic range in the Southwest. A new start just in time, but progress has been slow and tenuous. That is one reason the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance works for the lobo, and its arid land home.

Next Steps: How can it be that thirty-eight years later, the Mexican gray wolf is the most endangered mammal on the continent, and the most endangered subspecies of gray wolf in the entire world?

- ▲ In 1997, then Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt granted a plan to re-establish a population of at least 100 Mexican wolves in an area referred to as the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area by the end of 2006. It was expected that the target population would

include 18 breeding pairs at that point in time. As it turns out, bringing a species back to viability isn't that easy. In 2014, eight years behind the plan, the population finally reached 100. Incidentally, a 2013 expert scientific panel, put together by Fish and Wildlife itself, determined that the best available science currently indicates that a true sustainable Mexican wolf population would consist of at least 750 wolves, making the original 100-wolf goal woefully insignificant. At that low level, a literal shot in the dark, or the light, can turn the clock back just as easily.

Two years ago, three things occurred simultaneously that led to a ramping up of your Alliance's wolf advocacy work:

1. The Alliance re-staffed the field office in Silver City, NM to continue to work on issues in the Gila region. It now provides annual opportunities to take people out on wolf backpacking trips and increase local awareness of wolves. Trained staff and volunteers have collected in-depth inventories, placing wildlife cameras all over the Forest, and organizing the area in support of wolf reintroduction, a wild Gila River, and comprehensive watershed and wildlands protections.
2. Although not a litigious organization, the Alliance brought forward a lawsuit against the ill-advised DOJ policy, which we reported to you in October 2014. This current DOJ policy prevents prosecution

of people who kill endangered species unless the department can prove the perpetrator knew the exact biological identity of the species they were harming. This policy has led to extremely few prosecutions for illegal wolf killings, despite the fact that over 55 federally-protected Mexican wolves have been shot. This lawsuit is still pending and we are committed to seeing this policy reversed.

3. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) announced it would be updating the regulation it uses to manage the NM/AZ wolf population. The agency went through a public process to revise the regulations it uses to manage this wolf population. The Wilderness Alliance participated in every public meeting and submitted comments at every opportunity. Despite overwhelming public support for wolves and a public call for greater wolf protection, FWS's final rule included several policies that will almost certainly harm the wolf population. In late March, the Alliance filed a "Notice of Intent" which gives the FWS 60 days to alter its decisions and preserve our right to pursue litigation if necessary. We will update our members at the end of May when the 60 days is up.



* "Gypsy" by Skie Bender, Mexican Gray Wolf Conservation Stamp 2015 Winner

A New Mexico Wilderness Alliance declaration

With federal agencies 8 years behind the original reintroduction plan to re-establish a population of at least 100 Mexican wolves in an area that includes the Gila by the end of 2006, we are fighting for the chance to maintain and increase that small, benchmark population now. With such small numbers, every member of the pack is vital. It is not acceptable to blithely shoot them, whether a juvenile or an all-important adult breeder, "by accident" — and together we can stop it.

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Thank you for supporting all of New Mexico Wilderness Alliance's work, including Wilderness saving programs, legislative campaigns for new Wilderness, Mexican Gray Wolf Recovery, and our daily research work.

\$50 \$75 \$100* Other \$ _____

All levels support two professional staff working this spring on the Mexican Gray Wolf reintroduction – we are grateful for the most generous contribution you can give.

*If you would like the wolf stamp (above right) sent to you for your donation of \$20.00 or more, please check this box

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Thank you for helping New Mexico Wilderness Alliance shine a light on Wilderness – it belongs!