



## Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project 2008 End-of-Year Summary

**Description:** The Mexican wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*) is a genetically distinct subspecies of the North American gray wolf. Mexican wolves are smaller than northern gray wolves but larger than coyotes. Adult Mexican wolves weigh 45-75 pounds and stand 26-34 inches at the shoulder. Coyotes, in contrast, weigh 20-35 pounds and are 12-20 inches at the shoulder. Both wolves and coyotes have tails that are usually black tipped and which never curl over the back. Wolves are long-legged, with large feet and head, deep chest cavity and short, thick muzzle. Adult Mexican wolves are 4½ to 5½ feet long, including tail. Males are usually larger than females. Mexican wolves are grizzled shades of buff, gray, rust and black, with buff undersides, and are never completely white or black.

**Historical Range:** Mexican wolves are the most endangered and most southern subspecies of gray wolf. Research indicates that historically they mainly occurred in mountainous regions of the Southwest, from central Mexico throughout portions of Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and southern Colorado and Utah.

**Reasons for Decline:** In the late 1800s, high numbers of livestock, coupled with unregulated hunting of deer and elk by humans, resulted in many wolves preying on cattle and other livestock. This led to aggressive control programs, which by the mid-1900s exterminated the Mexican wolf from the wild in the United States and severely reduced populations in Mexico.

### **Free-Ranging Population (as of December 31, 2008):**

- Includes 29 wolves with functional radio-telemetry collars. The Reintroduction Project strives to locate each wolf at least weekly to determine its movements, home range, prey selection, and other behavioral information.
- Includes 23 uncollared wolves documented through ongoing survey and monitoring.
- Consists of ten packs with functional radio-telemetry collars (five on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests and the Fort Apache Indian Reservation in east-central Arizona and five on the Gila National Forest in west-central New Mexico) and six single wolves (2 in AZ and 4 in NM) with functional radio-telemetry collars.
- The minimum (i.e. documented) 2008 wild population in Arizona and New Mexico thus totaled 52 wolves, of which 45 were born in the wild. The 2008 end-of-year count also documented a minimum of two breeding pairs. Four packs (Paradise, Rim, Fox Mountain, and Dark Canyon) were not counted as breeding pairs because of mortalities that occurred during 2008 (at least two of the mortalities were illegal killings).

### **Reproduction:**

- Seven packs produced pups in 2008.
- At least 18 pups were born in the wild in 2008, with 11 surviving until the end of the year.
- Wolves born in the wild have formed packs and produced pups each year since 2002.

### **Food Habits:**

- A study of prey remains found in wolf scat revealed elk (73%), other native ungulates (16%), small mammals and unknown (7%), and cattle (4%) (J. Reed, et al. 2004).
- Wolves often take live prey, but they also scavenge when carrion is available.

- Intensive predation monitoring during the winter revealed elk to be the main prey.

### **Livestock Depredation:**

- Depredation is measurable and usually localized, creating disproportionate impacts for certain livestock owners. Overall, though, depredation events are infrequent, relative to the number of livestock present.
- Defenders of Wildlife (Defenders) maintains a private trust fund to compensate livestock producers at market value for documented (i.e. confirmed or probable) losses to wolves. The Project's Interagency Field Team investigates suspected depredations and provides a report to the producer, who decides whether to submit a claim to Defenders.
- Other compensation programs are being discussed.

### **Home Range Size:**

- Most packs use about 150-250 square miles.
- Packs typically consist of two to six wolves.

### **Causes of Death from 1998 - 2008 (Total = 66):**

- 30 wild wolves have been illegally shot, including five in 2008.
- 12 wild wolves have been hit by vehicles, including two in 2008.
- Ten wild wolves (including two in 2008) have died from natural causes – including predation, disease, starvation, whelping complications, and asphyxiation.
- Three wild wolves have died of other causes – including capture-related mortality (two) and lawful shooting by a private citizen (one).
- Nine wild wolves (including two in 2008) have died from unknown causes.
- Two wolves that died in 2008 are awaiting necropsy.

### **Management:**

- Designation of Mexican wolves as a “Nonessential Experimental Population” allows for more flexible management while striving toward wolf recovery.
- The Reintroduction Project goal of at least 100 wolves is a subset of the population needed for full Mexican wolf recovery and removal from the endangered species list.
- The Reintroduction Project is aggressively translocating and releasing wolves to help increase the population.
- Lead agencies for this Reintroduction Project are the Arizona Game and Fish Department, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, U.S. Forest Service, U.S.D.A. - APHIS Wildlife Services, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the White Mountain Apache Tribe. The collaborative effort also includes other state and county cooperators, with opportunities for broad public participation and input through the Project's Adaptive Management Work Group (AMWG), which meets periodically in the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area.

### **For further information about Mexican wolves, please contact:**

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### **Or visit:**

<http://www.azgfd.gov/wolf>  
<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/mexicanwolf>

