

Mexican Gray Wolf

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Scientific Name: *Canis lupus baileyi*. From the Latin *canis*, meaning dog; *lupus*, meaning wolf; and *baileyi*, honoring Vernon Bailey, U.S. Bureau of Biological Survey biologist in late 1800s, early 1900s.

Description: Smaller than a northern gray wolf but larger than a coyote—like a small German shepherd. Adults 70–80 lbs., 30 inches at shoulder. Coyotes 20–35 lbs., 21 inches at shoulder. Adults 5–5.5 feet long, including 14- to 17-inch tail. Males larger than females. Head and feet large in proportion to body. Body color often mottled or patchy, varying from gray and black to brown and buff.

Distribution: Ongoing but unpublished genetics work suggests broad historical distribution, from Mexico D.F. and Michoacan north through Durango, Chihuahua, and Sonora into Arizona and New Mexico to Utah, Colorado, west Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas. Broad overlap with other gray wolf subspecies exterminated by the early 1900s. Extirpated from United States by mid-1900s, and most of Mexico soon thereafter. Possibly persists in Mexico and along United States-Mexico border, but none confirmed for decades. About 50 to 60 along Arizona-New Mexico border now, due to releases beginning in 1998, and more than 150 in various captive breeding facilities.

Habitat: Oak, pine, and juniper forests and woodlands, grasslands, and riparian corridors in broken, sloping country. Generally above 4,000 feet elevation, occasionally lower.

Biology: Mexican wolves were eradicated before being studied scientifically. Anecdotal information from predator control agents gives a biased sense of their natural history. From 1880–1920, populations of large native mammals

(the wolf's natural prey) were plummeting due to unregulated subsistence and market hunting, unparalleled numbers of livestock were loose upon the range, and Mexican wolves were killed on sight. Monitoring of released wolves in Arizona and New Mexico is confirming many basics, and shedding light on other aspects of natural history.

Mexican wolf packs consist of the adult pair, young-of-the-year, and sometimes yearlings. Their home range may



be a few to many hundreds of square miles. Howling is important to communication within and among packs. Prey are killed outright, but carcasses are also scavenged. Dens are usually in broken, sloping country, near good foraging habitat. They may be dug from scratch, or just an enlarged hole in a bank or under a ledge. Dens may have several entrances, usually with a panoramic view and marked by a mound of dirt, and may be used more than once. Breeding occurs in December-March; four to eight pups are born in March-May. At 3 weeks, pups emerge from the den. Still nursing, they are brought pieces of prey, then whole carcasses, to scavenge. Live food is added later. At 3

months, pups begin to accompany adults on hunts; by December, they can hunt alone, although adults still provide food.

Mexican wolves feed on small mammals, but deer were the primary native prey historically. Pronghorn, javelina, and elk were also taken. In contrast, elk are the primary prey of wolves reintroduced in Arizona-New Mexico.

Status: Extirpated from the United States, possibly still extant in Mexico, and reintroduced in Arizona and New Mexico. Listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1976 as endangered, and designated in 2002 as a Southwestern Distinct Population Segment and retained as endangered. A Species of Special Concern in Arizona. Although the reintroduced Arizona-New Mexico population is growing, supplemented by releases, population objectives are jeopardized by human-caused and other mortalities.

Management Needs: The Mexican wolf is an endangered-species rarity. Its major needs are not habitat management/restoration. Reintroduced wolves show very clearly what is needed to achieve recovery: education to prevent people from mistaking wolves as coyotes and shooting them; heightened law enforcement to investigate mortalities more effectively, and to pursue legal actions against those who intentionally but unlawfully kill wolves; greater driver caution to reduce road-kills of wolves taking advantage of roads as travel corridors; and adequate funding to manage wolves, including conducting research, monitoring, public outreach, prevention of and response to depredation incidents, and field surveys to determine and monitor presence of wild individuals, and to evaluate potential reintroduction or re-occupation sites for habitat capabilities, prey base, and potential conflicts. ♣