

April 1, 1997 Project Update

Purpose of this update

The purpose of this update is to provide the interested public with current information about the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program.

Recent decisions about the program

On March 4, 1997, the Secretary of the Department of the Interior authorized the reintroduction of Mexican wolves to the Southwest. The Secretary's decision selects for implementation the Preferred Alternative from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) issued in December 1996. In 1998, captive-reared Mexican wolves will be reintroduced into the [Blue Range](#) Wolf Recovery Area in the Apache National Forest in Arizona and allowed to disperse onto public lands in the adjacent Gila National Forest in New Mexico. Annual releases into the Blue Range area will occur over the next 5 years. The second wolf recovery area considered in the EIS (White Sands Missile Range) will be used only if it is necessary to achieve the recovery objective of 100 wolves (see map). The FWS-Region 2 office in Albuquerque is the lead agency for Mexican wolf recovery.

Long term goals for the program

The FWS projects that natural reproduction will sustain population growth in about 5 years and that in about 10 years, the wolf population will reach the recovery objective of 100 wolves over 5,000 square miles.

What will happen next in the wolf recovery program

The FWS plans to undertake a variety of activities in the coming year to prepare for reintroducing wolves.

Short term initiatives

During the next three months, the FWS will initiate the following specific activities:

- Preparation of the Final Rule for designating released wolves and their progeny a non-essential experimental population of Mexican gray wolves.
- Development of a public outreach and communication plan for the reintroduction program. [Discussed under "Public Interaction Planning" later in this newsletter.]
- Evaluation and selection of specific release sites in coordination with cooperating state and federal agencies.
- Evaluation of specific wolves as release candidates.

Activities that will occur during the next year

During the coming year, the FWS will develop agreements with cooperating agencies and assemble a highly qualified field management team to oversee and guide wolf reintroduction. This team will include representatives from FWS, USDA Animal Damage Control, U.S. Forest Service, and other cooperating state and tribal agencies. Major responsibilities of this team will include: development of detailed wolf management plans; periodic evaluation of the reintroduction project; development of strategies to address specific management issues.

In 1998, 3 family groups of wolves will be released on public lands within the Apache National Forest in eastern Arizona and allowed to disperse throughout the Apache National Forest and adjacent Gila National Forest in New Mexico. Similar releases will be made annually for about 5 years. These wolves and their descendants will be designated a "nonessential experimental population." This designation gives the FWS and its cooperators the management flexibility to mitigate specific impacts, respond to needs of the reintroduced wolf population, and quickly address local wolf management issues.

All released wolves will be monitored to ensure that they are acclimating to their environment and that any unexpected activity is carefully recorded and addressed immediately.

The reintroduction program will be frequently evaluated. If needed, adjustments to management plans will be made.

Public interaction planning

The FWS is initiating work on the development of a formal public interaction plan which will identify and describe specific communication and public interaction activities the FWS will use to work with local communities and other interested parties as wolf recovery moves forward. The FWS will undertake a public interaction needs assessment during Spring of 1997. As our program activities change, we expect the public's interests to shift or change as well. The purpose of this assessment is to seek information directly from affected local communities about their information needs and the types of interaction activities that will be most useful and meaningful to them. We hope to receive information that will help us: develop a process to quickly address issues of interest or concern to local communities as they emerge; and to identify the public's information needs so that they are up-to-date and well informed about all aspects of the wolf recovery program. A written public interaction plan will be developed, using the results of the needs assessment, with implementation of this plan beginning later this year.

Status report information requested by the public

The public has identified a number of issues on which they would like regular updates as the FWS program for wolf recovery proceeds. These issues include:

- captive population updates

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- status of Mexican wolves in the wild
- information on livestock depredation incidents
- presentations and information materials available from the FWS

The FWS will provide this, as well as any additional project information in future updates.

Mexican Wolf Geographic Boundaries

