

The Mexican Wolf: Back from the Brink!

“Through the centuries, we have projected onto the wolf
the qualities we most despise and fear ourselves.”

Barry Lopez, in *Of Wolves and Men*

What is a Mexican Wolf?

The Mexican gray wolf, *Canis lupus baileyi*, or “lobo” is the rarest, southernmost, and most genetically distinct subspecies of gray wolf found in North America. Adult wolves typically weigh 50-80 lbs., are about 5 feet in total length, and have a richly colored coat of buff, brown, gray, red, white and black. It is believed that their general behavior is similar to other subspecies of gray wolf by having a complex social hierarchy maintained through vocalizations, body postures, and scent marking. Natural prey species most likely included elk, white-tailed deer, mule deer, javelina and other small mammals.



Minnesota Zoological Garden

Historic Range of the Mexican wolf



The Bi-national Wolf

Mexican wolves once ranged throughout parts of central and southern Arizona, southern New Mexico, west Texas and central Mexico. Historically, their habitat included oak woodland, pine/oak woodland, or pine forests with adjacent grasslands at elevations ranging 4500-9500 feet. However, like other subspecies of gray wolves throughout the world, intensive predator control programs at the turn of the century nearly eliminated the Mexican wolf from the U.S. and Mexico. There have been no confirmed reports of naturally occurring Mexican wolves in the U.S. since 1970, and no confirmed reports in Mexico since 1980.

Extinction means forever!

In 1976, the Mexican wolf was listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The ESA requires that the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service develop and begin plans for the restoration of any listed species. By 1979, the Mexican Wolf Recovery Team was formed and consisted of various wolf experts who prepared the Mexican Wolf Recovery Plan. The principal objective of the Plan is: “To conserve and ensure the survival of *C.l. baileyi* by maintaining a captive breeding program and re-establishing a viable, self-sustaining population of at least 100 Mexican wolves in the middle to high elevations of a 5,000-square-mile area within the Mexican wolf’s historic range.”



Minnesota Zoological Garden

Challenge in the Southwest

One of the inaugural problems for the Recovery Plan was the commencement of a captive breeding program from a small wild population. Between 1977 and 1980, five Mexican wolves were captured in Mexico under a joint agreement between the United States and Mexico. These original wolves, and two additional lineages of captive wolves added in 1995 make up the captive breeding population that is now managed by the Mexican Wolf Species Survival Plan (SSP) for the U.S Fish & Wildlife Service. International wolf experts rate the recovery of the Mexican wolf as the highest priority of gray wolf recovery programs worldwide.

Mexican Wolf SSP facilities

United States

Arizona	Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum; Tucson Heritage Park Zoo; Prescott The Phoenix Zoo; Phoenix Southwest Wildlife Rehab & Education Fcn; Scottsdale Navajo Nation Zoological & Botanical Park; Window Rock
California	California Wolf Center; Julian The Living Desert; Palm Desert
Colorado	Cheyenne Mountain Zoological Park; Colorado Springs
Illinois	Lincoln Park Zoological Gardens; Chicago
Louisiana	Audubon Institute Species Survival Center; New Orleans
Massachusetts	Zoo New England; Stoneham
Michigan	Binder Park Zoo; Battle Creek
Minnesota	Belle Isle Zoo & Aquarium; Royal Oak
Missouri	Minnesota Zoological Garden; Apple Valley
New Mexico	Wild Canid Survival and Research Center; Eureka Alameda Park Zoo; Alamogordo Albuquerque Biological Park; Albuquerque Hillcrest Park Zoo; Clovis Ladder Ranch; Caballo Living Desert State Park; Carlsbad Sevilleta Wolf Management Facility; Socorro
New York	Bronx/Wildlife Conservation Park; Bronx
North Dakota	Dakota Zoo; Bismark
Ohio	Columbus Zoological Garden; Powell
Texas	El Paso Zoo; El Paso Fort Worth Zoological Park; Forth Worth Fossil Rim Wildlife Center; Glen Rose Houston Zoological Garden; Houston
Washington	Wolf Haven International; Tenino

Mexico

Chihuahua	Rancho "Los Encinos"; Chihuahua
Distrito Federal	Parque Zoológico de San Juan de Aragon; Mexico City San Cayetano Wildlife Center; Mexico City Zoológico de Chapultepec; Mecico City
Durango	La Reserva de la Biosfera "La Michilia"; Durango
Jalisco	Zoológico Guadalajara; Guadalajara
Guanajuato	Parque Zoológico de Leon; Leon
Mexico	Zoológico de Zacango; Toluca
Puebla	African Safari; Puebla
Sonora	Centro Ecológico de Sonora; Hermosillo
Tamaulipas	Zoológico de Tamatan; Victoria City

** Facilities listed in bold were founding participants to the captive breeding efforts in the Mexican wolf SSP Recovery Program.*



Wild Canid Survival and Research Center

Preventing Extinction

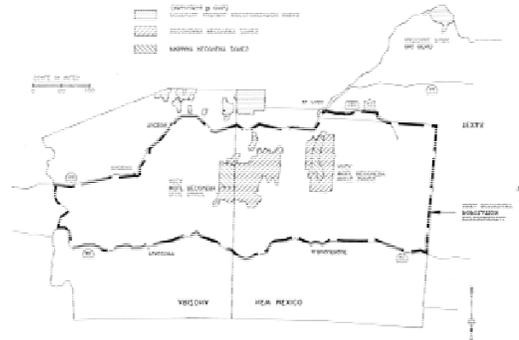
The Mexican Wolf SSP is a consortium of zoos and wildlife facilities that hold and breed Mexican wolves. The mission of the Mexican Wolf SSP is to support the re-establishment of the Mexican wolf into the wild through captive breeding, public education and research. In addition, the SSP strives to establish a large, genetically diverse captive population, develop successful techniques for genetic banking and assisted reproduction, design a protocol to monitor and evaluate the merging of the three lineages, and provide in-depth training for wolf keepers. A critical issue also facing captive managers is to focus on the development and improvement of husbandry practices that will increase the wolves' chances of survival in the wild.



El Lobo Returns

In March 1998, the howl of the Mexican wolf could once again be heard echoing through the hills of the Blue Mountain Range in Arizona. Wolves that were potential candidates for release to the wild are evaluated on several factors including their genetic make-up, breeding history, and enhanced fear of humans. Wildlife biologists initially used a “soft release” method, which allows the wolves to adjust to the release area for several months before the pen doors are opened.

Mexican Wolf Geographic Boundaries



The plan is to release about 15 pairs or family groups over a period of 5 years into the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area until a self-sustainable population of at least 100 wolves exists in the wild. Reintroduced wolves are designated as a “nonessential experimental population” under the ESA. This will allow for greater management flexibility relating to livestock depredation issues, major land use restrictions translocations, captures, and other monitoring needs.

What you can do!!

You can help Mexican wolf recovery for generations to come by supporting any of the listed Mexican wolf SSP facilities, or by encouraging a facility near you to join the program. Additional updates can be found at: www.ifw2es.fws.gov

If you want e-mail updates, news and stories about the recovery of Mexican wolves send your e-mail address to the California Wolf Center at: denali@connectnet.com

© 2000 Mexican Wolf SSP

This publication is made possible in part by the
AAZK Chapter of the Minnesota Zoological Garden-www.mnzoo.org,
California Wolf Center-www.californiawolfcenter.org,
Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum-www.desertmuseum.org and the
Wild Canid Survival and Research Center www.wolfsanctuary.org



AMERICAN ZOO AND AQUARIUM ASSOCIATION