

# South From Yellowstone

Tom Schwab



## What Remains to Be Done

Jacquelyn Fallon

by  
MICHAEL  
ROBINSON,  
DAVE PARSONS,  
and  
ROBERT EDWARD

*(members of the Southern  
Rockies Wolf Restoration  
Project Steering Committee)*

**I**n the three-plus decades since Congress protected wolves by passing the Endangered Species Act, wolves have been repatriated to a few key parts of their former range. Yet, if we evaluate how much of the species' former range remains unoccupied, it becomes clear that much work toward wolf recovery is left unfinished. In fact, by the measures established by Congress, progress toward recovery across the species' former range remains insignificant—literally. Two recent court rulings underscore this fact.

### **A Significant Shortfall**

The Endangered Species Act defines a threatened or endangered species as one facing extinction throughout “all or a significant portion of its former range.” Wildlife managers have used this benchmark to declare victory for species including the brown pelican, peregrine falcon and American alligator.

Unfortunately, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) ignored Congress's emphasis on the word *significant* in 2003 when establishing a template for removing the gray wolf from federal protection. Wolves presently occupy less than 5 percent of their historic range in the lower 48 states, and would occupy only slightly more under criteria that would be developed under the USFWS's April 1, 2003, Federal Register rule (that was struck down in

two successive federal court decisions this year). By any reasonable standard, much of the remaining unoccupied 90-plus percent has to be considered a significant portion of historic range.

The USFWS must accomplish wolf recovery in new areas. Few places more poignantly highlight the shortfalls of wolf recovery than the southern portion of the Rocky Mountains, where the USFWS has not yet developed a wolf recovery plan, and in the arid Southwest, where the same agency ignores scientists' warnings that its management of reintroduced Mexican gray wolves jeopardizes the population.

### **A Mother Lode for Wolves**

The Southern Rocky Mountains stretch from south-central Wyoming to northern New Mexico, encompassing nearly 41 million acres—25 million acres of which is public land. This vast landscape includes nearly all of the western third of Colorado and hosts North America's largest elk population (over 275,000 animals) and one of the largest deer populations (over 600,000 animals).

Two scientific studies concluded that the region could support over 1,000 wolves, and two associated public surveys revealed widespread urban and rural support for wolf restoration. Wolf scientist (and IWC board member) Mike Phillips described the Southern Rockies as "the mother lode for wolves." Unfortunately, the USFWS has actively sought to divest itself of its responsibility for wolf recovery in significant portions of the Southern Rockies.

### **The Land of El Lobo**

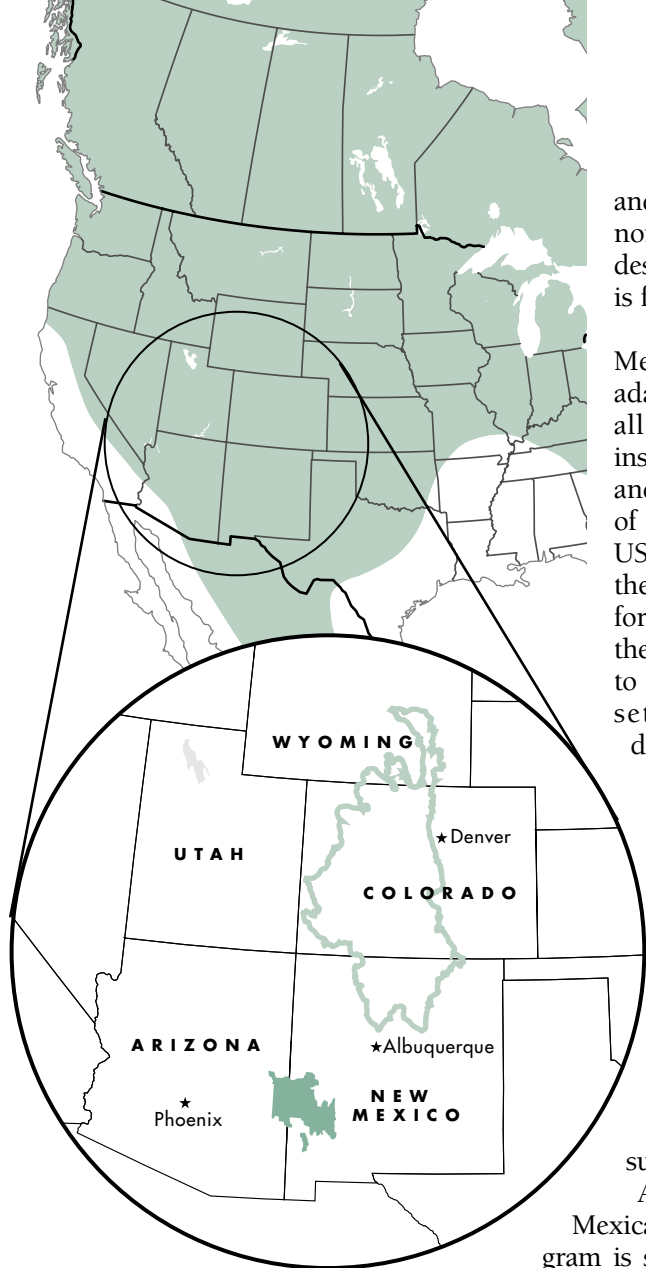
South of the Southern Rocky Mountains, the landscape transitions into rolling hills of piñon pine, ponderosa pine and juniper. Even farther south, in the desert mountains of Mexico and of southwestern New Mexico and southeastern Arizona, a distinctive wolf evolved. The Mexican gray wolf preyed on smaller animals and traversed prickly deserts, which helped shape the



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George Andrejko, Arizona Game and Fish Department



Top: Historic range of the gray wolf in North America. Bottom: Southern Rockies ecoregion in Colorado, Wyoming and New Mexico and the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area in Arizona and New Mexico.

“lobo” itself. The Mexican wolf is North America’s smallest gray wolf subspecies and, according to the scientist who first identified and named it, represents a “remarkably abrupt” morphological change from its neighboring subspecies.

In 1982, the USFWS finalized a recovery plan for Mexican wolves, which had been reduced to a small captive population descended from only seven wild ancestors. (No wild Mexican wolves are known to exist south of the border today.) In 1998, the USFWS began reintroducing these survivors’ progeny to the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area of Arizona

and New Mexico, only slightly north of their native range. Yet, despite this effort, the program is failing to meet expectations.

Program failures lie not in Mexican wolves’ difficulty in adapting to the wild (almost all the captive-bred wolves instinctively know how to hunt and raise pups), but because of management dictated by the USFWS’s accommodations to the livestock industry. Unlike for other endangered species, the USFWS has required itself to remove Mexican wolves that set up homes outside the designated recovery area (even if they are on other public lands). Thus, in November 2001 a nonpredating wolf was run down by helicopter until he collapsed and died. And in April 2003, one of the initial wolves released in 1998 was recaptured for moving outside these arbitrary political boundaries; five of her wild-conceived pups subsequently died in captivity.

Another provision in the Mexican wolf reintroduction program is similarly unprecedented and detrimental to program success: Unlike rules pertaining to livestock carcass management for the Northern Rockies wolf recovery program, rules for the Mexican wolf reintroduction project do not allow managers to require improved carcass management as a prerequisite for control actions.

Wolves getting their first taste of beef from a carcass are highly likely to prey on livestock later, virtually ensuring they will be captured or killed. The December 2004 draft five-year review of the Mexican wolf reintroduction program documents that 91 percent of Mexican wolves that scavenge on livestock carcasses eventually prey on livestock.

In May 2003, the USFWS shot a Mexican wolf that was preying on cattle near where she had previously scavenged on a dead cow that was

not killed by wolves; the owner had forbidden the USFWS to remove the carcass. The wolf that had lost her pups after being rereleased in 2003 was captured again for preying on cattle near where she had scavenged; she was accidentally killed in captivity.

In June 2001, four independent scientists led by Paul Paquet, Ph.D., recommended requiring ranchers to remove livestock carcasses (or render them inedible, as by lime) before wolves become habituated. Further, recognizing that wolves cannot read arbitrary lines on a map, the Paquet team recommended allowing wolves to roam at will unless they are creating problems. The team predicted that without these changes, the population would not meet projections. The USFWS did not act on the Paquet Report recommendations, and after eight years of reintroductions, the wild population of Mexican wolves (comprising five to eight breeding packs) is nowhere near the end-of-2005 projection of 83 wolves and 15 packs.

## Significant Midcourse Corrections

For wolves to fill their ecologically vital role within a significant portion of their historic range, the USFWS should develop and implement a recovery plan for the Southern Rocky Mountains, a region with abundant habitat and prey for wolves. Likewise, if wolves are ever to roam a significant portion of their former range in the Southwest—places like the Sky Islands and the Grand Canyon ecoregions—the USFWS must allow them to roam freely, and the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and ranchers must manage livestock carcasses, which probably facilitate wolves becoming livestock killers.

Together, the Southern Rocky Mountains and the Southwest represent a tremendous opportunity to advance the stewardship of wolves—and to meet the hopeful promise of the Endangered Species Act. ■



Jacquelyn Fallon



The Southern Rockies Wolf Restoration Project is a coalition of regional and national conservation

organizations (Defenders of Wildlife, The Center for Biological Diversity, National Wildlife Federation, New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, New Mexico Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club, and Sinapu) dedicated to the restoration of wolves to their full ecological role throughout the Southern Rocky Mountains. For more information, visit [www.rockywolf.org](http://www.rockywolf.org).

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## Wolf Pelt Tells One Man's Tale

The donation of a wolf pelt to the International Wolf Center reveals the story of a man named Michael Sinko. Sinko was an experienced outdoorsman in northeastern Minnesota who, according to family members, respected and revered the woods he worked in.

Sinko's parents immigrated to the United States from Russia. He eventually lived in Winton, Minnesota, where he worked as a miner, game warden and trapper. He worked long traplines to earn money to put his daughter through college. She wanted to be a teacher.

Sinko trapped a wide variety of animals including bobcats, beavers and foxes. Around 1960 he caught the wolf whose pelt is now at the Center. The wolf was caught in a snare, and his ears were clipped to turn in for a bounty. Sinko would have received a bounty of \$35 at that time.

Sinko drowned while working on one of his traplines. His wolf pelt was passed on to his nephew

Tom Brady. Brady and his wife, Mary Ann, had the pelt hanging on the wall of their log cabin for many years before deciding to donate it to the Center, where it will now be used for educational purposes.

From 1960 to 1965 about 200 wolves were submitted for bounty each year in Minnesota. The last bounty paid on a wolf in the state was in 1965. Public harvest was allowed until 1974, when the wolf was protected by the federal endangered species list.



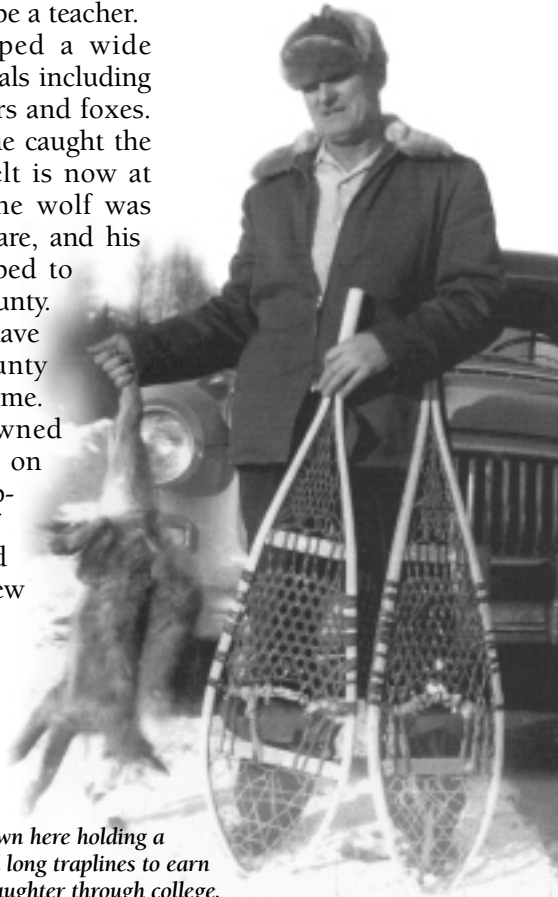
*Mac Montgomery wears the predator-friendly sweater purchased for him by his wife, Carol, from the Wolf Den store.*

## Living Their Beliefs

Carol and Mac Montgomery of North Carolina are “living their beliefs.” A close encounter with wolves in Yellowstone moved them to learn more about the wild creatures and the problems surrounding them. The couple visited the International Wolf Center's interpretive center in Ely, Minnesota, to build on their base of wolf knowledge.

One issue they discovered was livestock depredation. The conclusion Carol and Mac came to was that cows are actually the introduced species. And based on that belief, Carol bought a gift for Mac from the Wolf Den store. The gift was a predator-friendly sweater created by livestock producers who use nonlethal measures to control and reduce depredation on livestock. Mac says he wears the sweater as frequently as weather in North Carolina allows.

The Montgomerys plan to continue building their wardrobe of predator-friendly products and supporting the push for a balance between wild and domesticated animals. Carol says that although she might find the products cheaper somewhere else, she will continue to buy from the Center to contribute to the mission of teaching the world about wolves.



*Michael Sinko, shown here holding a coyote pelt, worked long traplines to earn money to put his daughter through college.*

Image courtesy of Tom and Mary Ann Brady

## Yellowstone National Park Wolf Project Funded

The International Wolf Center's conference "Frontiers of Wolf Recovery" in Colorado Springs, Colorado, in October 2005 was not only a success for the International Wolf Center but inadvertently helped give the Yellowstone National Park wolf research project a big boost.

A philanthropist who attended the "Values of Long-Term Research" session was so impressed that she committed a challenge grant of \$100,000 per year for 10 years to the project. Dr.

Doug Smith, Yellowstone wolf research project leader, will now work hard to obtain the matching amount, which will totally restore his recently cut operating budget.

In addition, the same donor committed \$40,000 per year for 10 years to Dr. L. David Mech for graduate students at the University of Minnesota who study in Yellowstone National Park.

The wolf conference and the long-term research session surely were the right catalysts at the right time.



Kelly Godfrey

Presentations like Doug Smith's at the "Frontiers of Wolf Recovery" conference inspired the donation of a challenge grant to the Yellowstone Wolf Project.

## Center Board Member Is "Environmental Hero"

The Wilderness Society has recognized International Wolf Center board member Paul Schurke as an environmental hero. The award is given annually to individuals going above and beyond in their effort to support the environment in Minnesota.

Schurke is co-founder of the Ely, Minnesota, chapter of Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness, and he has testified before Congress to protect the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness from expanded motorized vehicle use.

As part of the award, Schurke was given \$1,000 to donate to a nonprofit of his choosing. The Center is the proud recipient of that donation. ■

## Thank you for your continued support!

Due to an increase in the cost of postage, utilities and operating expenses, our membership rates are increasing beginning January 1, 2006. The best way you can continue to support our work is by renewing your membership and continuing to make donations.

New annual membership rates are as follows:

Lone Wolf	\$ 35
Wolf Pack	\$ 60
Wolf Associate	\$ 115
Wolf Sponsor	\$ 500
Alpha Wolf	\$1,000

\*A \$15 shipping charge will still be added to all non-U.S. memberships.



Nancy Jo Tubbs