



# *The Rewilding Institute*

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Statement of David R. Parsons, former Mexican Wolf Coordinator (1990-1999) for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and current Carnivore Conservation Biologist for the Rewilding Institute.

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Re.: Population decline of the wild population of Mexican gray wolves in the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area in southwestern New Mexico and southeastern Arizona.

## STATEMENT

Today's news of a 12% decline in the wild population of Mexican wolves is a big disappointment but, frankly, not a surprise. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and its cooperating state and federal agencies stopped managing for the conservation of endangered lobos four years ago, and the population has declined in three of those four years. The stated objective for 2007 was a 10% population increase, thus the Fish and Wildlife Service fell 22% short of their goal, leaving only 52 of these critically endangered animals in the wild. Of even greater concern is that the number of breeding pairs declined from seven at the end of 2006 to only four at the end of 2007. When breeding pairs are routinely destroyed or broken apart it is hard to grow a population. Indeed, only nine new pups were added to the population, and two of those have died already in 2008.

The Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area, 4.4 million acres of remote public lands teeming with elk and deer, was identified by wildlife biologists as the best place for the first reintroduction of the critically endangered Mexican gray wolf. The objective for this initial recovery effort was to establish a viable, self-sustaining, wild population of at least 100 lobos by the end of 2006, eight years after the first releases.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service should issue an immediate moratorium on any further killing and removal of wolves until the population rebounds to at least 100 wolves, as recommended by the American Society of Mammalogists.

Ignoring science and bowing to pressure from special interests, the Bush administration, and politicians, the Fish and Wildlife Service has abandoned its legal obligation to protect, conserve, and recover the Mexican gray wolf—the most endangered mammal in North America. Rather, conflicts (whether real or induced) are routinely resolved by

killing or permanently removing wolves, risking the second extinction of this rare, ecologically important carnivore.

None of this is the fault of the lobos whose only interest is to survive and prosper in the remaining wild lands of the Southwest. The wolves have shown their ability make a living in their native habitat. They eat mostly elk and deer, consistently breed and reproduce in the wild, and very few die of causes other than those inflicted by humans.

Scientific research has shown that wolves and other large carnivores improve the biological diversity and overall health of the landscapes where they live. Following the restoration of wolves to Yellowstone National Park, young willows and cottonwoods, formerly devoured by unwary elk, have returned to stream banks, beavers have returned, and songbirds are more numerous. A variety of scavengers including eagles, ravens, weasels, and foxes are flourishing from the free lunch left for them by wolves.

Southwest residents broadly support the wolf recovery effort and want to see lobos thrive in the wild once again.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has a legal and moral obligation to protect and conserve endangered lobos and restore them to viable populations within their former range. But their continued authorization of excessive killing and removal of wolves is having the opposite result.

It's like hiring a contractor to remodel your home and, instead, they tear it down. You would be outraged; and the American public should be outraged at the continued use of tax dollars by our public agencies to destroy endangered Mexican wolves.

Conflicts do arise between wolf recovery and other uses on our public lands, especially livestock grazing. The Fish and Wildlife Service has a proper role in seeking to minimize conflicts, but not at the expense of the conservation of endangered lobos. Wolves have a right to exist and are legally entitled to at least equal status on public lands.

It is wrong policy to give domestic livestock higher priority than endangered wolves on our public lands. Solutions will require abandoning the tools of the past—shooting and trapping—and adopting more innovative management practices and new policies that reflect modern ethics and public sentiment favoring the conservation of wild wolves.

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