



ESA & Wolves Under Attack

Several bills have been introduced or proposed to strip federal protections for wolves under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). These bills would weaken the ESA and have devastating impacts on wolves nationwide.

MEXICAN WOLVES – THE MOST ENDANGERED WOLVES IN THE WORLD – MAY LOSE ESA PROTECTION

The return of the wolf to the Northern Rockies has been one of America’s greatest wildlife conservation success stories. But the Southwest’s Mexican wolves are still critically endangered.

Following aggressive extermination campaigns in the early 20th century, wolves were essentially wiped out in the lower 48 states. However, under the protection of the Endangered Species Act, wolves were restored to the Northern Rockies and have made a strong comeback in the western Great Lakes region. But the Mexican wolf, with only 50 individuals in the wild in the entire world, still has a long way to go.

SECURING HEALTHY WOLF POPULATIONS

Proposed legislation would allow states to drastically reduce or even eliminate wolf populations, including the highly endangered Mexican wolf.

Even though citizens of Arizona and New Mexico overwhelming support Mexican wolf reintroduction, bills recently introduced would permanently block gray wolves from receiving ESA protection. If enacted, these bills would:

1. Eliminate any federal requirement for states to maintain healthy wolf populations.
2. Eliminate any ability to restore ESA protections if states fail to maintain sufficient numbers of wolves.

In the Southwest, the Mexican wolf population is struggling to recover from years of mismanagement during which Arizona Game and Fish in particular abandoned science-based management and championed excessive wolf removals. Now, the Arizona Game and Fish Commission and state legislature are supporting

throwing wolves off the ESA ark – hoping to get control of the few that remain. With the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reasserting its leadership, the population is finally beginning to increase, demonstrating that federal oversight is essential for success of the program. If ESA protections are stripped, the 50 wolves that survive – the only wild population of Mexican wolves anywhere in the world – face a new era of extinction.



The Road to Recovery

Over the past year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has taken steps to put the Mexican wolf back on the road to recovery. It has reasserted leadership of the program, assembled a team of scientists and stakeholders to help draw up a new recovery plan, established a fund to help livestock owners avoid conflicts with wolves and compensate for losses, and eliminated inflexible rules leading to too many wolf removals.

But without the protection of the ESA, these improvements would end, and Mexican wolves would slip toward extinction.

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UPHOLDING SCIENCE AND THE ESA

Proposed legislation would unravel the ESA and compromise protections for all imperiled wildlife.

For nearly four decades, the Endangered Species Act has set the standard in the U.S. and around the world for protecting imperiled wildlife. Bald eagles, Florida manatees, American alligators, grizzly bears and California condors—to name a few—were all brought back from the brink of extinction with the help of the ESA.

The backbone of the ESA has always been its commitment to science. This commitment has taken conservation and wildlife management out of the realm of politics and put them where they belong: in the hands of professional wildlife managers and biologists. The latest wolf bills would set a terrible precedent by allowing Congress to overrule experts and discard sound science.

A BETTER FUTURE FOR WOLVES

Mexican wolves, when they are safely recovered, can be properly delisted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service without sacrificing the ESA.

Any delisting effort must uphold three core principles:

1. Ensure a healthy, sustainable number of wolves;
2. Apply sound, scientific wildlife management; and
3. Provide a viable safety net through the ESA.

Stripping ESA protections for political reasons will undo decades of wolf recovery, unravel the ESA and leave many other species vulnerable. It will also open the floodgates for other species to be denied ESA protection whenever it's politically convenient.

Congress has wisely and courageously stood up for America's imperiled plants and animals in the past and must do so again. The future of the ESA, wolves and all of our nation's cherished wildlife is at risk.

Wolves Benefit Ecosystem and Economy

As top predators, wolves help maintain healthy, balanced ecosystems. The return of wolves to Yellowstone National Park is an excellent case study in the marvels of nature. During the several decades that wolves were absent from the park, elk numbers exploded to unsustainable levels. Elk grazed too heavily on streamside willow and aspen trees, requiring extreme management strategies to reduce their numbers. In turn, fewer willow and aspen trees contributed to a severe decline in beaver populations. Without beavers building dams, there were fewer ponds, wetlands and eddies for birds, insects, fish and plants that depend on them, and less water stored above and below ground. No wolves also meant more coyotes, which led to fewer pronghorn antelope and red foxes.

After wolves were restored, the ripple effects were seen in reverse as the entire ecosystem rebounded. Elk numbers and grazing behavior have returned to normal. As a result, willow and aspen stands have recovered, and songbirds and beavers have returned. With fewer coyotes, pronghorn antelope and red fox numbers are also up.

In the Southwest, scientists expect similar benefits – to wildlife, sportsmen and everyone who enjoys the outdoors – once wolf numbers increase.

In the Greater Yellowstone area, wolves bring in at least \$35 million annually in tourist revenue.

In Arizona and New Mexico, wolf-centered tourism is beginning as a few outfitters, Fish and Game Department programs and specialty tours take folks out to search for Mexican wolves. One promising new tour developed by the White Mountain Apache tribe combines wolf howling, camera "trapping" for wolves, and cultural activities. Like the ecological benefits of wolves, tourism options and revenue will increase as wolf numbers do.