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Poll: New Mexicans Wild about Mexican Gray Wolves

ALBUQUERQUE, NM. – New Mexico voters overwhelmingly support having Mexican gray wolves back in the wilds of their state, with 69 percent of respondents supporting the reintroduction of Mexican gray wolves into public lands in New Mexico and Arizona, according to a new poll.

The scientific poll was commissioned by conservation and wildlife organizations, including the New Mexico Audubon Council, Arizona Zoological Society and the Southwest Environmental Center. The poll was conducted by Research and Polling, Inc., one of the Southwest's largest market research firms.

“The Mexican gray wolf has strong and broad-based support among the voters in New Mexico. Nearly seven-in-ten New Mexico voters support wolf reintroduction in the state” said Brian Sanderoff, President of Research and Polling Inc. “Voters in New Mexico are much more inclined to view wolves in a positive light than negatively and most voters believe wolves should receive greater protection under the Endangered Species Act until the population rebounds.”

When asked to choose between two statements, 64 percent of respondents chose “the wolf is a benefit to the West and helps maintain a balance of nature,” compared to 21 percent who opted for “the wolf kills too many elk, deer and livestock and does more harm than good.”

The poll captured residents' views of different ways to manage Mexican wolves, including:

- 72 percent believe taxpayer dollars should be used to help ranchers prevent or reduce conflicts, versus 18 percent who believe taxpayer dollars should be used to remove or kill wolves that come into conflict with livestock.
- 62 percent believe the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service should manage Mexican gray wolves to ensure their recovery and not risk extinction again.
- By more than a two-to-one margin, voters support giving wolves greater protection under the Endangered Species Act to ensure the population rebounds.

Mexican wolves roamed the Southwest freely until a federal predator-control program wiped them out about 80 years ago. Mexican wolves were given protection under the Endangered Species Act in 1976, and their return to their wild homeland began with the release of three family groups of lobos in 1998, followed by additional releases through 2006. Wildlife biologists set a goal of at least 100 wolves, which they predicted would include 18 breeding pairs, by 2006.

The removal and killing of wolves that come into conflict with livestock has resulted in a population decline in three of the last four years. As of the latest population survey, conducted in early 2008, only 52 wolves and three breeding pairs were alive in the wilds of Arizona and New Mexico. Wildlife biologists and conservationists have urged the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to change the way it manages wolves to better prioritize wolf recovery.

Research and Polling surveyed 500 New Mexico residents by telephone. The poll has a margin of error of 4.4 percent. Research & Polling, Inc. is a full-service market research and public opinion research company. A copy of the survey is available at www.rpinc.com.

“The Mexican wolf has been on the brink of extinction for over three-quarters of century, and its very existence largely depends on the Fish and Wildlife Service doing the right thing starting now,” said Dave Parsons, former biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “This strong showing of support among New Mexico residents should translate into modern agency policies and actions in keeping with modern public values to save the lobos from a second extinction in the wild.”

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