

## New Mexicans work to save Mexican Wolves

Written by Staff Reports  
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SILVER CITY — Requesting a dramatic decrease in killings and more releases of captive-born wolves, thousands of New Mexicans and Arizona residents signed onto a June 16 letter calling for a focus on recovering the species, which is among the most endangered mammals in North America.

The letter by the Center for Biological Diversity to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service was supported by New Mexico Sportsmen, Upper Gila Watershed Alliance and the White Mountain Conservation League.

The agency is at work on a court-ordered rewrite of a wolf management rule.

In 2018 a federal court ordered a rewrite of a 2015 management rule that harms the wolves. This fall, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will release a draft environmental impact statement and proposed rule for public review and comment. The agency must finalize a new rule by May 17, 2021.

“Mexican wolves are beloved by so many people from so many walks of life,” center senior conservation advocate Michael Robinson said. “This rule-making process should show the government both the breadth of public support for our wolves and the depth of scientific concern over their survival.

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“Most rural residents in southwestern New Mexico support recovery of the Mexican gray wolf,” Carol Ann Fugagli of Upper Gila Watershed Alliance said. “The government is definitely not representing us when it traps or shoots wolves or refuses to release family packs that could thrive and enhance the genetics of this faltering population.”

Twenty wolves have been shot by the government since reintroduction began and dozens more were taken into captivity on behalf of the livestock industry.

While 20 newborn pups were released from captivity over the past two months to be raised by wolves already in the wild, the last release of a well-bonded male/female wolf pair with pups occurred in 2006. Genetic diversity has plummeted in the population in the intervening years because only one of the 30 pups released in previous years is known to have yet successfully reproduced, and because wolf killings and removals have taken out genetically rare wolves.

The letter also requests concrete steps to prevent private citizens from shooting or trapping wolves.

“Sportsmen respect wolves and appreciate their vital role in keeping the natural balance,” Oscar Simpson of New Mexico Sportsmen said. “A hunter shouldn’t evade the law by claiming they thought they were killing a coyote. The federal government needs to eliminate this cover for a person who intentionally wants to kill wolves.”

“Those of us in the mountains of eastern Arizona where wolves were first released in the 1990s know that the wolves play a vital role in the balance of nature,” Tom Hollender of the White Mountain Conservation League said. “These imperiled animals must be managed with far greater care than we’ve seen thus far.”