



Mexican Gray Wolf

One of the Most Endangered Wolves in the World



Background

The Mexican gray wolf (*Canus lupus baileyi*), commonly referred to as “el lobo,” is a small, unique subspecies of gray wolf (*Canus lupus*). Though they once numbered in the thousands throughout the southwestern U.S., these wolves were completely wiped out by the mid-1970s, with just a handful existing in zoos. They were listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1976, and in 1998, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released 11 Mexican gray wolves back into the wild in Arizona, kickstarting their recovery.

Although their numbers have grown slowly since reintroduction, lobos remain the most endangered subspecies of gray wolf in the world because of compromised genetics, human intolerance, and reluctance to release more individuals and bonded pairs to the wild. Today, there are only around 286 wild Mexican gray wolves in Arizona and New Mexico, occupying a fraction of their historic range. **Lobos have not yet met recommended recovery goals and still require full protection as an endangered species.**



Main Threats

More than 70% of documented Mexican gray wolf mortalities are human-caused, including:

✗ **Poaching:** Illegal killing is the leading cause of death for lobos, with *at least* 105 wolves known to have been unlawfully killed between 1998 and 2019. A similar number of radio-collared wolves disappeared, many under suspicious circumstances, during this same span.

🧬 **Declining Genetic Diversity:** After being nearly driven to extinction, the genetic pool of lobos is incredibly small. While captive populations maintain some diversity, every Mexican gray wolf in the wild is almost as closely related to the next as siblings.

⚖️ **Political Interference:** Political whims and special interests, rather than scientific data, inappropriately plays an outsized role in influencing the criteria for protecting and reintroducing lobos under the ESA. The ESA requires the use of the best available science to guide effective conservation efforts.

By the Numbers (U.S.)

0 wolves in the wild in 1975

11 wolves reintroduced in 1998

286 wolves in the wild in **1** vulnerable population today

750 wolves in **3** stable populations are recommended by experts before delisting



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Significant Investment in Livestock Loss Prevention & Compensation

Since reintroduction, public and private partners have financially supported ranchers when rare livestock losses occur, including (not comprehensive):

- **\$1.5M** for 2025-2027 Wolf-Livestock Coexistence, New Mexico legislature
- **\$1.7M** from Defenders of Wildlife for range riding, livestock mgt, and wolf monitoring (**\$175K/3 yr. avg**)
- **\$6.5M** awarded in 2023 for Grazing Management and Non-Lethal Predator Risk Mitigation, implementation in 2025, NRCS
- **\$736.7K** in 2023 for 25 recipients, USDA Livestock Indemnity Program
- **\$517.5K/yr** since 2023 for compensation and prevention, USFWS Livestock Loss Demonstration Grants

Coexistence with Wolves

Although wolf predation on livestock is rare – cattle are more likely to die from a lightning strike than a wolf attack – human tolerance for them is limited, so Mexican gray wolf recovery success will be determined by our effectiveness at solving wolf-livestock conflicts. To help ensure that people and lobos can coexist, we must respectfully address and de-escalate conflicts, incentivize conservation, build trusting relationships and demystify wolves.

Since reintroduction to the American southwest, Defenders of Wildlife and partners have worked with ranchers to fund and implement tools and techniques that reduce conflict, and to develop effective ways to address losses when they do occur.

These tools and management techniques include **range-riders** (pictured left), **fladry fencing**, **carcass removal**, **diversionary feeding**, **livestock guardian dogs**, **conflict-prevention training**. In rare instances where depredation occurs despite deterrent methods, there are **livestock loss compensation programs**.

Wolf Deterrent Methods

There are several effective options for preventing wolf-livestock interactions because there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to coexistence. Certain methods are deployed after evaluating ranchers’ individual circumstances, including:



Range-Riders: Trained professionals who patrol open ranges on horseback. Wolves avoid areas with human presence.



Fladry Fencing: Lines of brightly colored flags hung along the pasture perimeter. Wolves avoid unfamiliar stimuli, so there are other similar “scare tactics” like strobe-lights, sound devices, cracker shells, and more.



Carcass Removal: Removal of attractants like livestock carcasses. This method is prioritized in areas with active calving and prior to lobo denning season to prevent wolves from settling near ranches.



Diversionary Feeding: Road-killed native prey carcasses provided to wolves to reduce interest in livestock.



Livestock Guardian Dogs: Working dogs that deter wolf presence and physically defend cattle when rare interactions do occur.



Conflict-Prevention Training: Teaching livestock management strategies to reduce vulnerability to predators.