

# Crowds weigh in on Mexican wolf management plan

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A Fish and Wildlife Service proposal to revise management plans lifting population caps for the Mexican wolf stirred more than 80,000 people to sound off in a public comment period that ended at midnight.

The species has a vocal fan base, and for the conservationists who rallied the public comment campaign, the sheer mail volume matters.

Over 47,000 comments were submitted through the federal government's Regulations.gov website, and some 34,000 individuals signed conservation organization letters.

"On top of a heap of scientific literature, we once again see immense public support for real lobo recovery," Chris Smith, Southwest wildlife advocate for WildEarth Guardians, said in a statement, referring to the wolf by its commonly known name. "That means allowing wolves to re-establish throughout their historic range, rescuing them from genetic crisis, and designating them as essential."

But numbers don't tell the whole story ([Greenwire](#), Oct. 27, 2021).

Ranchers, among others, voice a competing perspective that has attracted far fewer signatures. Nevertheless, they point to the practical complications of Mexican wolf management.

"The economic impact currently affects the livestock producers and their families in the release zone on continuation of family tradition, real estate value, and daily positive production of livestock genetics," the Arizona Cattle Growers' Association wrote this week, citing a "fear" among ranchers.

FWS has proposed changes that include lifting the current population cap and setting a new "genetic objective" in the Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Area in Arizona and New Mexico, established under Section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act.

The Mexican wolf was placed on the endangered species list in 1976, after which FWS began developing a captive breeding and release program with Mexico that has increased Mexican wolf numbers to about 350 in the wild.

The Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Area was established in 1998 for what's called a "nonessential experimental population" of the species.

The proposed revisions would remove the current allowed population limit of between 300 and 325 Mexican wolves. FWS is also proposing the establishment of a genetic diversity objective, with a goal of 22 released wolves surviving to breeding age by 2030.

The agency is also proposing what it called "the temporary restriction of three forms of allowable take until the genetic diversity goals are met."

Nonessential experimental populations are designated under the Endangered Species Act as a means to reintroduce a listed species to part of its former range without imposing all the restrictions the law mandates elsewhere.

A 2015 rule established a population goal of 300 to 325 wolves within the defined Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Area, expanded the area in which wolves could be freed from captivity and extended the southern boundary of the experimental area to the U.S.-Mexico border.

The 2015 final rule also permitted the killing, called "take," of Mexican wolves under certain circumstances to protect livestock and nonferal dogs. FWS completed its Mexican wolf recovery plan in 2017.

In 2018, a federal judge ruled the 2015 final rule "failed to further the long-term conservation and recovery of the Mexican wolf." The agency was under a court-ordered deadline to fix the problems ([Greenwire](#), April 3, 2018).