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**Conservationists Intervene on Behalf of Mexican Gray Wolf Reintroduction Efforts in New Mexico**

*Releases of Adult Wolves and Puppies Being Blocked by State's Game and Fish*

**ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.** – Defenders of Wildlife, the Center of Biological Diversity, WildEarth Guardians and the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance filed a motion to intervene on behalf of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (the Service) in federal court today, arguing that the state of New Mexico had no authority to block the release of Mexican gray wolf adults and pups into the wild.

On May 20, 2016, New Mexico sued the Service for releasing wolf pups, which are critical to Mexican gray wolf recovery. New Mexico's lawsuit aims to force the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to recapture the released pups and return them to captivity and to ban future releases.

“All wolf releases from captivity are mission critical to the recovery of the most endangered gray wolf in the world,” said [Eva Sargent](#), senior Southwest representative for Defenders of Wildlife. “New Mexico's politically motivated lawsuit is a meritless, obstructionist attempt to usurp the Service's authority in endangered species recovery, as provided for in the Endangered Species Act, our nation's most important wildlife conservation law. We won't stand for it. We need more wolves, less politics.”

“The two captive-born pups now growing up as part of the Shepherders Baseball Park Pack in the Gila National Forest embody the hope to diversify the Mexican wolf gene pool and save their kind from extinction,” said [Michael Robinson](#) of the Center for Biological Diversity. “Removing these pups would be cruel and would contribute to an ongoing decline in wolf numbers and genetic diversity.”

“Obstructing the release of more lobos—one of the most endangered mammals in the United States—is a crime against nature,” said [John Horning](#), executive director for WildEarth Guardians. “We're intervening in this baseless lawsuit to stop New Mexico Department of Game and Fish's relentless assault against wolves and ensure that people will have the opportunity to experience wolves in our beautiful state.”

“America's first designated wilderness area deserves a balanced ecosystem with healthy populations of animals at every level of the food chain,” said [Judy Calman](#), staff attorney for New Mexico Wilderness Alliance. “Mexican wolves are a keystone species in the Gila, and the Fish and Wildlife Service's ability to release them is critical to their recovery and to the management of the wilderness area as a whole. Politics should not be allowed to override science here.”

**Background**

The Mexican gray wolf, or *lobo*, is the most endangered gray wolf in the world. With only 97 wolves in the wild in the United States at the last official count and fewer than 25 in Mexico, today the wolf population faces a drop in numbers and a [genetic diversity crisis](#). The 2015 count dropped

considerably from the all-time high of 110 wolves in 2014. Releases of captive wolves are critically needed to increase the genetic diversity in the wild lobo population. Limited genetic diversity in the wild is leading to smaller litters and lower pup survival – a recipe for extinction.

[Scientists, wolf breeding facilities and other conservationists urge the releases of many more wolves into the wild](#) in New Mexico’s Gila National Forest to enhance genetic diversity. But in the face of opposition from the livestock industry and the states of Arizona and New Mexico, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (the Service) had only released four captive-born wolves during the entire Obama administration until this spring; three died and one was trapped and returned to captivity.

On February 17, 2015, under authority of the 1973 Endangered Species Act (ESA) and a new management rule promulgated on January 16, 2015, the Gila National Forest was opened up to releases of captive-born wolves. In an apparent effort to cooperate with the State of New Mexico, the Service applied for state permits to release captive Mexican gray wolves. In June 2015, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish refused to grant the Service a permit to release Mexican gray wolf pups and adults into the wild. The Service appealed the State’s decision to the New Mexico Fish and Game Commission, and the public overwhelmingly commented and testified in support of the Service at a public hearing last August. However, the commission refused to reverse the department’s decision.

The [ESA](#) requires the Service to “cooperate to the maximum extent practicable with the states” as it pursues species recovery programs. However, the law gives the Service the ability to release endangered species without state permits if states do not allow the Service to carry out its lawful responsibilities. So, in April, the Service released two cross-fostered wolf pups into the wild in New Mexico and plans to release more wolves in the wild in June.

On May 20, 2016, New Mexico sued the Service for releasing the wolf pups, which are critical to Mexican gray wolf recovery. New Mexico’s lawsuit aims to force the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to recapture the released pups and return them to captivity and to ban future releases. While the conservation organizations involved in this suit do not think the Service is doing enough to support lobo recovery, they are engaging in support of the Service’s clear authority to release wolves and the clear conservation need to do so now and in the future.

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*Defenders of Wildlife is dedicated to the protection of all native animals and plants in their natural communities. With more than 1.2 million members and activists, Defenders of Wildlife is a leading advocate for innovative solutions to safeguard our wildlife heritage for generations to come. Get the latest Defenders news on Twitter [@defendersnews](#).*

*The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.*

*WildEarth Guardians works to protect and restore the wildlife, wild places, wild rivers, and health of the American West.*

*The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance is a 501(C)(3) nonprofit, grassroots organization dedicated to the protection, restoration and continued enjoyment of New Mexico’s wildlands and wilderness areas.*