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10. ENDANGERED SPECIES: Group sues FWS over lagging Mexican gray wolf recovery

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An advocacy group sued the Fish and Wildlife Service today in a bid to bring protections for the Mexican gray wolf into line with recommendations by a scientific advisory panel.

The **Center for Biological Diversity** lawsuit accuses FWS of ignoring scientific advice in its wolf recovery program. Two biologists who formerly worked with the agency on wolf recovery endorsed the suit and joined the group in criticizing the agency.

"The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is systematically undermining recovery of the Mexican wolf," said David Parsons, the agency's Mexican wolf recovery coordinator from 1991 through 1999.

The Mexican gray wolf is the southern-most subspecies in North America and has struggled, compared to thriving wolf populations in the Great Lakes and northern Rockies regions. John Vucetich, a biology professor at Michigan Technological University and a member of the FWS wolf recovery team said "conditions have deteriorated substantially" for the wolves since the late 1990s.

Wolves returned to the Southwest in 1998, when 11 animals were released into eastern Arizona. Since then, the population has grown to about 50 animals, and a few wolves have migrated to New Mexico. The agency put a moratorium on releasing the animals last year, largely in response to ranchers.

But the lawsuit charges the agency has been ignoring the recommendations made five years ago by a scientific panel that recommended steps toward a larger reintroduction.

The panel recommended releasing wolves into the Gila National Forest, allowing them to establish territories outside of their primary recovery area and requiring livestock operators on public lands to remove carcasses, so that wolves do not become accustomed to eating livestock.