

## Group pushes U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on wolf recovery

by Christine Steele  
*SUN-NEWS STAFF WRITER*

SILVER CITY - The Center for Biological Diversity, a conservation organization dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places, challenged the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to take action in the next two weeks, to move along the agency's efforts on the issue of the Mexican Wolf Recovery.

The call came on the heels of the release of the Mexican Wolf Conservation Assessment, a non-binding document that assesses the results of Fish and Wildlife's Mexican wolf recovery efforts.

The assessment documents the significant threats to the Mexican wolf from poaching and from the Fish and Wildlife Service's own management decisions in removing wolves from the wild, and the vulnerability of the single wild Mexican wolf population in southwestern New Mexico and southeastern Arizona -

last counted in January at 42 animals and two breeding pairs - and of the approximately 300 wolves in 47 captive-breeding facilities in the United States and Mexico.

The Mexican wolf historically inhabited the southwestern United States and portions of Mexico, until it was virtually eliminated in the wild by private and governmental predator eradication efforts in the late 1800s and early to mid-1900s. Listed as an endangered subspecies of gray wolf in 1976, conservation and recovery efforts to ensure the survival of the Mexican wolf were initially guided by the 1982 Mexican Wolf Recovery Plan, which recommended the establishment of a captive breeding program and the reintroduction of Mexican wolves to the wild. Both of these recommendations have been implemented.

The assessment points to the urgency in reforming the Mexican wolf reintroduction project, and developing an up-to-date Mexican wolf recovery plan that includes

criteria to help establish additional wolf populations.

"This conservation assessment is a clarion call to action before it's too late for the Mexican wolf, and that moment is approaching perilously fast," said Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity. "Whether the Fish and Wildlife Service will act on its own science and fulfill its own promises remains to be seen."

Robinson challenged Fish and Wildlife to act immediately by appointing a panel of scientists to a new Mexican wolf recovery team in the next two weeks who would work toward completing a new Mexican wolf recovery plan by October 15.

The assessment does not require action by any party and is not required by the Endangered Species Act.

Fish and Wildlife moved forward with delisting gray wolves in the Northern Rockies, but has no current plans to delist the Mexican wolf.