



Friday, February 3, 2012

More Mexican Wolves Roam the Southwest

By Rene Romo
Journal South Reporter

The wild wolf population of southeast Arizona and southwest New Mexico saw a net increase of eight in 2011 bringing the total count to 58, according to the annual census conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The growth from the 2010 population of 50 represented a 16-percent increase. It is the first time since 2003 that the number of Mexican gray wolves, which were first reintroduced to the wild in 1998, grew for two consecutive years, noted Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity.

Benjamin Tuggle, (CQ) the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Southwest Regional director, said he was pleased with the population growth but that the agency is considering releases of captive-bred wolves to increase the genetic diversity of wolves on the ground in an effort to improve pup mortality rates.

"These numbers are an indication of the full-on effort we and our partners . . . have been putting into this program. We were successful in establishing the initial population of Mexican wolves in the wild, and we are building on that success," Tuggle said. "Our team is addressing the two biggest threats to Mexican wolf recovery, limited genetic diversity and illegal mortality, and I am certain that we will overcome them."

The Service counted 26 wolves in six packs in New Mexico and 32 wolves in six packs in Arizona.