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Feds propose expanding range for Mexican wolves

The Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.—Endangered Mexican gray wolves would have more room to roam in the Southwest under a proposal unveiled Friday.

The provisions regarding the Mexican wolves are part of a plan proposed by the Obama administration that calls for lifting most of the remaining federal protections for gray wolves.

Protections would remain only for the fledgling population of Mexican wolves in Arizona and New Mexico. The plan would also allow for captive Mexican wolves to be released in New Mexico and for the wolves to roam outside the current Blue Range

recovery area—two changes that independent scientists and environmentalists have been pushing for over the past decade.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Director Benjamin Tuggle said managers in the Southwest need more flexibility.

“When you look at our ability to have initial releases within the limited area that we have, it has sort of hamstrung us to a degree,” Tuggle said. “If we expand those opportunities, we sort of minimize the potential of conflicts on the landscape.”

A subspecies of the gray wolf found in the Northern Rockies, the Mexican wolf was added to the federal endangered species list in 1976. The 15-year effort

to reintroduce them has stumbled due to legal battles, illegal shootings, politics and other problems.

The proposal calls for expanding the area where the wolves could roam to include parts of the Cibola National Forest in central New Mexico and the Tonto National Forest in Arizona. In all, there would be a tenfold increase in the area where biologists are working to rebuild the population.

Environmentalists welcomed the prospect of expansion, but they voiced concerns about provisions that could create loopholes that would expand circumstances in which wolves could be killed for attacking livestock or for other reasons.

