

RESOLUTION 25-21

RESOLUTION OF THE COCHISE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS EXPRESSING OPPOSITION TO THE ONGOING MEXICAN GRAY WOLF REINTRODUCTION PROGRAM AS CURRENTLY IMPLEMENTED, AND CALLING FOR IMMEDIATE REFORM, ENHANCED STATE AUTHORITY, AND FAIR COMPENSATION TO IMPACTED RANCHERS

WHEREAS, in 1998, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) initiated the experimental Mexican Wolf Reintroduction Project under Section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and began introducing captive bred wolves into Arizona; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Section 10(j) of the ESA, the USFWS determined that one hundred percent of the Mexican Gray Wolves currently located in the United States are “non-essential” to the continued survival of the species; and

WHEREAS, in 2024 the captive population of Mexican gray wolves exceeds 350 animals, and Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) has estimated the population of Mexican gray wolves in Arizona and New Mexico to be in excess of 286 wolves roaming in at least documented 60 packs, with an additional 40 animals estimated in Mexico; and

WHEREAS, the original recovery benchmark of 100 wolves was reached in 2014, yet in 2017 the USFWS unilaterally increased the delisting threshold to a rolling eight-year average of 320 wolves, a decision not clearly supported by transparent, peer-reviewed science or grounded in the realities of rural ranching communities; and

WHEREAS, in 2022 Cochise County had a population of 125,487 and had 1.73 million acres that were privately owned, a large percentage made up of 335 active cattle ranches with approximately 57,000 head of cattle, as well as numerous farmers with other types of livestock; making Cochise County the most populated county, most privately owned land county and highest density of livestock of all counties within the Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Area; and

WHEREAS, Cochise County does not include a sufficient population of natural ungulate prey such as deer and elk, thereby increasing reliance on cattle and other livestock as prey animals, to be used as a replacement food source to sustain a wolf population in Cochise County; and

WHEREAS, in January 2025 alone, at least twenty-two confirmed or suspected livestock and equine deaths in Southeast Arizona were attributed to Mexican gray wolves, imposing substantial economic harm on ranchers and illustrating the increasing conflict between wolf reintroduction goals and rural livelihoods; and

WHEREAS, a single wolf attack can cause between \$69,000 and \$162,000 in direct and indirect losses to a local rancher, creating significant, unrecoverable economic damage and hardship to ranching and farming families that have called Cochise County home for generations; and

WHEREAS, the burden of proof to confirm kills is nearly impossible to satisfy, as the new Operating Procedures of Domestic Livestock and Pet Depredations (SOP 11.1) restricts evidence of Mexican wolf depredations to subcutaneous hemorrhaging alone, regardless of the fact that other states like Idaho and Montana accept other valid indicators, thereby limiting access to state and federal compensation; and

WHEREAS, a cow, goat, sheep, or horse are not just animals to a rancher or farmer, and are considered an investment, no different than one on Wall Street, when killed by wolves, causing a severe, uninsurable financial loss without due compensation as guaranteed by the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution; and

WHEREAS, livestock losses to predators are not covered by insurance, and indirect losses such as reduced weight gain, long-term herd disruption, and replacement costs are excluded from most federal compensation schemes—leaving ranchers uncompensated despite USFWS spending over \$220 million on the wolf recovery program to date; and

WHEREAS, 90% of the Mexican gray wolf's historic range lies in Mexico, yet American taxpayers continue to bear disproportionate financial and ecological costs of the program, with projected expenditures through 2030 expected to exceed \$47–59 million; and

WHEREAS, the Arizona Game and Fish Department is equipped to manage the Mexican wolf in Arizona with an appropriate balance between ecological, economic, and public health and safety interests; and

WHEREAS, Cochise County has a vested interest in defending its agricultural economy, protecting the property rights of its residents, and ensuring that conservation policies reflect practical, science-based goals consistent with constitutional guarantees and the needs of local communities;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by formal vote of the Cochise County Board of Supervisors that:

1. The Board opposes any further expansion of the Mexican gray wolf population in Cochise County unless and until recovery criteria are reassessed using independently verified science, with local stakeholders involved in decision-making.
2. The Board urges the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to immediately downlist the Mexican gray wolf from endangered to threatened status and initiate steps toward delisting consistent with population stabilization, historical range limits, and species recovery.
3. The Board supports the “Pet and Livestock Protection Act” recently passed by the U.S. House of Representatives and currently awaiting a vote in the U.S. Senate; specifically supporting the provision that returns local control for management of the Mexican Gray Wolf to the states and their respective game management agencies, in addition to Congressman Paul Gosar’s “Enhancing Safety for Animals Act.”
4. The Board calls upon the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to rescind all Final Rules relating to the management and recovery of the Mexican gray wolf. Furthermore, the Board affirms that any future criteria for Mexican gray wolf recovery must explicitly bifurcate the Mexican gray wolf population in the United States from recovery efforts within Mexico, recognizing the unique ecological, economic, and legal challenges facing American ranchers and borderland communities.

5. The Board affirms the right of ranchers to defend livestock from predation within lawful limits and encourages AZGFD and federal agencies to adopt clear, proactive guidelines that balance wolf conservation with rural economic interests.
6. The Board requests the USFWS and AZGFD revise SOP 11.0 to incorporate a totality of evidence standard that includes eyewitness statements, physical evidence to include the presence of wolf tracks, blood trails, DNA, and other indicators.
7. The Board requests that Congress amend federal reimbursement programs to include indirect economic losses and approve compensation at no less than 150% of market value for confirmed or probable wolf depredation events, reflecting actual harm.
8. The Board reserves the right to consider civil litigation on behalf of Cochise County residents and taxpayers if federal agencies continue to impose unfunded mandates or fail to provide fair compensation for harms resulting from wolf predation.
9. The Board will consider joining the October 18, 2024, Memorandum of Understanding for Mexican Wolf Recovery and Management with the Lead Agencies and other affected counties, for the purpose of exchanging views, information, and advice related to the management, implementation, and oversight of efforts to reestablish a viable population of Mexican gray wolves in Arizona and New Mexico. Participation shall be consistent with the County's interest in safeguarding local agricultural operations, property rights, and public safety.
10. The Board, upon entering a Memorandum of Understanding with USFWS and AZGFD, designates the Cochise County Sheriff as the lead agency for residents to report wolf sightings and potential wolf killings within the county. The Sheriff shall, as needed, investigate and report such incidents to AZGFD, USFWS, and the Board of Supervisors to ensure the County maintains a comprehensive record for potential legal or policy action.

11. The Board further declares its intent to commit all necessary county resources to the training and equipping of the Cochise County Sheriff's Ranch Patrol deputies to identify and report potential Mexican gray wolf killings. This initiative shall enhance documentation accuracy, facilitate timely reporting to relevant agencies, and support future legal or policy-related actions.
12. The Board hereby directs the Cochise County Sheriff to prepare and submit to the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors an annual report summarizing all documented wolf sightings, potential or confirmed wolf killings, and outcomes of investigations undertaken by the Ranch Patrol or other designated personnel. This report shall be delivered no later than January 31st of each calendar year and serve as a record for transparency, oversight, and potential legislative or judicial action.
13. The Board requests that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service assign and station a dedicated federal wildlife enforcement officer or field agent in Willcox, Arizona to enable more rapid coordination and response in cases of wolf sightings, livestock depredation, or public safety threats, thereby improving agency accountability and response time in Cochise County.
14. The Board urges the creation of a 48-hour emergency response protocol by AZGFD for removing wolves from conflict zones when public safety, confirmed kills, or credible threats are established by local investigation.
15. The Board formally requests that the federal government reimburse all reasonable county expenses incurred from livestock depredation investigations, public safety efforts, and documentation related to the Mexican Wolf Program.
16. Nothing in this resolution shall be interpreted as authorizing actions that violate the Endangered Species Act, state law, or other applicable statutes. The County remains committed to lawful cooperation and advocacy within the limits of its authority.

A Resolution of the Cochise County Board of Supervisors Expressing Opposition to the Ongoing Mexican Gray Wolf Reintroduction Program as Currently Implemented, and Calling for Immediate Reform, Enhanced State Authority, and Fair Compensation to Impacted Ranchers

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Board of Supervisors of Cochise County, Arizona, this ____ day of _____, 2025.

COCHISE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Frank Antenori, Chairman

Tom Crosby, Vice Chairman

Kathleen Gomez, Supervisor

ATTEST:

Lara Loewenheim
Clerk of the Board

APPROVED AS TO FORM:


7/17/2025

Dylan Hendel
Civil Deputy County Attorney