



## Arizona Deer Association

P.O. Box 21868 • Mesa, Arizona 85277 • 480-854-8950

www.azdeer.org

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### **OPEN LETTER TO THE ADA MEMBERSHIP AND ARIZONA SPORTSMEN**

*RE: Mexican gray wolf reintroductions*

*October 11, 2011*

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service has recently convened meetings to plan for Mexican gray wolf recovery. Although the Arizona Deer Association, the Arizona Sportsmen for Wildlife, Arizona Elk Society and other groups that represent sportsmen and conservation requested a presence at these meetings, those requests were denied. In lieu of our participation, the Arizona Wildlife Federation was chosen to represent sportsmen. I would like to briefly explain what is happening in an effort to enlighten sportsmen before hunting opportunities for deer and elk are dramatically reduced.

For more than 20 years, there has been an attempt to reintroduce the Mexican gray wolf in southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico. That repopulation is being conducted under a provision in the Endangered Species Act referred to as an “experimental, non-essential” program. The goal of the reintroduction program was to establish at least 100 free-ranging wolves in parts of Arizona and New Mexico. An environmental impact statement was prepared and the findings indicated that the maximum financial obligation for the program would be \$7,500,000.00. That figure has long been eclipsed and to date the program has cost taxpayers over \$24,000,000.00. The program has had marginal success, constant criticism, and the target of 100 wolves has not been met. USFWS was sued by the Center for Biological Diversity and other like-minded groups. The lawsuit was settled by consent decree in which almost all the stakeholders, including the hunting public, were excluded.

The basis for the current round of meetings was to develop a new recovery plan. I have done some research on the internet and the document that seems to best present what the future may hold was published in July of 2004. It indicates that the containment range of the “Blue” area is not sufficient to biologically guarantee that the current population of Mexican gray wolves will be able to survive. The document was prepared for the Turner Endangered Species Fund and the prominent presenters were Carlos Carroll and Michael K. Phillips. For those who wish to read the document, you can research it under the title *Spatial Analysis of Restoration Potential and Population Viability of the Wolf ‘Canis Lupus’ in the Southwestern United States and Northern Mexico*.

The thrust of these current draft recovery criteria is that they will require several hundreds of wolves in three populations to ensure long-term survival. The space designated for these wolves is now in the process of evaluation. According to the proposal, the best biological prognosis for Mexican gray wolf survival is to have a total of three populations with Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado and Utah as possible translocation areas. Specifically for Arizona, it calls for the Mogollon Rim and the Colorado Plateau as prime potential areas for good survivability. That could include the “Strip” and the Kaibab as well as any unit in which elk and deer have a presence.

Certain people and groups believe that the southwest could biologically support thousands of Mexican gray wolves and that Mexico could support about 1,700 wolves. Those numbers, if even remotely close, would guarantee that hunting would be greatly reduced in the years to come.

Since the late 1980s, the mule deer herds in Arizona have declined dramatically. Studies that the Arizona Deer Association helped to fund indicate that drought, habitat, and water have played a minor role in the reduction of deer herds. Predation has been the main culprit in the loss of thousands of mule deer. The Three Bar study presented scientific proof that predation was responsible for a majority of our fawn crop losses. With low fawn recruitment, we have witnessed a loss of over 60 percent of our Arizona deer tags. Sightings of mule deer across the state are at an all time low while we have poured millions of dollars into habitat development and water resources. The Strip is probably the finest area in the world for hunting large trophy class mule deer. That area, and the Kaibab, have both been studied to death. Establishing a top line predator would result in tremendous declines in Strip and north Kaibab deer populations. We do not need another predator roaming these special places!

The Arizona Deer Association pledges to strongly lobby for a seat at any future meetings and we will oppose any decisions to expand the current Mexican gray wolf zones. We will also strongly fight any increase in wolf numbers, particularly any number in the hundreds, which will practically guarantee that hunting will be greatly reduced. Understand that the Center for Biological Diversity, the HSUS and other groups have been advocating for increased wolf numbers for years. It appears that the federal government, specifically the USFWS, is the tool that these groups will use to end the North American model of wildlife conservation. As hunters and conservationists, each of you reading this has a responsibility to become involved in any way possible. It will take finances, time, and most importantly an informed and united representation by sportsmen. The proponents of wolf expansion have been active and well funded. They are ready to proceed and have the funding to foist their wolf expansion on an unsuspecting public. The bugle of an elk or the sight of a mule deer herd grazing in an open meadow will be a fleeting memory if we do not act now.

The Arizona Deer Association Board of Directors hopes that you are as outraged as we are. We asking that you please, read anything released by the Arizona Deer Association, Arizona Sportsmen for Wildlife, the Arizona Elk Society, Big Game Forever, and all other groups with a stakeholder interest in this issue. The meetings are very real. The USFWS's timetable is being accelerated and the potential is a rapidly expanding wolf population throughout Arizona. The USFWS and wolf advocates are counting on a complacent and uninterested hunting community to aid their efforts. The mistakes made in the past in our northern states have dealt a crippling blow to wildlife. We cannot and will not make the same mistakes here in Arizona. Get involved and educated now. Wildlife and the future of hunting are at stake.

Yours in Conservation

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Koleszar". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John Koleszar  
Arizona Deer Association President