

**Statement for the Record
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
House Committee on Natural Resources,
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries
Legislative Hearing On
H.R. 4255, Enhancing Safety for Animals Act of 2025**

September 3, 2025

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement for the record on H.R. 4255, “Enhancing Safety for Animals Act of 2025.” H.R. 4255 would remove the separate Mexican wolf subspecies endangered listing from the lists of threatened species and endangered species under section 4 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This bill would also nullify the effect of the final rule “Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Endangered Status for the Mexican Wolf,” published on January 16, 2015, which determined that the Mexican wolf is a separate entity from the gray wolf. In addition, the bill would nullify the effect of the final rule “Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Revision to the Nonessential Experimental Population of the Mexican Wolf,” published on July 1, 2022, which revised the implementing regulations pertaining to the Mexican wolf section 10(j) population.

H.R. 4255 states that if the Mexican wolf is listed as endangered or threatened in the future under section 4, the Service may not reference or otherwise consider the status of the recovery of the Mexican wolf in Mexico, in terms of factoring that population into a recovery plan. Under the bill, the Service is also prohibited from considering the population status of the species in Mexico when evaluating the status of the Mexican wolf population in the United States.

The Mexican wolf was listed as endangered under the ESA in 1976, and a binational captive breeding program was initiated to help prevent the extinction of the subspecies. In 1998, the Service released the first captive Mexican wolves into the Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Area in Arizona and New Mexico. Currently, the Mexican wolf is listed as endangered wherever found, except where included in the Experimental Population Area. In this area, in portions of Arizona and New Mexico from south of I-40 to the border with Mexico, the species is designated as a Non-essential Experimental Population under section 10(j) of the ESA. Often, if there is a need to reintroduce a species back onto the landscape, the Service will promulgate a 10(j) rule, which provides greater management flexibility for the reintroduced population. The Mexican wolf 10(j) population is therefore treated as threatened, rather than endangered (as it is elsewhere in its range) and there is more management flexibility around “take” of the species, as well as consultations, as section 7 consultations are not required for 10(j) nonessential experimental populations except on National Wildlife Refuge System or National Park Service lands. Under the ESA, “take” of a listed species pertains to killing, harming, harassing, and other actions against the species.

The Service is working closely with our partners to support recovery of the Mexican wolf to the point of delisting. The Service is seeing progress in both overall population targets and genetic diversity within the population. We are also working closely with state wildlife agencies, ranchers, local communities, and other partners to reduce depredations, and we have seen five years of steady declines of reports of livestock killed by wolves through 2024, the last full year of data. The Service is encouraged by the downward trend in reported depredations, though we recognize that depredations remain a persistent challenge for Americans living the range of the Mexican wolf and that the community's concerns are rising as the wolf population grows. We continue to work to make further progress to reduce livestock kills.

We understand and appreciate the challenges and complexities of managing and living with wolves. While wolves are a part of America's natural heritage, the increased presence of apex predators in an ecosystem presents ongoing concerns for local communities, especially livestock producers.

The Department of the Interior takes the community and sponsor's concerns seriously and addressing them is a priority for this Administration. We are committed to ongoing collaboration and transparency through robust partnerships and communication with local communities on this important matter. The Service will continue to work with the community, the sponsor, and the subcommittee on additional ways to help address depredations and other concerns related to ever-increasing Mexican wolf populations at the urban-rural interface.