

June 23, 2025



House Committee on Natural Resources

Congressman Bruce Westerman – Chair

Congressman Robert Wittman – Vicechair

Congressman Jared Huffman – Ranking Member

Congresswoman Harriet Hageman – Chairwoman of the Water, Wildlife and Fisheries Subcommittee

CC: Congressman Paul Gosar (AZ District 4) – Chairman of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee

CC: Congressmen Eli Crane (AZ 2nd District), Juan Ciscomani (AZ 6th District), & Gabriel Vasquez (NM 2nd District)

RE: Mexican Wolf Recovery Program and Corresponding 10(j) Rule

Dear Chairman Westerman, Vicechair Wittman, Ranking Member Huffman, & Chairwoman Hageman,

The New Mexico Council of Outfitters and Guides (NMCOG) would like to express our support for Congressman Gosar's statement, made on June 12th during the full committee Oversight Hearing, that he would soon be introducing legislation to "delist and delink" the Mexican Wolf. Although the legislation has yet to be introduced, NMCOG would like to formally encourage the committee to address this important topic.

NMCOG is a 501(c)(6) non-profit organization that serves as an advocate for the outfitter/guide industry by working with state and federal governments and government agencies to protect and promote the outfitted segment of the hunting & fishing industry in the state of New Mexico.

Our members consist of business owners (Outfitters) and their employees (Guides) who facilitate hunting and fishing opportunities on New Mexico's public and private lands. A substantial portion of our membership operates in and around the Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Area (MWEPA) and have been directly impacted by a noticeable reduction in the elk herds because of a rapidly increasing wolf population.

Rural communities within the MWEPA depend on huntable big game populations as a food source but also to sustain tourism and economic vitality. 98% of the tourism base in Catron County, NM is hunting related and according to a recent study conducted by NMCOG, non-resident elk hunters spend an average of \$12,000 per visit hunting elk in the Gila National Forest. Elk hunting is vital revenue for the rural communities in Mexican wolf country. The outfitting industry depends on huntable elk and deer populations to generate revenue, and the wolves depend on those same populations for food. There will always be conflict between outfitters and wolves. It is in the economic best interest of the states of New Mexico and Arizona that we establish balance between the wolves and the hunting industry.

Outfitters and guides are some of the most well-attuned individuals to the natural world. They may not be biologists, but outfitters/guides are operating outside in nature every day. They know what is going on in their areas. Every outfitter and guide who operates in the Gila National Forest of NM (the heart of the

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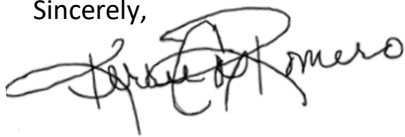
MWEPA) says that the elk and deer populations in their areas are declining. They are seeing less and less elk calves. The wilderness areas, that were once abundant with elk, are nearly completely devoid of elk today. And the quality of elk in the Gila (which used to be top 5 in the world) has suffered substantially. In response to decreasing elk herds, the NM Dept. of Game and Fish recently reduced elk hunting permits in the Gila wilderness. The NM Dept. of Game and Fish also required that scopes be removed from muzzleloaders to try to stabilize the elk quality (without scopes a hunter cannot shoot as far, thus reducing harvest rates while maintaining hunter opportunity). These negative impacts to the outfitting industry are a direct result of a rapidly increasing wolf population.

NMCOG has been involved in the Mexican Wolf Recovery efforts since they began in 1998 and we were a stakeholder on the original Mexican Wolf Recovery Team (which was dissolved by the USFWS during the 2017 10(j) revision). Over the many years of the recovery, we have provided comments to the US Fish and Wildlife Service and NM & AZ Game and Fish Departments. We've been involved in litigation regarding the wolf reintroduction. We worked with the USFWS on their initial recovery plan, the first draft of the 10(j), the second draft of the recovery plan, and the court ordered re-writing of the recovery plan.

Over the past 30 years NMCOG has watched the Mexican wolf numbers grow from 7 captive wolves to a point where we now have many well-established packs and a thriving population in excess of 286 wolves in the wild. It is time to begin the downlisting and delisting conversation. New Mexico and Arizona cannot afford for the Mexican wolf recovery to go the way the Gray wolf recovery did (exploding population numbers with continuous litigation to prevent delisting). Given our arid climates, we simply do not have quantity or density of ungulate populations to sustain wolf numbers much above where they are today and maintain an economically viable outfitting industry. By the time the data shows that wolves are impacting elk and deer populations to the point where the 10(j) says the USFWS can begin to intervene, it will be too late to save the outfitting industry in the MWEPA.

We appreciate this committee's priority to reform the Endangered Species Act through H.R. 1897 and we applaud Congressman Gosar's attempts to include the Mexican wolf as part of the conversation. We would appreciate the opportunity to participate in any discussions of delisting or delinking the US Mexican wolf population with that of the country of Mexico (which is where 90% of the Mexican wolf's historic range exists). Mexican wolves are thriving in New Mexico and Arizona but continue to struggle in Mexico. The downlisting & subsequent delisting of the US population should not be contingent on wolf recovery in Mexico.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kerrie Cox Romero". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the last name "Romero" being more prominent.

Kerrie Cox Romero – Executive Director
New Mexico Council of Outfitters and Guides

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