

Congratulations - you're planning to visit the Wolf Conservation Center on a virtual field trip! Before your trip, make sure you read about the history of the wolves you're going to meet. This background information will help you better connect to the wolves during your visit.

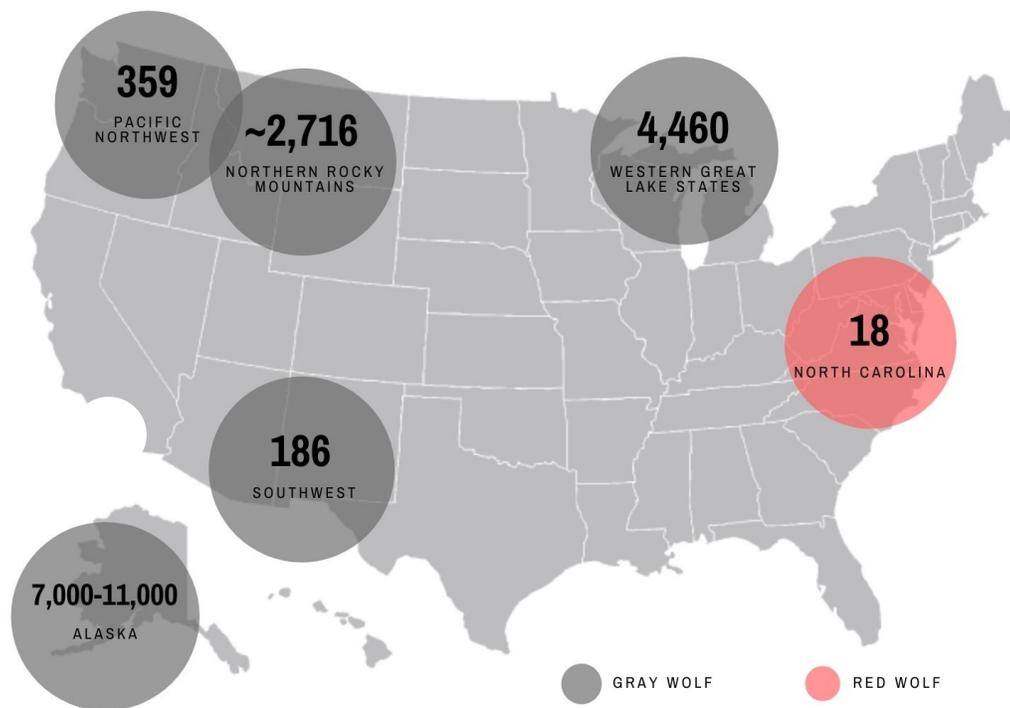
Summary:

Participants learn about the history of gray wolves, red wolves, and Mexican gray wolves.

Background Information:

There are two species of wolf in the United States - gray wolves and red wolves. Although wolves were once found in every single US state, centuries of **persecution** pushed wolves to the brink of extinction. Luckily, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) gave wolves special protections so people would be punished if they harmed them. These protections, combined with special programs that **reintroduced** wolves to the wild, allowed the populations of wolves in the US to increase. As of January 4, 2021 gray wolves are no longer listed as a federally endangered species in the US.

So where do wolves live today and approximately how many are there?



You'll notice there are some areas, like Alaska and the Northern Rocky Mountain states, that have a lot of wolves. In these states, wolves aren't protected by the ESA anymore - in fact, these states let people hunt and kill wolves. There's no scientific or ethical reason to kill wolves and you'll learn more about this during your field trip.

Two areas, the Southwest and North Carolina, have very small wolf populations. Let's learn more about the wolves that live there!



Background:

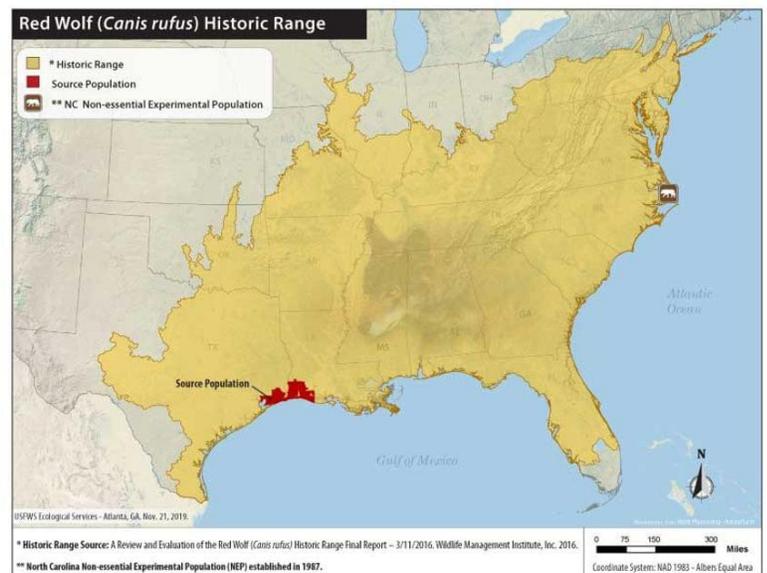
The red wolf (*Canis rufus*) is one of two species of wolves in North America, the other being the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*). As their name suggests, red wolves are known for the characteristic reddish color of their fur (most apparent behind the ears and along the neck and legs), but they are mostly brown and buff colored. The average adult red wolf weighs 45-80 pounds, stands about 26 inches at the shoulder, and is about 4 feet long from the tip of the nose to the end of the tail.

Red wolves are social animals that live in **packs** consisting of a breeding adult pair and their offspring of different years, typically five to eight animals. Red wolves prey on a variety of wild mammals such as raccoon, rabbit, white-tailed deer, **nutria**, and other rodents. They are **crepuscular**, which means they're most active at dusk and dawn, and are shy and generally avoid humans and human activity.

Red wolves are protected as an **endangered species** under the Endangered Species Act and are classified as "critically endangered" on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List.

The **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)** established a captive-breeding program for the red wolf in 1973. Biologists began to remove remaining red wolves from the wild in an effort to save the species from extinction.

In 1977, captive red wolf pairs produced their first litters. In 1987, four pairs of red wolves were reintroduced to the wild in the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge in northeastern North Carolina. While the wild population was estimated to be over 130 a few years ago, the current population estimate is at its lowest level since the late 1980s.



Map by Jose Barrios, USFWS

This spring, USFWS released 8 captive-born red wolves to the wild for the first time since 2014. One of the wolves, named Deven, was born at the WCC in 2018 - how exciting!



Background:

The Mexican gray wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*) is a **subspecies** of gray wolf. Mexican gray wolves are native to the southwestern United States and Mexico and are commonly referred to as "lobos" (Spanish for "wolf").

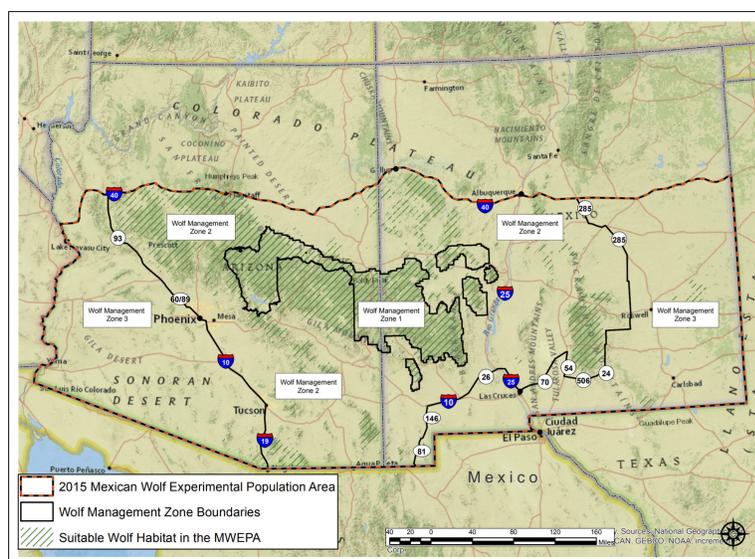
Adult Mexican wolves typically weigh 65-85 pounds, average 4.5-5.5 feet from nose to tail, and stand 28-32 inches at the shoulder. They breed from late January through early March, and give birth to an average of four to six pups about 63 days later.

They prefer mountain woodlands, probably because of the favorable combination of cover, water, and available prey (deer, elk, **javelina**, rabbits, and small mammals). Like all wolves, the lobo is a social creature with a complex system of communication and social structure. However, because the primary prey of Mexican wolves is smaller than the moose and caribou hunted by northern gray wolves, wolf pack sizes are slightly smaller.

Mexican gray wolves are protected as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act. There are currently approximately 186 living in the wild in Arizona and New Mexico.

Under an agreement between the United States and Mexico, the last five wild Mexican wolves were captured between 1977-1980 in Mexico. These wolves were transferred to the United States to establish a certified **captive breeding program**.

In March 1998 the USFWS and its cooperators (Arizona Game and Fish Department, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, USDA Wildlife Services) released three family groups consisting of 11 Mexican wolves into eastern Arizona. They now live in New Mexico, too.



Map by USFWS

Wild Mexican gray wolves have resumed their rightful place on the landscape and more wolves from captivity will hopefully be released in the future.

Captive breeding program - This term refers to the "species survival plan" (SSP) program. The SSP is a breeding and management program designed to ensure the long-term sustainability of captive-based animal populations. It's a coordinated effort among zoos, organizations like the Wolf Conservation Center, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Mexico's Fish & Wildlife Agencies, and managed under the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). Essentially, SSP organizations care for red wolves and Mexican gray wolves until they can be released into the wild.

Crepuscular - Crepuscular animals are more active during twilight (when the sun is rising and the sun is setting).

Endangered species - An endangered species is a plant or animal that is at risk of extinction.

Endangered Species Act - The ESA was established in 1973 to protect animals that are endangered and threatened (at risk of becoming endangered). The ESA aims to protect endangered and threatened wildlife by protecting their habitats and keeping them safe from harm.

Javelina - Javelinas (also known as peccaries) are medium-sized animals that look like wild pigs. They live in Arizona and New Mexico and are prey (food) for Mexican gray wolves.

Nutria - Nutria are large rodents that live in areas with lots of freshwater. They are considered to be a pest animal and are consumed by red wolves and other carnivores in North Carolina.

Pack - Wolves live in family groups called "packs." A pack is usually made up of mom, dad, and their children. Sometimes unrelated wolves are part of the pack.

Persecution - Persecution is the mistreatment of an individual or group by another group. For example, thousands of wolves were killed by humans. Some people still kill wolves.

Reintroduction - Reintroduction occurs when an animal or plant is returned to the wild area where it used to live (or where its species used to live).

Subspecies - A subspecies is a group within a species that has become somewhat physically and genetically different from the rest of the group. However, they are still similar enough to interbreed with the rest of the species. For example, Mexican gray wolves are a subspecies of gray wolf; this means they are slightly different from other types of gray wolves but they could still breed with another type of gray wolf.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) - USFWS is an agency of the US federal government dedicated to conserving fish, wildlife, and natural habitats. USFWS enforces the Endangered Species Act.