

July 8, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum, Secretary of the Interior, exsec@ios.doi.gov
Karen Budd-Falen, Associate Deputy Secretary, Department of the Interior
Brian Nesvik, director-nominee, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Paul Souza, Acting Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, paul_souza@fws.gov
Joshua W.D. Coursey, Senior Advisor to the Director, joshua_coursey@fws.gov
Stewart Jacks, Acting Regional Director, Southwest Region, stewart_jacks@fws.gov
Seth Willey, Acting Regional Director, Ecological Services, Seth_Willey@fws.gov
Brady McGee, Ph.D., Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator, brady_mcgee@fws.gov

Re: The immediate need to release the Caldera Pack of Mexican gray wolves

Dear Secretary Burgum, Deputy Secretary Budd-Falen, General Nesvik, Acting Director Sousa, Advisor Coursey, Acting Director Jacks, Acting Director Willey, and Coordinator McGee,

The 36 undersigned conservation organizations write on behalf of our millions of members and supporters throughout the United States to request immediate implementation of the planned release of the Caldera Pack of Mexican gray wolves at the Ladder Ranch in New Mexico, to best ensure their success in the wild and improvement of the dire genetic plight of this unique but gravely endangered subspecies of gray wolf.

The Caldera Pack consists of a female, named Asha in an online kids' wolf-naming contest, her mate Arcadia, and their five pups Kachina, Aspen, Sage, Kai and Aala. Asha, who was born in the wild, became an icon of wolf wandering – and persistence – in 2023 in her two long-distance movements well north of the Fish and Wildlife Service's arbitrary boundary for Mexican wolf movements, Interstate 40. She was captured and released once and, after her second infraction, the Service captured her again and paired her with the captive-born Arcadia, publicly stating they would be released after pups were born.

Now their moment has arrived and we implore the Fish and Wildlife Service to move forward with the promised release. The pups would materially improve the health of the genetically depauperate wild population, which becomes harder to diversify the larger the population grows on the landscape, because the larger population anticipated in the future would require proportionately more releases to gain the same percentage of genes underrepresented in the wild but available among captive wolves.

In June, the Service notified nearby land-owners that the release will occur on the conservation-dedicated 244-square-mile Ladder Ranch. The Ladder Ranch adjoins the vast Gila National Forest and specifically the Aldo Leopold Wilderness, which in 1924 the Forest Service designated along with today's Gila Wilderness as the first place in the world in which the ecosystem and non-motorized recreation were to be forever protected from road construction and vehicular access.

The release was scheduled for June 23 but postponed supposedly due to logistics. However, the livestock industry has been lobbying to halt wolf releases – inadequate though they

have been – and with the release now apparently on hold and certainly delayed, we are troubled that wolf recovery may be being stymied for political reasons. Implementation of the Endangered Species Act is required by the statute to be based exclusively on the best science, not political influence.

Time is of the essence. Now is the opportunity to accustom the Caldera Pack to their natural prey of elk, which Mexican wolves typically learn to hunt during the early summer when elk calves abound. (Notably, Asha has never been accused of preying on livestock and her captive-born family has not yet encountered domestic animals.)

The Mexican gray wolf is a beautiful, social and intelligent animal that, by 1980, had come within seven animals of extinction. Reintroduction of the Mexican wolf in 1998 marked a signal turn away from the government's deliberate campaign of wolf extermination on behalf of the livestock industry, to a more inclusive, balanced and ecologically-healing policy of wolf recovery. In a multitude of public polls over the course of decades, large majorities of New Mexico and Arizona residents in both urban and rural areas support recovery of the Mexican wolf. School children named the members of this wolf family and the public is eager for their success.

Please release the Caldera Pack this week.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely endorsed by:

Karen Michael
Secretary, Board of Directors
Animal Defense League of Arizona

Michael J. Robinson
Senior Conservation Advocate
Center for Biological Diversity

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Please reply to:

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