

## Mexican Wolf Messaging Recommendations

### *Framing*

Public opinion research offers insights into the best way to frame debates over wolf recovery. The polling suggests that framing the issue as a choice between wolves/environmentalists and ranchers/livestock production is likely to result in a negative public reaction. Tapping into broad public support for wolves requires that advocates frame the issue as a choice between wolves and no wolves – or wolves and extinction. By framing the issue as a choice between wolves and extinction, wolf supporters can effectively avoid alienating potential supporters.

### *Do:*

- Increase awareness of Mexican gray wolves and the recovery effort. There is an opportunity to target younger voters who are less aware of the issue and should be receptive.
- Improve overall image of the wolf. The single best predictor of support for wolf recovery is one's overall feelings about wolves.
- Focus on positive messages about the wolf.
- Use images and words that put the wolf in a positive light.
- Keep social media messages simple, focusing on the wolf.
- Tout the benefits of having wolves in the wild (balance of nature, et cetera).
- Lead with positives and then follow with messages that counter inaccurate claims about wolves (e.g. counter a statement about livestock loss with statistics such as wolves are responsible for less than 1 percent of livestock losses, et cetera).
- Criticize flawed government policies, but also offer solutions.
- Respond to misinformation only in the medium where information was disseminated.
- Use specific targeted mailings to build support and encourage action, whether through letter writing, attending public hearings/meetings, or through donations.
- Build support in local communities in or near the reintroduction area. Turn locals out to public events and meetings to counter anti-wolf presence and voice. Show that not everyone hates the wolf in the recovery area.
- Demonstrate willingness to address ranchers' concerns and seek solutions.
- Build close relationships and alliances with agency personnel who truly are supportive of the wolf. Work hard to foster these relationships. You never know who may be in charge or have a greater voice in the next administration.
- Frame the issue as being wolves vs. wolf extinction. Take ranchers out of the equation and focus on the wolf.

### *Don't:*

- Make personal attacks on ranchers, public land grazing or the ranching industry. Attacking ranchers/ranching will be seen as attacking a way of life.
- Brand the reintroduction program as a failure.
- Vilify agencies or personally attack agency personnel.
- Get sucked into the typical rancher versus environmentalist frame.
- Do or say things that can help ranchers paint wolf advocates as environmentalist extremists.
- Use the wolf as a pawn to eliminate grazing on public lands. This will only deteriorate the image of the wolf and support for wolf recovery.
- Frame the issue as a choice between wolves and ranchers or environmentalist versus ranchers.

- Get caught up in too much “inside baseball” in the mass media campaign. It’s too complex and people do not currently know enough about the issue.
- Run strong anti-ranching or anti-grazing media campaigns concurrent with pro-wolf campaigns. The ranchers will use this as evidence that wolf recovery is just a ploy to eliminate their way of life.
- Attack controversial laws allowing ranchers to kill elk or other wildlife destroying crops. It will only add to the confusion and may hurt current efforts being made to change the law.

### **Effective Messages:**

The polling recommendations include a number of positive messages that garner strong support from both core supporters and pro-wolf/pro-ranchers, and maintain soft support from soft supporters and middle-of-the-roaders. The most compelling messages overall were:

- “Wolves are intelligent, family-oriented animals. Shooting and trapping them disrupts their packs, separates mated pairs and can leave pups without parents.”
- “Wolves are an essential part of the balance of nature. They keep elk and deer herds healthy by ensuring the most fit animals survive.”
- “Living with wolves is part of life in the West.”
- “Wolves are part of God’s creation. We have a responsibility to take care of them.”

### **Additional messages that showed strong support in polling:**

- Mexican wolves are “beautiful animals”, “endangered species” and “wild” (top three responses when people were asked what first comes to mind when they think of wolves.)
- Wolves belong in nature
- People living in or near the wolf recovery area should take steps to minimize danger to pets and livestock
- When it comes to taxpayer money in managing wolves, 79% of respondents said they’d prefer “Helping ranchers prevent or reduce conflicts with wolves.”
- Wolves are responsible for less than 1% of livestock losses. Most livestock losses are due to disease, accidents, and bad weather
- We need to do more to protect endangered species
- The wolf is a benefit to the West and helps maintain the balance of nature.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service should manage Mexican gray wolves to ensure their recovery and not risk extinction again.
- Give wolves greater protection under the Endangered Species Act to ensure the population rebounds
- Allow wolves to migrate to suitable habitat in Arizona and New Mexico, even if it is outside of the zone where wolves are currently allowed
- Being a good steward of the land includes sharing the land with wildlife like bears and wolves.
- Require ranchers to remove or make inedible cattle that die of non-wolf causes, for example by applying lime, so wolves are not drawn to nearby live cattle.

**Spokespeople:** Wildlife biologists ranked highest as credible spokespeople on the issue, followed by representatives from the state and federal departments of wildlife/game and fish departments, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, in that order.