

A close-up, high-resolution photograph of a wolf's face. The wolf has thick, grey and white fur with a dark brown patch around its eyes and on its muzzle. Its eyes are a striking, golden-orange color. The wolf is looking slightly to the left of the camera with a calm, steady gaze. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting.

Wolf Conservation Center

Annual Report 2021





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Protecting the Future for Wolves

The Wolf Conservation Center (WCC), founded in 1999 by Hélène Grimaud, is a private, not-for-profit environmental education organization working to protect and preserve wolves in North America through science-based education, advocacy, and participation in the federal recovery and release programs for two critically endangered wolf species: the Mexican gray wolf and the red wolf.

Lessons From 2021

It was good to open the doors to the WCC once again in 2021. Our hearts continue to be with those who have been affected personally by this global catastrophe.

While everyone is still struggling with several new realities of how to operate in the midst of a pandemic, through a mix of limited in-person, online, and hybrid events, the WCC was able to continue its mission of educating the public about wolves throughout the chaos of this past year.

As we've always said: the strength of the wolf is the pack, and the past year has shown us just how far and wide that pack roams.

We can't thank you enough for your continued support through these trying times, and we're more sure than ever that better days lie ahead.



Maggie Howell

Executive Director



2021

at a Glance

12,250

People were educated through onsite, offsite, and virtual education programs

8,498

Donors supported us with 17,538 gifts through the year

33

Wolves were nurtured and cared for on our campus





Serving Locally, Impacting Globally

In a world that is ever-changing, one constant is the need to continually educate about and raise awareness for wolves. The WCC continued to innovate and reach wide audiences both in-person and virtually, despite facing challenges that reverberated globally.

Our virtual programming allowed wolf supporters from Australia to Ireland to California to learn about the importance of wolves to their families and to ecosystems, and to better appreciate the need to value wolves as individuals. Were it not for your unyielding support and trust in the WCC's mission, we could not have accomplished these feats.



What is an SSP?

A Species Survival Plan is a breeding and management program under the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) designed to ensure the long-term sustainability of captive-based animal populations. The primary purpose of a SSP is to support the re-establishment of critically endangered, endangered, or threatened species through captive breeding, public education, research, and pre-release care

SSP: The Wild World Of Red Wolves

The WCC is a part of the SSP (Species Survival Plan) for red wolves. At the end of 2020, only 8 red wolves were known to remain in the wild - the lowest population count since captive to wild red wolf releases began in 1987.

For the first time in nearly three decades, no pups were born to the wild population in 2019 and 2020. These devastating milestones were direct results of USFWS abandoning the red wolf recovery effort in 2014; federal officials announced that they needed to conduct a review of their Red Wolf Adaptive Management Plan and halted all wild releases, abandoned their coyote sterilization efforts, and issued kill permits to private landowners. The wild population plummeted to its lowest numbers since the release effort began in 1987.



We take comfort in knowing that Deven experienced a life all wolves deserve - a chance to be free and roam without barriers, a chance to roam his ancestral lands - but we are determined that his death not be in vain. With so few red wolves remaining in the wild, their safety and protection is imperative.



Recovering Endangered Species

History was made in June 2021 when red wolf Deven, born to parents Jack and Charlotte at the Wolf Conservation Center in 2018, was released in North Carolina by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Deven and the seven other wolves chosen for release (three adults, four pups) were selected for their genetic value and their especially elusive behaviors. Unbeknownst to Deven, he was also chosen for a much more significant reason - the need to rescue his imperiled species from the brink of extinction.

The release of Deven and the other wolves was intended to be a catalyst to once again spark red wolf growth and recovery in the wild. Tragically, none of the released adults survived more than a few months in the wild - Deven and two other wolves were struck and killed by vehicles, and the fourth adult was shot in October 2021.

Outreach: Lending a Helping Paw

The strength of the wolf is the pack, and the strength of wolf recovery is teamwork. In October 2021, red wolves Rich and Shane left their family at the WCC and embarked on a new adventure; the brothers were transferred to their new home at the Bergen County Zoo in New Jersey. The WCC participates in the Red Wolf Species Survival Plan (SSP) and welcomed the Bergen County Zoo as one of the newest members. In the WCC's role as a leading facility for red wolf conservation through our education, advocacy, and husbandry efforts, we provided support for Bergen County Zoo's team as they transitioned into their new role as an SSP facility.



Outreach: Lending a Helping Paw

WCC Curator Rebecca Bose conducted trainings for Bergen County Zoo's animal care staff to provide insight into wolf handling techniques so as to minimize stress and prioritize animal welfare, and used the WCC campus to illustrate the importance of spacious, natural enclosures for red wolf well-being.

After Rich and Shane arrived at their new home, the WCC provided public support as well, with WCC Director of Education Regan Downey attending the grand opening of their enclosure and speaking to hundreds of excited visitors about the importance of these brothers to their overall species, and the need for public action to support red wolf recovery.



Photo credit: Bergen County Communications Dept

Preparing the Public for Action

The WCC is a vocal and visible advocate in securing protections for wolves nationwide, utilizing its extensive online network to encourage supporters to speak up about issues that affect the recovery and success of wolves.

Lobo recovery plan court ruling

Mexican gray wolves, the most genetically distinct subspecies of gray wolf in North America, are once again roaming their ancestral lands in the southwestern United States but their recovery is far from complete. Mexican gray wolves, or “lobos,” continue to face genetic threats and are limited in their geographic range – two factors, among many, that spurred the Wolf Conservation Center and other conservation organizations to file a lawsuit against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2018.

The Trump administration released the Mexican gray wolf recovery plan in November 2017 but the plan was deeply flawed and failed to meet basic requirements of the Endangered Species Act to provide site-specific management actions and objectives with measurable recovery criteria to address the most immediate threat facing the Mexican wolf recovery program since its inception: illegal killing.

A minor victory was granted in October 2021 when a judge ruled that FWS must add specific actions to address illegal killing of Mexican wolves in their plan for the species’ recovery. “Too many wolves, including individuals released from our center, have already been killed by poachers,” said Maggie Howell, Director of the Wolf Conservation Center. “This ruling confirms the critical need for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to take meaningful action to protect these vulnerable and genetically invaluable wolves.”



Grave Danger for Gray Wolves

Effects of Delisting

The end of 2020 brought devastating news for gray wolves – effective January 2021, gray wolves across the lower 48 states would no longer receive federal Endangered Species Act protections, thus turning gray wolf oversight to the states. For the few wolves living in northern California and protected at the state level, the delisting did not have major impacts but for wolves elsewhere, the federal delisting signaled a bloody turn in state management.

In Wisconsin, the Department of Natural Resources was forced to hold a wolf hunt the last week of February 2021; state law mandates a hunt if wolves are not federally protected and a lawsuit forced the DNR to hold a weeklong season. Over 200 wolves were slaughtered within 60 hours.

The removal of federal protections also impacted wolves in states where federal protections had been stripped away long ago, because wildlife commissions and state legislators were emboldened by the message sent by federal officials in their delisting decision. The Idaho legislature approved a bill that would allow for the killing of up to 90% of wolves in the state and also expanded both the killing seasons and ways hunters and trappers could kill wolves. Montana was no better – the Fish and Game Commission quickly approved measures that expanded the hunting and trapping seasons, legalized the use of snares, bait, and lights to hunt and kill wolves, and increased the number of wolves that could be killed.

What Is Being Done?

The rapid killing of wolves spurred the creation of the #RelistWolves campaign, a coordinated effort by organizations across the nation to restore federal protections for gray wolves. Gray wolves have not met the scientific definitions of recovery across the United States, nor have state agencies proven their ability to ethically oversee wolves within their jurisdiction

2021

Highlights



Education Is The First Step

This year, we're excited to help support the Voyageurs Wolf Project! The Voyageurs Wolf Project was started to address one of the biggest knowledge gaps in wolf ecology: what do wolves do during the summer in forested ecosystems? Despite decades of research, the answer to this question has remained elusive due to the difficulties of studying wolves during the summer. With the help of advanced GPS-tracking technology and remote video cameras, the Voyageurs Wolf Project has been able to get an unprecedented look at the summer ecology of wolves in the Greater Voyageurs Ecosystem in Northern Minnesota.



Connecting Through New Platforms

This year, our Twitch channel really began to take off, with thousands of people around the world checking in to see the wolves at the WCC, and they were also helping the mission. Amazon donates \$4.99 to The Wolf Conservation Center when folks subscribe to our Twitch Channel for FREE!



#Relist Wolves

The #RelistWolves campaign was spurred out of necessity when tons of wolves were killed rapidly following the disintegration of their ESA protections. The WCC and other organizations garnered support for a petition asking Secretary Haaland and President Biden to relist wolves under the Endangered Species Act.





A Dedication

The WCC family lost two strong and benevolent leaders in 2021 – red wolves Veronica and Jack sadly passed away, leaving behind their respective families. Although neither was born at the WCC, they each became revered among our global base due to their compassion, courage, and charisma.

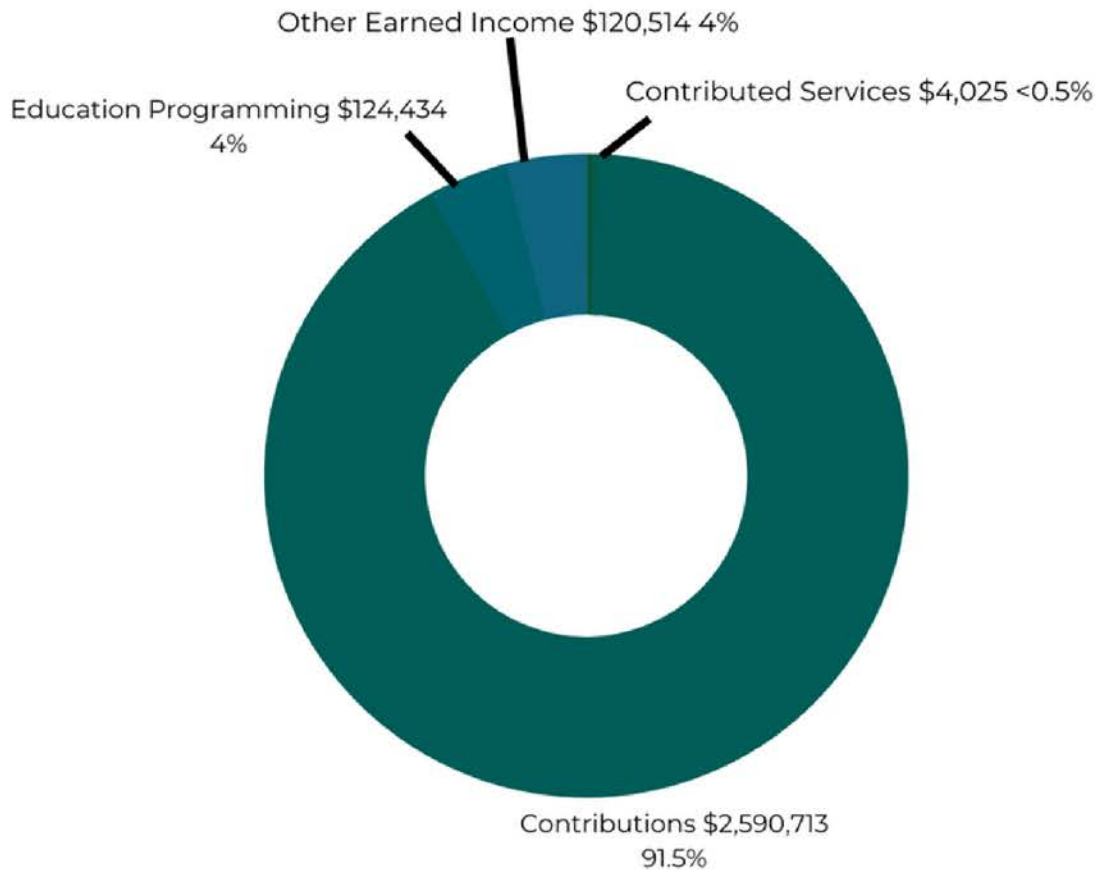
Veronica was a gentle yet fierce mother, capable of controlling her rambunctious brood of children with a single glance. She led by her actions and taught her children of the importance of family, a lesson that will shape the rest of their lives.

While Veronica was a calm and quiet leader, red wolf Jack was anything but. His presence was explosive and loud, a direct contradiction to his age and diminutive stature. He was curious yet quick to run, playful yet tender, and was the nucleus of his family.

While we will forever miss their presence, we are honored to have been the final home for these endangered wolves. They never spent one moment thinking about us, but we will spend the rest of our days thinking of them.



INCOME



Note: these are not inclusive of the ongoing capital campaign (expenses or income)

EXPENSES

