

Mexican gray wolf killed by recovery team

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. -- An endangered Mexican gray wolf that was involved in killing three cows in southwestern New Mexico was fatally shot Friday by a member of the wolf interagency field team.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued an order to permanently remove the male wolf, a member of the Saddle Pack, from the Arizona-New Mexico border in February. At the time, the agency said the team would make every effort to capture the wolf.

But **the Center for Biological Diversity** criticized the kill, saying no such efforts were made.

"There was no trapping attempted on this animal, there was no attempt to dart this animal from the air," said **Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity** in Pinos Altos. "... There was no attempt to take this animal alive."

The Fish and Wildlife Service did not immediately return a message seeking comment Friday evening.

Federal biologists began releasing wolves on the Arizona-New Mexico border in 1998 to re-establish the species in part of its historic range after it had been hunted to the brink of extinction in the early 1900s.

The wolves are designated as a "nonessential, experimental population." That gives the field team greater flexibility to manage the wolves under the Endangered Species Act and allows permanent removal _ by capturing or killing a wolf _ after three confirmed livestock deaths.

The Center for Biological Diversity has sued the Fish and Wildlife Service over mismanagement of the Mexican wolf. Among the group's complaints is that the permanent removal orders and the resulting kills are compromising the wolf's genetic diversity.

According to an agency e-mail recently obtained by **the Center for Biological Diversity** through the Freedom of Information Act, a manager acknowledged that a member of the Saddle Pack who was killed in 2004 was the most genetically valuable wolf in the wild at the time and was irreplaceable genetically.

Robinson claims the e-mail shows that program officials shot the animal despite its value.

The center contends that conservation of the wolf's limited gene pool is important to avoid inbreeding depression as well as declines in resilience, vigor and reproductive ability.

Wildlife managers estimated there were 59 wolves in the wild at the end of 2006, but **Robinson** puts the number at 57 with Friday's kill and another in February.

Robinson was in the Gila Wilderness with a group of students from the University of New Mexico last weekend and found a wolf track. **He said** the land needs the wolves to restore a natural balance.

"It really is a tragedy," **he said** of Friday's kill. "It adds up to a loss for this endangered animal and a loss to the ecosystem."

On the Net:

Fish and Wildlife Service: <http://www.fws.gov>

