

12-Wolf Pack Is Down to Two

By Tania Soussan

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The Southwest's 12-member Hon Dah Pack of endangered Mexican gray wolves was down to just two Wednesday after a sharpshooter killed one, six pups were killed by another wolf and others died following capture.

"The loss of these wolves is a blow to the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program and everyone who is working to recover wolves in the Southwest," said Benjamin Tuggle, acting Southwest regional director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

He said in a statement that the agency is launching an internal review.

All of the Hon Dah wolves lived in southeastern Arizona, near the New Mexico line. The wolf recovery area overlaps the two states in two national forests.

The wolves were targeted for permanent removal from the wild last month after being found responsible for seven confirmed and four probable livestock depredations on tribal lands since last June 7. Arizona's White Mountain Apache tribe asked for their removal.

The Fish and Wildlife Service estimates there are 32 to 46 wolves and an unknown number of pups in the wild in New Mexico and Arizona. The number is far fewer than the federal endangered species reintroduction program had expected to have now.

Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity in an interview called the deaths "an atrocity" and said a moratorium on wolf killings and trappings is needed. "The Mexican wolf is facing an emergency," he said.

The Hon Dah Pack included two adults, three yearlings and seven 4-week-old pups.

Two yearlings were captured last month. One was found dead in its enclosure a few days later, probably because of stress from the capture, the Fish and Wildlife Service has said. The other is "alive and doing well" at the Ladder Ranch in southern New Mexico, agency spokeswoman Vicki Fox told the Journal on Wednesday.

On Friday, six pups were captured, taken to the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico and put in a pen with a pair of wolves who already had two pups. The hope was that the adults would act as surrogates for the new pups— something the male had done before.

But the male killed all six in an instinctive effort to protect his own pups, the service said.

The seventh Hon Dah pup was not found and is too young to survive on its own, Fox said.

The alpha female was captured Sunday and suffered a minor foot injury. She was taken to the field office in Alpine, Ariz., and monitored through the night but was found dead early Monday.

The alpha male was shot about 10:30 a.m. Wednesday morning by a tribal member of the wolf reintroduction program field team. Efforts to trap the wolf had failed, and the program rules allow wolves to be shot after three confirmed livestock killings.

"We are currently reviewing our capture practices, animal handling and pup placement procedures to determine whether these deaths could have been prevented and to ensure that any necessary measures are taken to reduce the chance of this happening again," Tuggle said.