Wolf issue is being poached by groups

In the Old West, as portrayed by Hollywood at least, justice was sought by disseminating posters listing rewards for wanted outlaws.

Today, rewards are still offered for criminals when leads are slim, but now bounty offers are distributed by electronic means.

One of the most recent examples of such bounty-based justice stems from a shooting that happened near Elgin in Eastern Oregon.

Someone shot and killed an endangered gray wolf earlier this year.

Rewards have been posted offering $9,000 for someone to snitch on the shooter and bring him or her to courthouse justice.

Offering a reward may be the only thing that leads to a conviction in the case, which was months old before test results could even confirm the carcass found was that of a wolf.

It is proper for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which has responsibility for protecting endangered and threatened animals, like the gray wolf, to post such a reward.

Fish and Wildlife is offering $5,000 for information that leads to a conviction. However, two conservation groups - Center for Biological Diversity and Oregon Wild - also want to be in the bounty business on this issue. By putting up a combined $4,000 last week in reward money in this case, the advocacy organizations are seeking political gain and press coverage more than justice.

Oregon Wild and the Center for Biological Diversity care less about bringing one criminal to justice than using this case as a platform for their own agenda.

Justifiably concerned

Ranchers and other rural residents throughout the West are justifiably concerned that the reintroduction of the wolf, with overly stringent protections, will throw the predator into conflict with people and their livestock and pets.

The wolf had been gone from the Oregon landscape for decades, but is now coming back as packs reintroduced into Idaho in the 1990s spread out and expand their range.

"The killing of endangered wildlife like this wolf is a crime against Oregon's children," Steve Pedery, conservation director of Oregon Wild, was quoted as saying in a statement about the reward. "Wolves are the icons of American wilderness. ..."

One part of the statement about the reward says: "Despite the fact that wolves are still absent from many areas and that poaching remains a serious threat, the Bush administration has moved to strip the gray wolf of Endangered Species Act protection.

"Politicians in Wyoming and Idaho have already vowed to kill the majority of wolves in their respective states if the animals lose their protected status, placing recovery of the species in Oregon and elsewhere in jeopardy."

For the record, the federal government does not want to remove protections for the wolf, but does realize the numbers of wolves have expanded much more rapidly than anticipated. The government is looking at the reasonable step of controlling the number of predators roaming the West.

The statement twists and distorts the concerns of those who want to ensure wolf numbers don't grow too large to be supported by the available food sources they will find in the wild and turn to domesticated animals for prey.

Where is the call for preserving and protecting those other American icons - farmers and ranchers - and their livestock?

We do not advocate the illegal killing of endangered animals and support efforts to find and prosecute the responsible party or parties.

However, we must condemn the actions of Oregon Wild and Center for Biological Diversity for poaching this issue for their own extremist politics.