

Feds, state investigate the capture of Macho B

By JB Miller

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The Office of the Arizona Attorney General has launched a formal investigation into the circumstances surrounding the initial capture of the jaguar known as “Macho B.”

Arizona Game and Fish Department Director Larry Voyles said his department made the request for an investigation following new information concerning the events surrounding the jaguar’s capture.

In addition, Rep. Raul Grijalva, (D-Ariz.), has called for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to look into the circumstances surrounding the capture, recapture and euthanization of the jaguar, and USFWS has agreed to do so and has opened a criminal investigation.

Originally captured on Feb. 18 west of Nogales along the north side of the U.S.-Mexico Border, Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) officials said early data indicated that Macho B, estimated to be 16 years old, was doing well in the days after being fitted with a tracking collar. However AZGFD officials said careful monitoring conducted between Feb. 28 and March 1 revealed a decreased level of activity that called for “further investigation.”

On March 2, the jaguar was recaptured at an undisclosed location not far from the original capture site and brought to the Phoenix Zoo. Veterinarians at the zoo conducted lab work and physical exams in order to evaluate the deteriorating condition of the animal, which they said was due to kidney failure. Macho B was euthanized later that day.

The Center for Biological Diversity, which initially called for an independent medical inquiry into the death of the jaguar, said that a veterinarian at the University of Arizona has determined that Macho B’s kidneys were actually still functioning, and there was a chance the jaguar might have recovered. “There’s already been some secondary review of the medical treatment and there’s more ongoing,” said Randy Serraglio of the Center. He added that a veterinarian at the University of California-Davis is also conducting an independent analysis.

However, Serraglio said the larger issue at this point is whether the capture was intentional.

During an interview with The Nogales International conducted on April 1, Bob Miles, spokesperson for the Arizona Game and Fish Dept. maintained that Macho B accidentally stepped into a snare set by a biologist for AZGFD, which was conducting a research project exclusively on mountain lions and black bears. He also said there were no other people involved in setting the trap.

On April 2, the Arizona Daily Star reported that Janay Brun, a member of the Borderlands Jaguar Detection Project, said she had baited the snare with female jaguar scat in an effort to attract a male jaguar. She also alleged in the article that another member of the project, Emil McCain, was privy to this information as well as an AZGFD employee. McCain has denied the allegations, and AZGFD has not revealed the name of the employee who Brun said was involved.

The Nogales International called the AZGFD about the allegations and was sent an e-mail that said investigators from the Office of the Arizona Attorney General have advised all department staff at AZGFD to make no further public comment in order to avoid compromising the investigation. Later that day AZGFD followed up with another e-mail that said, "In the event this investigation reveals any inappropriate conduct or actions, the Arizona Game and Fish Commission and Department will take appropriate measures. The Department and Commission did not authorize or condone the intentional initial capture of this jaguar."