

Judge tosses challenge to wolf program

The Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE — A federal judge has tossed out a challenge to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's reintroduction program for the endangered Mexican gray wolf.

U.S. District Judge Christina Armijo dismissed all claims made by groups seeking to have the wolves removed from southwestern New Mexico and southeastern Arizona, where the federal government launched its reintroduction program in 1998.

The Coalition of Arizona/New Mexico Counties for Stable Economic Growth, the New Mexico Cattle Growers Association and others claimed the agency should do an in-depth analysis of the effects of the program.

The groups argued that the wolves were breeding with hybrids in the wild and diluting the gene pool. They also said Fish and Wildlife underestimated the number of livestock the wolves would kill.

"To require preparation of a detailed (analysis) at every moment in response to such ongoing and frequently changing daily management activities would render the agency's decision-making process intractable to the point of absurdity," Armijo wrote in her decision issued Monday.

Howard Hutchinson of the Coalition of Counties said he had not seen the decision and could not comment.

Susan George, senior counsel for Defenders of Wildlife, said the decision vindicates

the Fish and Wildlife Service's hard work in putting Mexican wolves back in the wild.

"This ruling lifts a threat from our lobo population," said Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity.

Fish and Wildlife workers in Albuquerque said Tuesday they couldn't tell how the ruling would affect the Mexican gray wolf program.

In a separate case, U.S. District Judge Robert E. Jones in Portland, Ore., ruled Tuesday that the Bush administration violated the Endangered Species Act when it relaxed protections on many of the nation's gray wolves.