

Arizona Daily Star

June 23, 2005

Killing of gray wolves an outdated solution

**GUEST COLUMN OPINION BY
MICHAEL J. ROBINSON**

Michael J. Robinson of Pinos Altos, N.M., is with the Tucson-based Center for Biological Diversity.

Following two meetings between high-level regional officials of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and ranchers, the federal agency has proposed a number of measures: a moratorium on releasing Mexican gray wolves from the captive breeding population into the wild, limitations on rereleases of once-wild wolves that have been captured, and an increase in predator control targeted at wolves.

The agency is already implementing its proposed policies by attempting to shoot or trap the Gila National Forest's Francisco Pack, which includes the last animal to roam free from among the first 11 lobos released in 1998 at the outset of the reintroduction program.

The strategy of killing more wolves and releasing fewer of them should be judged against the June 2001 warnings of independent scientists led by Paul C. Paquet of the University of Calgary, who said the population would not reach goals unless more wolves were allowed to live out their lives in the wild.

The Mexican wolf environmental impact statement projected 68 wolves by the end of the seventh year following reintroduction. By Fish and Wildlife Service's

count, there were 44 observed by the end of 2004 - down from 55 by the end of 2003.

Are there dozens of wolves out there that have escaped observation? If so, they would be finding each other.

Two radio-collared sisters from the Aspen Pack were rereleased six weeks ago and have wandered dozens of miles through Arizona. Neither has hooked up with a male. A wild-born male trapped two years ago and rereleased in the Apache National Forest has wandered hundreds of miles across the northern portion of the Gila National Forest in New Mexico. He is still alone.

Not only does Fish and Wildlife propose trapping and killing more wolves and releasing fewer of them, it has also suspended indefinitely the meetings of the recovery team that had been working diligently for two years to replace the 1982 Mexican Wolf Recovery Plan.

That plan states that the Mexican wolf is so close to extinction it would have to stay on the endangered-species list for the conceivable future. Thus, while the original 1980s recovery team identified a preliminary goal of establishing two viable populations in the wild, it refrained from naming recovery criteria until the plan could be revised. Now that revision is stalled.

In the first half of the 20th century, Fish and Wildlife poisoned and trapped wolves

into extinction in the western United States, and starting in 1950, began poisoning wolves in Mexico. The agency was stopped only by passage of the 1973 Endangered Species Act. Now, Fish and Wildlife seems to have returned to its roots in predator control.

The Paquet Report recommended revising the rules to require ranchers on public lands to take some responsibility for removing or rendering impalatable - as by lime - the carcasses of cattle and horses that die of other causes. Such carcasses serve to habituate wolves to livestock. Had that been done, the Francisco Pack would not be in the cross hairs today.

The solution at hand - killing more wolves - makes one wonder what century our government is operating in.

Contact Michael J. Robinson at michaelr@biologicaldiversity.org.