

## 'Lethal take' ordered for wolf

by Thomas J. Baird  
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A male Mexican gray wolf wanted for killing four head of cattle continues to avoid traps and sharpshooters and ranchers are getting frustrated.

An alpha male and female from the Francisco Pack are under a "lethal take" order for killing the cattle on grazing allotments near Reserve in the Gila National Forest.

Biologists are focusing on capturing or killing the uncollared male, but he continues to elude them, said program manager John Morgart of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The male was born in the wild but can't be re-released because he's killed so many cows. He doesn't have the valuable genetics to be a candidate for captive breeding, Morgart said.

The agency had originally intended to kill the male wolf in the trap if he was captured, but the agency has reversed that decision.

Morgart said the male could help rear his pups if all the animals are taken into captivity.

Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity praised the decision not to kill the wolf in the trap, but said he hopes the male escapes both trapping and shooting.

"I would reiterate that the wolves were drawn into the area by livestock carcasses," he told the Sun-News. "These

are problems that could have been prevented if the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Forest Service had worked to implement the suggestions scientists made four years ago. But we're very pleased New Mexico Game and Fish was able to get one concession from Fish and Wildlife. We always felt that would have been an unnecessary killing."

According to Vicki Fox, a spokeswoman for Fish and Wildlife, "The female wolf is in a den with four young pups and biologists are putting out food to ensure she has enough nutrition to feed her pups."

But ranchers are frustrated with the situation and said Thursday there's nothing they can do about it. Meanwhile, the alpha male continues to depredate their cattle.

Fred Galley, owner of the Rainy Mesa Ranch, said he's losing \$25,000 to \$35,000 a year because of wolves.

"The latest is we're still waiting for somebody to kill the damn wolf," he told the Sun-News Thursday. "The female's sitting there with pups and they're monitoring her and feeding her, but he's been very elusive and on a killing spree."

Galley said it's the cost of losing a 2- to 5-year-old cow, which they've had to raise and which should produce many offspring, that really hurts.

"It's frustrating from the ranchers' standpoint, because nobody but ranchers seems to get an opportunity to kill them and we can't," he said. "I have to hire extra men to go ride and the wolves are scattering

the cattle and we don't get the breeding pattern we should."

Don Gatlin manages the ranch for Galley.

"We've lost 57 tagged, branded calves and 33 cows since 2003," he said. "The main thing about it is the wolves ran our cattle onto a vacant allotment, into a riparian area and then we get hit by the Forest Service. We can't keep those cattle in one pasture with wolves chasing them, they go through fences and everything else. The bad thing is, ain't a damn thing you can do about it. You can't do nothing."

The Associated Press contributed to this story.