

## A Howl Heard

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by Brita Belli

Wolves, it seems, are finally getting some slack—at least one small pack of Mexican gray wolves in southwestern New Mexico. These predators, so often targeted with traps and shotguns, have gotten a little reprieve from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) thanks in part to intervention by the nonprofit Center for Biological Diversity. When wolves such as this Middle Fork Pack, as they are known, kill at least three heads of livestock within a year, the federal agency can kill those wolves in turn. But despite this particular pack killing five cows in a month, FWS has decided to let the struggling pack live, since FWS Regional Director Benjamin Tuggle in Albuquerque “ruled Friday that the Middle Fork Pack is highly valuable genetically to the effort to establish endangered Mexican gray wolves in the wild on the border of Arizona and New Mexico,” according to the nonprofit’s report.



The Middle Fork Pack of Mexican gray wolves has been spared, in part to protect the pack’s yearling and four pups.

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The pack in question consists of two three-legged adults—a breeding pair—who lost their legs in private traps, as well as a yearling and four pups. The Center for Biological Diversity calls the area where the wolves live “severely grazed” and “where carcasses of cattle killed by non-wolf causes dot the landscape, tempting wolves and acclimating them to scavenging near grazing cows.” Volunteers with the nonprofit found 16 dead cattle in the area this past spring, with no signs of having been attacked by wolves.

While the CBD was cheered by news of the federal agency’s sympathetic stance toward the gray wolf—an endangered animal that has been a focus for recovery by the agency—local cattle ranchers were not so enthusiastic.

Caren Cowan, executive director of the New Mexico Cattle Growers Association, said, “We are deeply disappointed that our federal and state wildlife management agencies don’t see fit to protect our industry.” And in his three-page decision, Tuggle, too, said he is “deeply concerned” about the economic impact on the rancher involved, whose name was not released. Tuggle authorized his agency to help, with others, in compensating the rancher via grazing allotment alternatives or contributions of hay.

SOURCES: [Center for Biological Diversity](#); [U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service](#).

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