

Mexican wolf subject of program at MPEC

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The return of the Mexican gray wolf to the Southwest will be discussed in a program Thursday at Mountain Park Environmental Center in Beulah.

Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity will talk about restoration efforts and show slides at 7 p.m. The center, a wildlife advocacy organization based in Tucson, Ariz., has been involved in the movement to return the Mexican gray wolf to a portion of its native range in New Mexico and Arizona. The effort was begun in 1998.

Robinson, who lives in Pinos Altos, N.M., said status of the restoration project is “a mixed bag.”

“There are 50 wolves in the wild now - probably the last time there were that many was at the beginning of the 20th century, 100 or so years ago. But the bad news is the numbers aren’t as high as predicted in the environmental impact statement. The number of breeding pairs is six - only half of the 12 pairs predicted.”

Robinson said the Mexican wolf project has been burdened by governmental regulations. Chief among them is the requirement that the wolves - reintroduced into the Gila National Forest in southwestern New Mexico and the Blue Range of southeastern Arizona - be required to stay within those political boundaries. If they stray onto adjoining public lands, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is required to remove them.

Also, Robinson said, livestock operators on the Gila and the Blue Range lands are allowed to leave the carcasses of dead animals - not killed by wolves - and the wolves scavenge on the carcasses and “develop a taste for beef.” This is not the case in the more successful central Idaho/Yellowstone National Park wolf restoration project.

“If ranchers do not remove ‘attractants,’ the government won’t remove wolves” that prey on cattle, he said.

The Mexican wolf - *Canis lupus baileyi* - is the southernmost subspecies of the gray wolf in North America. Historically, the Mexican wolf was found throughout mountainous regions from central Mexico through southeastern Arizona, southern New Mexico and southwestern Texas. Intensive predator-removal efforts from the late-1800s to the mid-1900s exterminated the Mexican wolf from the wild in the U.S. portion of its range. It was listed as an “endangered” species in 1976.

Mexican gray wolves typically weigh 60 to 80 pounds and measure up to 5 feet from nose to tail (about the size of an adult German shepherd). They are buff, gray, rust and black. Like other wolves, Mexican wolves have a complex social structure and live in extended family groups, consisting of an adult mated pair and their offspring. Wolves hunt cooperatively to bring down prey animals usually much larger than themselves. Native prey for Mexican wolves includes white-tailed deer, mule deer and elk.

Robinson’s program is free to the public, though donations are accepted. For more information, call Mountain Park Environmental Center - located in Pueblo Mountain Park - at 485-4444.