

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Shoots Wolf After Her Third Cattle Kill

By SUE MAJOR HOLMES
ASSOCIATED PRESS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on Thursday shot a female Mexican wolf in Catron County, less than a week after cattle killings that subjected the wolf to a three strikes rule.

The program to reintroduce endangered Mexican gray wolves into the Southwest requires the permanent removal of any wolf linked to three livestock killings a year — either by trapping and keeping it in captivity or by shooting it.

The wolf, designated AF924 for alpha female 924, had killed two head of livestock before being relocated to Catron County on April 25. The day after her release, county officials demanded she be removed before she had a chance to kill another cow.

Fish and Wildlife said at the time it had no reason to remove her under the program's three-strikes rule.

The agency issued a lethal order for the wolf Tuesday night after the weekend killings of a cow and calf.

Catron County Manager Bill Aymar said Thursday he's not a fan of the wolf program — "I couldn't be with seeing all that happens down here"

— but it was a shame Fish and Wildlife killed the wolf.

"If they had actually acted upon our first request and removed that wolf, that wolf might still be alive," he said.

AF924, the alpha female of the Durango pack, was pregnant when released. Elizabeth Slown, a spokeswoman for Fish and Wildlife, said Thursday her pups are old enough that they are eating solid food. She said the agency will provide supplemental feeding for the male to feed them.

A landowner in the area told agency officials there are four pups, she said.

Late last month, Catron County issued a notice of intent to trap the wolf and turn her over to Fish and Wildlife because she was stalking the Adobe Ranch in southeastern Catron County where the Mike Miller family lives. The county's wolf incident investigator did not immediately trap the animal, however.

Then last weekend, wolves killed the cow and calf.

Wildlife Services, a federal agency that investigates reports of wolf

depredation, confirmed that AF924 and her mate, alpha male 973, were involved.

Fish and Wildlife, Wildlife Services and other groups made the decision to credit the wolves with one depredation each — a third strike for the female and a first for the male.

Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity in Pinos Altos said Thursday the female wolf was killed "because the Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service and New Mexico Department of Game and Fish all refuse to require the ranching industry using public lands to clean up their dead livestock that attract wolves."

Robinson has long criticized the government for not requiring ranchers to remove cattle that die for whatever reason on their grazing allotments. "The wolves scavenge on cattle carcasses and eventually switch to killing cattle," he said.

Slown said the wolf program's current rules do not allow Fish and Wildlife to order carcass removal. "That's an excellent topic for people to contemplate" as the agency considers changing the rules, she said.