



## Federal agency leaves wolf pack in wild

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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.-The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has decided to leave a wolf pack in the wild in southwestern New Mexico, despite the pack killing five cows this month.

The federal agency-which can remove wolves that kill three head of livestock within a year-confirmed that a cow killing on Aug. 12 was the third by the pack this month. This week, the wolf program's field team two more kills by the alpha pair in the Beaverhead area of Catron County.

However, Fish and Wildlife 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.

Tuggle said the pack's alpha pair, released in 2004, are a breeding pair that are raising at least four pups and that removal could jeopardize the pups' survival.

It was the second time this summer the federal agency decided against removing a wolf linked to at least three livestock kills in southwestern New Mexico. In June, Fish and Wildlife decided to allow the alpha male of the San Mateo Pack, who had been linked to four livestock killings, to remain in the wild.

Tuggle said the wild wolf population has stagnated because of a significant number of deaths in recent years-both natural deaths and wolves that were shot-and because of wolves the program removed.

Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity, which supports the wolf program, called the decision good news for Mexican gray wolves.

But Caren Cowan, executive director of the New Mexico Cattle Growers Association, criticized the decision.

"We are deeply disappointed that our federal and state wildlife management

agencies don't see fit to protect our industry," she said.

Tuggle said in his three-page decision he also is "deeply concerned" about the economic impact on the rancher involved, whose name was not released.

He directed Fish and Wildlife staff to work with other agencies to haze the wolves daily-on foot or on horseback, by air, with trap-and-release hazing and by daily deployment of range riders. The state Department of Game and Fish agreed to provide extra range riders to help, he said.

Tuggle also authorized noisemakers for hazing, including shell crackers, and deployment of agency personnel and volunteers in the effort.

Chris Tincher, a spokeswoman for Fish and Wildlife, said wolves don't want human contact.

"If there's a daily (human) presence, that's a really effective way. Range riders have been effective," she said.

Cowan questioned why the agency waited until several cows had been killed rather than beginning hazing after the first kill.

"The other concern that continues to plague me is that these are predators being turned loose by the federal government and managed by the state and federal governments, but neither of those governments is stepping up to the plate in terms of compensation" for cattle killed by wolves, she said.

Tuggle also authorized his agency to work with others to help the rancher with grazing allotment alternatives or contributions of hay.

Robinson said five packs had been established previously in the Beaverhead area, and all those wolves were removed-either by trapping or shooting-after livestock kills.

"No other pack in this area has been allowed to stay," he said.

The Center for Biological Diversity had been worried about the fate of the Middle Fork Pack-which consists of the alpha pair, a yearling and four pups-"and we're very pleased with this decision," Robinson said.

The alpha pair are both three-legged wolves. Robinson said each had a leg amputated after being caught in separate incidents in leg-hold traps put out in the area by unknown parties.