

July 2, 2009

## Wolf Pups Rescued; Some Found Dead

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Filed at 9:23 p.m. ET

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) -- Wildlife agents rescued two Mexican gray wolf pups found abandoned in a New Mexico forest, but three others from the same litter were found dead, officials said Thursday.

The U.S. [Fish and Wildlife Service](#) said the mother gave birth to six pups in April, in what officials viewed as an achievement in a decade-long effort to reintroduce the wolf to the southern New Mexico-Arizona border region.

But two of the pups were found dead in June. The mother, the pack's alpha female, then moved one pup to a new den, and the remaining three were left behind because they couldn't be coaxed out of the den.

Officials with the endangered Mexican gray wolf reintroduction program tried to reunite one of the abandoned pups with the mother and the pack's alpha male but it was later found dead. The other two pups were rescued and taken to the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge.

Environmentalists said they are extremely concerned that human activity around the den site could have prompted the wolves' departure. Officials had been monitoring the pack's alpha male because it was linked to four livestock killings within the past year.

"We feel like one of the questions that has to be answered is did the presence of these people lead to the wolves abandoning the den and ultimately abandoning some of their pups," said Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity, a group that has been critical of the way the agency has handled the reintroduction program.

Environmentalists are planning to ask the U.S. [Interior Department](#) to investigate the incident, Robinson said.

Christine Tincher, a deputy assistant regional director of external affairs with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said personnel take "a lot of care" to respect the environment and monitor the wolves from a safe distance as not to interfere with the pack's dynamic.

"The alpha female made a lot of effort to get the other pups out of the original den. They were stuck deep in a crevice," Tincher said.

The Mexican wolf, a subspecies of the gray wolf, was exterminated in the wild in the Southwest by the 1930s. In 1998, the government began reintroducing wolves along the Arizona-New Mexico line in a 4 million acre-plus territory interspersed with forests, private land and towns.

Biologists had hoped to have at least 100 wolves in the wild by now and 18 breeding pairs. The most recent survey shows there were 52 wolves scattered between New Mexico and Arizona at the end of 2008.

Tincher said the reintroduction team has documented three packs with litters in the two states and there's a possibility of at least five more reproducing packs.

[Copyright 2009 The Associated Press](#)

-