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## Feds asked to reconsider 'poster wolf'

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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Conservation groups want the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to take down a poster of an endangered Mexican gray wolf at the agency's headquarters and remove the image from the wolf recovery Web site because the animal died in captivity.

By using the photograph, the Fish and Wildlife Service is not being honest with the public about its management of Mexican gray wolves in New Mexico and Arizona or gray wolves in the Northern Rockies, the groups claim.

"We think it's important for people to realize what the reality is behind this beautiful poster," said Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity, which has been pushing for reforms in wolf management for years.

The Center for Biological Diversity and 15 other groups sent a letter to Fish and Wildlife director Dale Hall on Monday, asking that the image of the female wolf — known as No. 511 — be replaced with one that shows the same animal after she died of stress and overheating after the agency captured her in 2005.

Jose Viramontes, an agency spokesman in Albuquerque, said he could not comment on the groups' request until the agency receives the letter and has a chance to review it.

The "poster wolf," as the conservationists refer to her, was one of the original 11 Mexican gray wolves released along the Arizona-New Mexico border in 1998 as part of the federal government's wolf recovery program. The Mexican gray wolf, a subspecies of the gray wolf, was exterminated in the wild in the Southwest by the 1930s.

With the recovery program, federal biologists had hoped to have at least 100 wolves in the wild by now; the population is estimated at just above 50.

The wolves in Arizona and New Mexico are designated as a "nonessential, experimental population." That gives Fish and Wildlife greater flexibility to manage them under the Endangered Species Act and allows permanent removal — by capturing or killing a wolf — after three confirmed livestock kills in a year.

Ranchers and some other residents in the recovery area have complained about the animals killing livestock and family pets as well as showing up near homes and schools.

In their letter to Hall, the conservationists said 29 Mexican gray wolves and another 2,882 gray wolves have died due to the Fish and Wildlife Service's actions since reintroduction efforts began for each of the two species.

Robinson contends the agency's "heavy-handed" approach to managing the wolves has compromised the recovery effort as well as the animals' genetic diversity. He pointed to rules that require the Fish and Wildlife Service to remove any wolf that establishes a territory outside of the recovery area and the three-strikes policy on livestock kills.

"The government should be honest and show the true face of the wolf predator control program," the groups' letter reads. "The reality of this program is dead wolves, sometimes in the wild and sometimes in a cage, plus survivors who once roamed freely but now pace or limp behind wire mesh."

Robinson said also designating the Mexican gray wolf as fully endangered, rather than an experimental population, would go a long way in helping the recovery effort.

As for replacing the image of No. 511, Robinson said conservationists may have to wait for a new administration to be sworn in.

"This (wolf recovery) team has not shown a great propensity to taking conservationists' pleas to heart," he said, "but this team is heading out the door."