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Ranchers Vent On Wolves to Gov.

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RESERVE— Gov. Bill Richardson promised help for Catron County at a town hall meeting Wednesday, but it didn't take much of the edge off local anger over government efforts to restore wolves to cattle country.

"I'm for a sensible, fair wolf restoration program," Richardson told a crowd of about 80 people at the Catron County Courthouse.

The Endangered Species Act, which is driving the multiagency program to restore endangered Mexican gray wolves to southwestern New Mexico and southeastern Arizona, can only be changed by an act of Congress, the governor said. "That's the policy of the country."

About half the audience appeared to be ranchers or residents sympathetic to them, and more than a few made their preference clear: End the wolf "recovery program," which ranchers blame for the killings of scores of cows and calves on grazing allotments in the Gila National Forest.

"The environmentalists have taken away logging; the wolves will take away cattle," said Tom Macnab an area resident who said many of his friends are ranchers. "This will pretty much ruin this country."

Others in the audience said they are increasingly concerned that wolves will one day attack a human, particularly a child.

"The people in Santa Fe and Albuquerque that really support the wolves, I don't think they take this seriously," said Don Gatlin, manager of the Rainy Mesa Ranch.

Gatlin gave the governor's staff copies of reports of wolf attacks on humans in North America over the past century. "They (wolves) do kill people and they do attack children," he said.

"How are they supposed to take care of the ranch when you're worried about children?" asked Apache Creek resident Ellen Snow.

Richardson asked for suggestions to help ranchers, "short of saying 'no wolves.'"

The governor ended up appointing a task force, led by his senior energy and environment policy adviser Ned Farquhar. He rounded it out with concerned citizens from the crowd.

The task force will look into issues such as wolves killing livestock, improving compensation for cattle lost to wolves, and public safety.

The task force will have its first meeting in Reserve within two weeks; Richardson wants recommendations within 60 days.

"This task force, if we are able to

move forward a little bit, it'll be worth it," Richardson said. "You might not like everything (the task force recommends), but I want to make things better."

Richardson opened the town hall meeting here by saying he wanted to discuss other local concerns first.

Comments from the audience led Richardson to make several commitments, including trying to change the funding formula for rural satellite schools, such as one in Datil and one in Glenwood.

Several Glenwood parents said that without a change in the state school funding formula, the Glenwood elementary school, serving about 17 children from kindergarten through sixth grade, will have to close.

That would force Glenwood children to make a roughly 30-minute drive to Reserve. The closure would likely hurt the economy of the community of about 350, residents said.

The governor promised to provide the roughly \$100,000 to keep the Glenwood school open another year while the school-funding formula is adjusted. He said he would dispatch the state's assistant secretary for rural schools to meet with local school officials and parents within 10 days.

Richardson promised to secure \$400,000 needed to build a senior center in Glenwood. And he said he would seek

\$116,000 to fund a countywide domestic violence prevention and rape-crisis service.

"The governor's visit was very productive," said state Rep. Don Tripp, R-Socorro, who represents Catron County. "It gave him a chance to see the human side of issues— the wolf issue, schools, jobs, tourism."

Richardson promised to return to Reserve in two months, Tripp said. It was the Democratic governor's second visit to the conservative town since his election.