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## Wolf Program Should Be Scrapped, Ranchers Say

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RESERVE - Dozens of angry ranchers told state and federal biologists Wednesday that the endangered Mexican gray wolf reintroduction program should be scrapped.

If the program does stay, they said, any wolves that stray outside the Gila Wilderness should be fair game for shooting.

"The only thing that will save this county from complete ruin is either do away with the wolf program completely or restrict the wolves to a small area," said Catron County Commission Chairman Ed Wehrheim.

The passionate comments from ranchers and other local residents came in a 2 1/2-hour meeting in Reserve, the first in a series being held this week across New Mexico to talk about proposed changes and a recent review of the wolf reintroduction effort.

Other meetings will be 6-9 p.m. today at the National Guard Armory on U.S. 180 in Bayard; 6-9 p.m. Friday at the commission chambers, 405 W. Third, Truth or Consequences; and 9 a.m.-noon Saturday at the U.S. Forest Service regional office, 333 Broadway SE, Albuquerque.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and its partners are considering changes

to the program, including a recommendation by biologists to allow wolves to set up territories outside the current boundaries and a one-year ban on some new wolf releases.

Many of the ranchers said they were worried wolves would attack their children.

Don Gatlin, manager of a ranch where wolves have killed cattle recently, said his two young children don't want to play outside.

"When that wolf gets one of my kids . . . God be with each and every one of you," Gatlin told the panel of government officials running the meeting, winning applause from the audience of about 80.

Asked what it would take to get the wolves out of the wild, Terry Johnson, chairman of the program oversight committee, said, "You're going to have to win it in court."

Only one of more than two dozen speakers supported the wolf program.

Craig Miller of Defenders of Wildlife, which compensates ranchers for livestock losses, advocated more cooperation between his organization and the ranchers.