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State Shows Disrespect For Planet and Future

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The recent decision by the New Mexico Game Board to withdraw from the Mexican gray wolf recovery efforts speaks volumes about priorities in the Martinez administration.

In the next 50 years, 25 percent of the mammals – some 1,400 species – on our planet are projected to go extinct, largely due to humans' role in the perturbation or collapse of healthy (wild) ecosystems. Similar dismal projections have been advanced for other forms of fish and wildlife.

What role will New Mexico play in this crisis? The recent decision by the newly installed game board, individuals especially appointed to ensure healthy and productive wildlife populations for New Mexico, is a dangerous step backward. The science on this issue is clear, but once again, science was dismissed for short-term political gain.

The Mexican gray wolf reintroduction effort was unanimously supported by a resolution of the American

Society of Mammalogists in 2007 at a meeting attended by (about) 500 scientists. We know that top predators are essential to healthy ecosystems. When top predators are removed, a cascade of other losses often follows.

We also know that the Mexican gray wolf is the most distinctive form of wolf in North America and is globally significant because it harbors highly distinctive genes. We further know that, contrary to the bluster of a few politicians and shock jocks, wolves and humans can coexist. Wolves cause far less damage to livestock than other predators such as black bears, cougars, coyotes, domestic dogs or automobiles.

What about the economic argument? Elsewhere, healthy wolf populations have been a boon to the tourism industry. How about safety? Having raised a family in Alaska, where wolf packs moved freely through our neighborhood, (I can say that) efforts by some local politicians (and even a U.S. representative) to instill fear of this animal are simply laughable.

What about our moral obligations? With some 7 billion humans on

the planet and the population of New Mexico doubling in the last few decades, we are the primary force impacting biodiversity. The onus is squarely on us to make wise decisions now regarding who will share the planet we leave to our children.

Diddling is not a viable option. Stepping backward to the ill-advised predator control efforts of the last century is worse. We can and must do better.

Will we hold our politicians and appointed officials accountable? New Mexicans should embrace our irreplaceable wild heritage. It's our state and our future. Demand that our decision-makers maintain the few wild places left – such as the Gila Wilderness. These areas must support rich, healthy ecosystems with all the pieces (species) intact, not impoverished landscapes where we soon will recall, regretfully, that wildlife used to roam.