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New Mexico abandons efforts to restore Mexican gray wolves

GREENSPACE Environmental News from California and Beyond

By Nicholas Riccardi

New Mexico's Game Commission on Thursday night voted to stop assisting the federal effort to restore Mexican gray wolves in the Southwest, the latest step by new Republican Gov. Susana Martinez's administration to reverse her state's green course.

Martinez appointed four new members to the six-member commission. Its vote is expected to have a mainly symbolic impact in the beleaguered attempt to reintroduce the wolf, which was once endemic to the state before government trapping pushed it to the brink of extinction.

Federal biologists supervising the reintroduction have found less than 50 wolves in both New Mexico and Arizona after the species was returned to the region in the late 1990s. Martinez's Democratic predecessor, Bill Richardson, ordered an end to government trapping of the wolves in 2007.

The state's Fish and Game Department is still required to conduct surveys of the wolves and protect them as an endangered species. The state has spent only \$1.9 million on the program since 1999, with most of that paid by the federal government, and dedicated two employees to it.



Photo: A Mexican gray wolf runs inside a holding pen at wildlife refuge in New Mexico. Credit: Luis Sinco / Los Angeles Times

Ranching groups, who complained the predators damaged their cattle and threatened children, were cheered. "It shows support for the rural industries that are under siege right now," said Laura Schneberger, president of the Gila Livestock Growers Assn. "But I don't know how it will affect us immediately."

Environmental groups were outraged. "New Mexico's governor sided with an intransigent, wolf-hating livestock industry," said Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity.

Republicans in Congress have separately proposed legislation to end the wolf re-introduction program, following their successful attempts

to end federal supervision of the gray wolf in the northern Rockies.

Martinez has made a point of distancing herself from Richardson's environmental record, which she contended hurt business.

Shortly after taking office this winter, Martinez removed all members of an environmental board which formulated rules limiting emissions. She also overturned regulations that required a 3% cut in industrial greenhouse gas emissions and regulated waste on dairy farms, though the state Supreme Court later overturned those moves, ruling Martinez exceeded her power.

