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NM panels roll back environmental initiatives

By JERI CLAUSING
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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.—A state commission voted Friday to repeal New Mexico's energy efficient building codes, becoming the second panel of gubernatorial appointees to move in as many days to roll back environmental initiatives that had been pushed by former Gov. Bill Richardson.

With a 7-1 vote, the state Construction Industries Commission negated the codes that Richardson's administration spent 14 months putting in place. At the time, the measures were touted as the most stringent in the nation.

During public hearings held around the state, home builders were split on repeal, which is part of a broader agenda by Gov. Susana Martinez to undo what she called unnecessary rules and regulations that hurt business.

Commission Chairman Randy Baker said he was simply trying to do what is best for New Mexico, the industry and public.

Environmental groups, however, blasted Friday's vote as bad politics.

"Today's action by the Construction Industries Commissioners shows a blatant disregard for public process and the efforts of hundreds of New Mexicans who participated in the open and fair code development process that lasted over a year," said Tammy Fiebelkorn of Southwest Energy Efficiency Project.

She claimed the rollback was developed in secret by the commission under direction from the administration with no public input and no consideration of the extensive analysis undertaken to develop the code.

"Where's that transparent government this administration keeps promising?" Fiebelkorn asked.

On Thursday, the New Mexico Game and Fish Department voted to pull out of the federal government's controversial Mexican gray wolf recovery project, which was opposed by ranchers.

Richardson's administration supported the federal project, providing a handful of employees to assist in trapping, transplanting and collaring wolves. They also worked on projects aimed at reducing conflicts involving the wolves and livestock.

While ranchers lauded the vote as a long-awaited show of support by the state for protecting their livelihoods, environmentalists said it could have the opposite effect.

"New Mexico's governor sided with an intransigent, wolf-hating livestock industry," said Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity. "Ironically, withdrawing state participation will undercut successful proactive efforts to prevent wolf-livestock conflicts, and could lead to an increase in livestock losses."

The New Mexico State Game Commission has been a partner in the program since 1999. About 50 Mexican wolves are spread over New Mexico and Arizona.