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## Wolf Will Live, But Maybe Not In Wild

By Rene Romo / Journal North Reporter

LAS CRUCES – Conservationists were thrilled when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service last week rescinded a two-day-old order to kill a Mexican gray wolf blamed for killing four cattle in recent months, but they continue to press federal officials to let the wolf remain in the wild.

Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity said removing the Fox Mountain pack's alpha female, the mother of at least four pups, is bad policy for a recovery project that has only 58 wolves in the wild in southeast Arizona and southwest New Mexico.

Fish and Wildlife's acting regional director rescinded the kill order on Aug. 10 after the Southwest Wildlife Conservation Center in Scottsdale, Ariz., stepped forward and offered to house the alpha female for the rest of her life.

Service spokesman Tom Buckley said the agency would not change course and allow the wolf to remain in the wild, despite the ongoing public pressure.

Before the first release of wolves in a national forest in Arizona in 1998, federal officials projected there would be 100 wolves in the wild by the end of 2006. However, illegal shootings and strict management of cattle-killing wolves have slowed the population's growth.

Removal, Robinson said, "will have the same results ecologically on the wolves that are remaining as if they killed her."

The Fish and Wildlife Service's regional office in Albuquerque was inundated by hundreds of phone calls and emails protesting the Aug. 8 kill order, the first such order issued by the Service in four years. Killing the wolf, advocates said, would decrease the wolf pups' chances for survival.

Federal agents on Wednesday afternoon were continuing the efforts they started last week to capture the Fox Mountain alpha female.

Federal officials say the Fox Mountain pack killed four cows in the last four months outside the 4.4-million acre wolf recovery area. Three cattle were killed on private land.

The ranchers who owned the cattle received compensation for several of the killings, financial support for hay to draw cows away from a wolf den, and money to hire range riders to protect herds. The killings continued, and "the Service has to be responsive to the effects of wolves on livestock operations," according to a Fish and Wildlife press release.