



Agency faces suit over wolf permits

By Rene Romo / Journal North Reporter
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LAS CRUCES – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today marks the 15th anniversary of the reintroduction of the endangered Mexican gray wolf into the wild, even as the federal agency faces another lawsuit challenging its management of free-roaming lobos.

The Center for Biological Diversity on Thursday filed a lawsuit in federal court in Tucson, challenging the agency's issuance of a permit allowing itself and cooperating state agencies to capture wolves that enter Arizona or New Mexico from their northern or southern borders. The permit would allow the service to hold the wolves, captured north of Interstate 40 or south of Interstate 10, in captivity indefinitely.

Since October 2011, the Mexican government has released at least 14 gray wolves in an area near the border.

Michael Robinson, the Center for Biological Diversity's wolf expert, said the service "can cite no evidence that trapping wolves and putting them in cages enhances their recovery in the wild," as is required by federal law. A spokesman could not be reached for comment Thursday evening.

Mexican gray wolves were largely eradicated from the United States by the 1930s as a result of federal predator control programs, which Fish and Wildlife extended into Mexico with a poisoning effort started in the 1950s. The Mexican gray wolf was listed as endangered in 1976 and a reintroduction effort began with the capture of seven wolves in Mexico and the U.S. for breeding in the late 1970s. The captive population of wolves has now expanded to 260 wolves in 52 facilities around the U.S. and Mexico.

On March 29, 1998, 11 wolves were released into the forest in southeast Arizona, which makes up a portion of a designated recovery zone that includes forests in southwest New Mexico. According to a survey at the end of 2012, there are at least 75 Mexican wolves in the two-state recovery area, "an all-time high," the Fish and Wildlife said in a news release, but still below the 100 biologists expected by the end of 2006.