



Agreement reached on wolves

By Journal and wire reports

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Plan allows for direct releases into N.M.

Environmentalists have reached settlements with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that will allow for direct releases of captive wolves into New Mexico as part of the federal government's efforts to re-establish the species in the Southwest.

The agreements also call for the agency to drop plans for capturing any wolves that enter New Mexico or Arizona from Mexico. The agency is also proposing expanding the area where wolves are allowed to establish territories.

"These agreements should breathe new life into the struggling Mexican wolf recovery program and expand the wolf's habitat here," said Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental group that has been critical of wolf management.

The agency first unveiled a proposal in June that called for giving Mexican gray wolves more room to roam in New Mexico and Arizona. Independent scientists and environmentalists have been pushing for more room and for releases of captive wolves in New Mexico for years, saying such actions would bolster the success of the recovery effort.

But, on Friday, Rep. Steve Pearce, R-N.M., criticized the proposed expansion of the program. He said millions of dollars have been spent over the last decade and the wolf population has yet to recover.

"Even worse, these decisions are not being made by the people, or even by elected officials, but by the special-interest lawyers at the Center for Biological Diversity," Pearce said. "It is outrageous and unacceptable that New Mexicans' lives and livelihoods are being put at risk and our tax dollars wasted."

Pearce contends that the management of the wolf population should be turned over to the state government.

A subspecies of the gray wolf found in the Northern Rockies, the Mexican wolf was added to the federal endangered species list in 1976. The 15-year effort to reintroduce them has stumbled due to legal battles, illegal shootings, politics and other problems.