



Two worlds for our lobos NM embraces the imagery of wolves, is indifferent to species

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Enchanting New Mexico is the land of inconsistency.

Tens of thousands of its inhabitants love the Lobos, even swear by them.

Many of these same people despise lobos and swear at them.

The University of New Mexico named its sports teams Lobos because no other mascot was so fitting as a fierce, proud symbol of the Southwest.

Another part of government, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in the 1950s tried to trap, shoot and poison the real New Mexico lobos out of existence. It nearly succeeded.

The federal government even sent poisons and canine killers into Mexico, figuring that nobody would object to reviled wolves being wiped out before they could cross into New Mexico or Arizona.

If history has taught us anything, it is that the imagery of lobos is easy to embrace. The spine-tingling howl of a wolf stirs us. But it's not enough for us focus on how few Mexican gray wolves exist.

Only about 75 roam free in New Mexico and Arizona. That is the entire U.S. population in the wilds.



The number of Mexican wolves is up a bit, but their strength is not. With only three breeding pairs, wild Mexican wolves are producing small litters and pups with low survival rates, said Michael Robinson, right, of the Center for Biological Diversity.

Along with the 75 Mexican wolves that are fending for themselves, another 248 were in zoos as of last month. More rove northern Mexico, though nobody can say for sure how many packs exist.

Even with a population that is tiny and weak, these lobos are under siege.

U.S. Rep. Steve Pearce, R-Hobbs, sent out a celebratory statement this month after the Fish and Wildlife Service cleared a New Mexico rancher who killed a Mexican wolf in defense of his livestock.



“However, we must not forget that the wolf program remains a major problem for New Mexicans,” said Pearce, right.

One of Pearce’s favorite themes is that federal protection for species with dwindling populations puts humans at a disadvantage for jobs and business development.

He has made political hay by fighting protections for the dunes sagebrush lizard, the lesser prairie chicken and the Mexican wolf.

Pearce said the case of a rancher who killed to protect his own animals “only reiterates the terror that wolves cause for New Mexicans, and calls attention to the need to rethink this costly and dangerous program.”

Robinson, whose organization regularly battles Pearce, says Mexican wolves do not have the numbers to be a societal danger. More than 6 million acres are in the territory designated for a wild population of 75 lobos.

Even so, he says government regulations are constricting Mexican wolves. Robinson wants wolves from zoos to be released into Gila National Forest in New Mexico. Current regulations mandate that captive Mexican wolves can only be freed in the Blue Range Recovery Area in Arizona.

Carlos Carroll, a California biologist who is part of the national wolf recovery team, says funneling wolves into one spot jeopardizes the newcomers.

Established packs control the territory and turn on imported wolves.

Carroll said wild Mexican wolves need to number 750 to ensure that the subspecies survives.

From a scientific standpoint, he said, Mexican wolves would have a better chance if government broadened their territory to include Utah and southern Colorado. Currently, I-40 is a government boundary that Mexican wolves are not supposed to cross.

Opposition to allowing Mexican wolves in the southern Rockies and Grand Canyon area would be ferocious, as Pearce’s stand demonstrates.

The alternative is not having any lobos in New Mexico, except the ones on postcards, coffee cups and UNM sweat-shirts — all beautiful images of what the Southwest is supposed to be.