

Statement of David R. Parsons, retired Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator (1991-1999)
December 12, 2006

My former employer, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), is systematically undermining recovery of the Mexican wolf.

The FWS squandered authority (granted by the Assistant Secretary of Interior for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks in September of 1999) to change the existing ineffective rule governing the reintroduction of Mexican wolves into the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area. The FWS took no action to revise the rule under this authority.

A formal three-year review of the Mexican wolf reintroduction project (commonly referred to as the "Paquet Report" released in 2001) conducted by credentialed independent wolf scientists concluded that substantive changes to the rule were necessary to make positive progress toward recovery of the Mexican wolf. They identified the need to allow wolves to disperse and occupy areas outside the established boundaries; the need to release wolves directly into the Gila National Forest; and the need to require ranchers dispose of dead livestock to reduce habituation by wolves to livestock and subsequent depredations. To this day, the FWS has not acted upon these recommendations.

The FWS's own internally conducted five-year review released in December 2005 and annual population estimates document a failing project. Yet none of the 37 recommendations set forth in the document will increase the odds of survival and persistence in the wild for a Mexican wolf for the next 2-3 years or longer. And the FWS has yet to initiate a rule change process.

Incredibly, the FWS continues to authorize the killing and removal of Mexican wolves from the wild population at rates that preclude achievement of recovery objectives. This is being done for the purpose of "resolving" livestock-wolf conflicts. The FWS states that killing or removing wolves that kill livestock is essential to gaining a level of tolerance among ranchers for supporting wolf recovery. There is no credible evidence that any such social tolerance has been achieved, yet all conflict continues to be resolved to the detriment, and often death, of individual wolves and to the detriment of the wild population of Mexican wolves.

The Mexican wolf reintroduction project is managed by a multi-agency committee that purports to use an adaptive management process to make changes in support of the goal of wolf recovery. Adaptive management is a formal process that uses the science of monitoring and research to inform the art of management to make decisions that improve progress toward recovery of the Mexican wolf. The FWS's brand of adaptive management appears to throw the science out the window. In the face of two consecutive years of population decline (2004 and 2005), this group proposed a moratorium on any new releases of wolves and more lethal control procedures for killing or removing wolves that prey on livestock. Anti-wolf politics have been controlling agency decisions and actions to the detriment of wolf recovery.

An important distinction that evades the FWS is that “conflict” is not caused by wolves. Conflict is caused by a clash of values resulting from attempts to use our public lands for both wolf recovery and livestock grazing. Killing more wolves has done little to resolve the underlying conflict and is antithetical to wolf recovery. What we need are policy changes that set priorities for compatible uses of our public lands and real innovations in livestock management and husbandry that reduce livestock-wolf conflicts, thus allowing more wolves to survive and persist in the wild. Given enough political will, such changes are possible.