

The Honorable Dirk Kempthorne
Secretary of the Interior
Interior Building, Room 6156
1849 C St.
Washington, D.C. 20240

June 19, 2006

Copy by facsimile: (202) 208-5048

Dear Secretary Kempthorne,

This is to request an emergency moratorium on all predator control targeted against endangered Mexican gray wolves in Arizona and New Mexico. We request that this moratorium stay in effect until the population of Mexican wolves stabilizes and population objectives for the reintroduction are achieved.

Federal predator control has significantly contributed to the reduction of the census population of Mexican wolves in the wild from 55 at the end of 2003, to 44 at the end of 2004, to 35 at the end of 2005 – a twenty percent decline in each year. Most recently, your Fish and Wildlife Service authorized two trapping and killing operations that wiped out ten wolves, including six pups from one pack. A seventh, orphaned pup has likely died of starvation as a result of these actions.

By way of contrast, the Mexican wolf population, which was reintroduced to the wild in 1998, was projected to reach 102 animals by the end of this year.

The dramatic decline in the Mexican wolf population mirrors the original loss of the Mexican wolf. The Fish and Wildlife Service and its predecessor agencies poisoned and trapped all gray wolves in the West, including the Mexican wolf, between 1915 and 1945 while claiming that extermination was not the goal. Beginning in 1950, Fish and Wildlife Service personnel and government poisons were sent to Mexico in a program that eliminated Mexican wolves in that nation, as well. Only passage of the Endangered Species Act led to the live capture of the last known five “lobos” in Mexico (comprising four males and one female) for an emergency captive breeding program to stave off extinction. No wild wolves have been confirmed alive in Mexico since 1980.

The reintroduction program that stemmed from the captive population is intended to correct a historic mistake and save an endangered species and the ecosystems of which it is a part. The Mexican wolf is the engine of evolution for southwestern ecosystems, contributing to the strength and vigor of elk, the alertness of deer, the agility and sense of balance of bighorn sheep, and the speed and keen eyesight of pronghorn antelope. The lobo also provides carrion for scavenger species such as eagles, badgers and bears. In sum, reintroduction of the Mexican wolf is part of this generation's commitment to generations yet to come that we will leave them some landscapes teeming with life. Appropriately, polls have consistently indicated strong

public support for wolf reintroduction, including in the rural counties where lobos now roam.

Unfortunately, over the past eight years, federal control actions intended to capture and kill Mexican wolves, exacerbated by continued incidents of illegal shootings and hit-and-run vehicular collisions, have resulted in the wolf population consistently failing to meet population projections. The 1996 Mexican gray wolf reintroduction final environmental impact statement predicted 83 wolves in the wild and fifteen breeding pairs by the end of last year, while only 35 wolves in five breeding pairs could be counted by the Mexican wolf interagency field team.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has known since at least June 2001, at the release of the Mexican Wolf Three-Year Review, that reforms were needed to bring the Mexican wolf program up to the standards of the successful reintroduction of northern Rocky Mountain gray wolves to Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho. For example, unlike in the Southwest, the Service has not pledged itself to trap wolves in the northern Rockies simply because they establish homes outside of their designated recovery area. And unlike in the Southwest, in the northern Rockies the Service has given itself the flexibility to refuse to carry out predator control against wolves if those wolves prey on domestic animals in a region in which attractants – including carcasses of cattle and horses that died of non-wolf causes – have drawn the wolves in. Over the past six years the Service has repeatedly pledged that action will be imminent to reform the Mexican wolf reintroduction program's rules, but it has failed to act. Now, the Mexican wolf, which the Service identified in 1986 as the most endangered mammal in North America, is being wiped out again.

In order to avoid repeating a tragic history, we respectfully request an immediate order by your office to the Fish and Wildlife Service to put a hold on all predator control activities targeted at Mexican wolves, until the wolf population stabilizes and the goal of at least 100 wolves in the wild for the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area has been achieved.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely endorsed by:

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