Honorable Susana Martinez
Office of the Governor
490 Old Santa Fe Trail, Room 400
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

June 6, 2011

Certified Mail
Return receipt requested

Copy by e-mail to Brian Moore, Deputy Chief of Staff for Legislative Affairs and Policy, brian.moore@state.nm.us. E-mail copies also sent to New Mexico game commissioners.

Re: Mexican gray wolf recovery and management.

Dear Governor Martinez,

The undersigned thirteen national and New Mexico conservation organizations request that your administration, including your appointees to the New Mexico State Game Commission, take a stance consistent with dependable science and the broad public interest to promote recovery of the endangered Mexican gray wolf. The game commission has placed wolves on the agenda for action at its upcoming June 9 meeting in Las Cruces, presenting an opportunity for your administration to support the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish's continued constructive engagement with other state, tribal and federal agencies in wolf recovery, and to push for needed reforms in management.

There is strong and growing support nationally, throughout New Mexico and in the Gila National Forest region for this beautiful, intelligent, social animal that is uniquely adapted to the arid Southwest but is beleaguered and at great risk of extinction. A 1995 poll conducted for the League of Women Voters found that 60% of New Mexico respondents supported wolf reintroduction, which was then under consideration at White Sands Missile Range, and 25% opposed; within the counties of Grant, Catron, Sierra and Otero the poll found 52% support and 34% opposition. A 2008 statewide poll of New Mexico residents found 69% in support of ongoing wolf reintroduction and only 21% in opposition.[1]

As described and supported in detail below, the undersigned organizations recommend for your consideration that the State of New Mexico (1) support ongoing recovery planning for the Mexican gray wolf to ensure development of delisting criteria, (2) reaffirm support for amending the 1998 federal reintroduction rule so as to allow release of wolves that have not yet been in the wild into New Mexico, (3) encourage resumption of releases of wild-caught wolves into New Mexico, and (4) oppose removal of wolves from the wild except for veterinary purposes or when required by the 1998 rule.

<u>Catron County's divisive anti-wolf recommendations should not serve as State of New Mexico policy.</u>

We hold grave concerns over requests by the Catron County Board of Commissioners for you to take actions that would impede recovery, such as those

[1] Mike Taugher, "Poll: Rural County Residents Support Wolves," *Albuquerque Journal*, 12/6/1995, pp. A1, A4 (enclosed in the USPO-sent copy of this letter, and attached in the copy sent via e-mail); Rene Romo, "'Large Margin' Supports Wolf; Survey: 69% Back Reintroduction," *Albuquerque Journal*, 6/17/2008, p. C4 (enclosed and attached).

included in the county's January 25, 2011 letter requesting that you "impose a moratorium" on releases of captured wolves and that you "permanently remove wolves." And we firmly believe that you deserve to hear a more balanced account of how state and federal agencies cooperate in wolf management than the version offered in the county's follow-up letter of February 2, 2011, with its ominous but unsubstantiated suggestion that "various biologists" harbor agendas amounting to "more than just re-introducing the wolves." (We received these letters from your office under authority of the Inspection of Public Records Act.) We also note the county's press release of April 11, 2011 that concludes: "'Catron County has taken a no-wolf stand,' [commission chairman Hugh B.] McKeen said. 'I'm requesting that you [Governor Martinez] take a no-wolf stance, too.'"[2]

In requesting that you reject such a dead-end position that is sure to engender further unnecessary conflict, we write below to correct Catron County's specific, baseless charges, to provide you an abbreviated history of how we came to the present moment of great peril for this unique animal, and to suggest a way forward that elevates science over politics and promotes prevention of wolf depredations on livestock and an equitable resolution of conflict through cooperation. We urge you to exercise much-needed positive leadership in conservation rather than adopting a no-wolf stance.

<u>There is no basis for impeaching the integrity of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish's cooperative role in wolf management.</u>

Catron County has requested an "investigation into the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish wolf biologists' attempted influence to manipulate the Wildlife Services wolf-livestock depredation findings from a confirmed wolf-livestock depredation to a probable wolf-livestock depredation." We understand that an investigation is underway, and we have no first-hand information to add to the account of what a game and fish department biologist said to a trapper working for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services agency by telephone on January 18, 2011. Nevertheless, Catron County's own account coupled with a public statement by a Wildlife Services supervisor suggests that the state biologist's conduct was professional and proper.

Attachments in the county's February 2nd letter state that a heifer was reported dead on January 16, that the remains were removed from BLM public land, examined off-site on January 18 and determined to have died two to three weeks earlier. Based on bite marks on the hide and unspecified indications of hemorrhage, the USDA Wildlife Services employee concluded without doubt that a wolf or wolves killed the heifer despite the fact that wolves frequently scavenge on animals that are already dead. We wish to note that determining cause of death may be problematic without an on-site investigation and based on a two- to three-week-old carcass -- or more likely, given the abundance of scavenger animals, based on remains that may have consisted solely of hide and disarticulated bones.

According to the county's documents, after the USDA Wildlife Services trapper concluded in the presence of Catron County's representative that it was a "confirmed" wolf kill, but apparently before sharing that conclusion with other agencies, a New

[2] "Catron County Commission Demands Wolf Incident Investigation," Catron County press release, 4/11/2011 (enclosed and attached).

Mexico Game and Fish Department wolf biologist called the trapper to say that the previous year feral dogs had roamed the area where the carcass had been found.

In an *Albuquerque Journal* article on the county's allegations, USDA Wildlife Services' state director Alan May was quoted calling the exchange "appropriate," and stating "that in trying to determine the cause of a domesticated animal's death, Wildlife Services personnel 'routinely solicit input from others,' including Game and Fish employees, 'in order to ensure that the most informed decision is made.'"[3]

Catron County and its livestock industry allies provide you, the federal courts, and the public with misleading information about Mexican wolves.

To bolster its misguided attempt to discredit an ordinary exchange of information between two cooperating agencies, and to exaggerate the wolves' negligible impact on cattle, the Catron County Commission has sent you inapt information regarding wolf depredation rates. The Catron County Commission's attachment entitled "Comparability of Confirmed Wolf Depredations to Actual Losses / Wolves Denning in Calf/yearling Core Areas / Catron County, New Mexico 01/21/11" states: "A USFWS 2003 study by John Oakleaf determined that the actual wolf kill ratio is one found carcass to eight actual livestock kills."

The Catron County commissioners neglected to inform you that this study was conducted in Idaho in a completely different ecosystem occupied by northern Rocky Mountain gray wolves, not our diminutive Mexican gray wolves.[4]

In contrast to the results from Idaho, a recent local study that was conducted through four years and five months of telemetry monitoring of 930 radio-collared calves at two high-risk predation sites occupied by Mexican wolves, found that in the study area of Eagle Creek, Arizona, the rancher found and correctly identified the cause of death of 77.5% of calf mortalities, 79.4% of predator-killed mortalities and 100% of calves killed by wolves; and that in the other study area consisting of public and private lands leased or owned by the Adobe Ranch in New Mexico, the corresponding detection rate was 33%.[5] In neither case does this approach the eight-to-one ratio cited by Catron County.

Furthermore, none of these ratios correlate to the number of stock killed versus the number for which compensation is made. That is because many if not most depredation investigations are initiated through the wolf-monitoring activities of the interagency field team, which locates the wolves from the air and ground via telemetry and often detects suspected depredations before the stock owner does. It is worth also noting that because currently 25 of the 50 Mexican wolves that were counted in the wild in January of this year wear radio collars, a much higher proportion than that of radio-collared wolves in Idaho, detection rates for livestock carcasses in the vicinity of Mexican wolves may be correspondingly higher.

The Catron County commissioners also sent you two papers that purport to identify psychological trauma suffered by county residents due to wolves. You should be informed that the authors of both of these non-peer-reviewed reports have close personal

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[3] Rene Romo, "Complaint Lodged With Agency Over Cow's Death," *Albuquerque Journal*, 4/15/2011, p. C1.

[4] Oakleaf, J.K., C. Mack and D.L. Murray. 2003. Effects of wolves on livestock calf survival and movements in central Idaho. Journal of Wildlife Management 67:299–306.

[5] Breck, S.W., B.M. Kluever, M. Panasci, J. Oakleaf, T. Johnson, W. Ballard, L. Howery and D.L. Bergman. 2011. Domestic calf mortality and producer detection rates in the Mexican wolf recovery area: Implications for livestock management and carnivore compensation schemes. Biological Conservation 144:930–936 (enclosed and attached).

connections to wolf opponents and livestock operators in the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area (which consists of the Gila and Apache national forests in respectively New Mexico and Arizona). They are not disinterested researchers.

It is not surprising that longtime anti-wolf activists are sending you prejudicial and inaccurate information. We urge you to examine skeptically the claims made by a zealous group of livestock owners and their political supporters who inflexibly oppose wolf recovery but are willing to be excessively flexible in their citation of evidence. For example, this faction in its various incarnations has filed suit three times to compel the federal trapping or shooting of all or some of the wolves in the wild. In their first case, filed in 1998 and dismissed in 1999, plaintiffs claimed that the wolves released into Arizona from captivity in 1998 were in fact wolf-dog or wolf-coyote hybrids and that their release endangered a remnant, "genetically pure" population of Mexican wolves as well as endangering Mexican spotted owls that the plaintiffs stated provide them with "substantial aesthetic enjoyment." (An *Albuquerque Journal* editorial countered, before the dismissal: "Crocodile tears over the fate of the Mexican spotted owl are so contrary to the track record of ranching groups as to be bereft of credibility."[6]) In their second case, filed in 2003 and dismissed in 2005, some of the same plaintiff organizations[7] stated that the wolves originating in captivity that were previously claimed to be hybrids were in fact pure-bred Mexican wolves that were imperiled by hybrids pre-existing in the wild, and therefore should be removed from the wild. Their third case, which was filed last year and did not address hybridization, was voluntarily withdrawn this year followed by a statement from one plaintiff that the case would be re-filed.

Far from evincing an authentic concern for the psychological health of local residents, from almost the moment the wolves were first released into New Mexico in spring 2000, members of the loose-knit anti-wolf cabal have not hesitated to attempt to frighten the public. See, for example, the enclosed New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau press statement of May 16, 2000 and article from the next day's edition of the *Silver City Sun-News*.

From the Farm Bureau statement: "At 7 a.m. May 16, 2000 a young woman was attacked by Mexican Gray Wolves 50 feet from the Campbell store off the main road to the Gila Cliff Dwellings. Its [sic] a darn good thing this lady had two dogs with her, since according to eye-witnesses to the attack, the wolves were obviously starving. It is fortunate she was in a populated area and rescued by two local U.S. Forest Service employees in the face of this life-threatening attack."[8]

But from the local newspaper: "'My dogs saw the wolves and one of them ran after them,' said [Renee] Dupree. 'The wolves saw the dog coming and one of them came toward me, apparently because he was curious about the other dog I was holding. I really didn't feel threatened myself, but I was a little concerned about the dogs.' Dupree let the dog go and threw some rocks at the wolves. The animals ran back into the wilderness behind the homes of some residents and were barked at by other dogs, said Dupree."[9]

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[6] "Ranchers Squander Precious Credibility," *Albuquerque Journal*, 3/25/1999, p. A14 (enclosed and attached).

[7] The organizations that served as plaintiffs in both the 1998 and 2003 suits seeking removal of the reintroduced Mexican wolves from the wild, but for contradictory reasons, were the New Mexico Cattle Growers Association, Grant County Farm and Livestock Bureau, New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau, the New Mexico Public Lands Council, and the New Mexico Wool Growers.

[8] Norm Plank, untitled press statement, New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau, 5/16/2000 (enclosed and attached).

[9] Stacey Hearn, "Woman, dogs encounter wolves," *Silver City Sun-News*, 5/17/2000, p. A1 (enclosed and attached). Note also that the Endangered Species Act explicitly immunizes against prosecution for the injury or killing of an endangered species to protect

Mexican wolves embody the potential to enrich the natural ecosystems of the Southwest.

Wolves once lived throughout the northern hemisphere and evolved into different forms in response to regional habitats and prey species. The Mexican gray wolf is the southernmost and smallest subspecies of gray wolf in North America, and one of the rarest mammals in the world. It is also thought to be the oldest lineage of wolves in North America, and is genetically unique.[10]

Wolves benefit their ecosystems in a variety of ways, for example by routinely preying on unfit ungulates, which allows greater numbers of more robust or alert deer and other hoofed mammals to survive and pass on their genes. Wolves may also prevent the spread of wildlife diseases by culling ailing animals before they infect an entire herd. Wolves reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park in 1995 have induced elk to spend less time in low-visibility valleys with steep embankments where they are more vulnerable to surprise attack. This has resulted in the growth of streamside cottonwood trees that the elk previously overbrowsed and prevented from maturing beyond saplings. Birds now nest in newly-lofty trees, and beavers feed on them and use them for dams which in turn improved fish habitat.[11]

Wolves also kill coyotes, which has led to increases in foxes in Yellowstone and greater survival of pronghorn fawns in Grand Teton National Park. Finally, wolves provide carrion for many types of scavenging animals including eagles, badgers and bears.[12]

A recent study in the Southwest found that as yet there are too few wolves to have measurably benefitted our ecosystems.[13]

The Mexican wolf's plight argues for not continuing the failed policies of the past.

European settlement of the Southwest did not automatically signal conflict between wolves and civilization. For example, at least as early as the 1830s sheep ranchers in New Mexico used herders and guard dogs to protect their flocks from predators, allowing sheep-raising to thrive. But in the late nineteenth century, unregulated market hunting greatly reduced the numbers of bison, elk, mule and white-

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against bodily harm to oneself or others. So any real threat by wolves, however unlikely, could be addressed with the same suite of tools available for threats by cougars, black bears, rattlesnakes, etc.. Even in a 1998 instance in which a man shot a Mexican wolf in Arizona and reported the incident, at first stating that he was protecting his dog and then changing his story to claim he was protecting his wife instead, and in which forensic evidence contradicted his account, Fish and Wildlife Service declined to prosecute. (Arthur H. Rotstein, "Wolf-Death Inquiry Urged, Shooter's Defense Challenged," *Albuquerque Journal*, 7/30/1998, p. D1.)

[10] vonHoldt, B.M., J.P. Pollinger, D.A. Earl, J.C. Knowles, A.R. Boyko, H. Parker, E. Geffen, M. Pilot, W. Jedrzejewski,B. Jedrzejewska,V. Sidorovich, C. Greco, E. Randi, M. Musiani, R. Kays, C.D. Bustamante, E.A. Ostrander, J. Novembre and R.K. Wayne. 2011. A genome-wide perspective on the evolutionary history of enigmatic wolf-like canids. Genome Research, advanced online publication, http://genome.cshlp.org.

[11] Miller B., B. Dugelby, D. Foreman, C. Martinez del Rio, R. Noss, M. Phillips, R. Reading, M.E. Soule, J. Terborg and L. Wilcox. 2001. The importance of large carnivores to healthy ecosystems. Endangered Species Update 18(5):202-210; Ripple, W.J. and R.L. Beschta. 2003. Wolf reintroduction, predation risk, and cottonwood recovery in Yellowstone National Park. Forest Ecology and Management 184:299-313 (enclosed and attached); Ripple W.J. and R.L. Beschta. 2004. Wolves and the ecology of fear: can predation risk structure ecosystems? BioScience 54(8):755-766; Berger J., P.B. Stacy, L. Bellis, and M.P. Johnson. 2001. A mammalian predator-prey imbalance: grizzly bear and wolf extinction affect avian neotropical migrants. Ecological Applications 11(4):947-960; Hebblewhite M., C.A. White, C.G. Nietvelt, J.A. McKenzie, T.E. Hurd, J.M. Fryxell, S.E. Bayley and P.C. Paquet. 2005. Human activity mediates a trophic cascade caused by wolves. Ecology 86(8):2135-2144.

[12] Miller et al 2001; Smith, D.W., R.O. Peterson, and D.B. Houston. 2003. Yellowstone after wolves. BioScience 53(4):330-340; Berger, K.M. and E.M. Gese. 2007. Does interference competition with wolves limit the distribution and abundance of coyotes? Journal of Animal Ecology 76(6):1075-1085; Berger, K. M., Gese, E. M. and Berger, J. 2008. Indirect effects and traditional trophic cascades: a test involving wolves, coyotes and pronghorn. Ecology 89(3) 818-828 (enclosed and attached).

[13] Beschta, R.L. and W. J. Ripple. 2010. Mexican wolves, elk, and aspen in Arizona: Is there a trophic cascade? Forest Ecology and Management 260:915–922

tailed deer, pronghorn, bighorn sheep and other wolf prey species, leaving all of these animals exceedingly rare and leading in fact to the complete extirpation of bison and elk within the state. (A different subspecies of elk was later reintroduced from Yellowstone.) The paucity of natural prey forced wolves to rely extensively on livestock.[14]

That induced the Arizona-New Mexico territorial legislature in 1893 to authorize and appropriate payment of bounties on wolves and other predators, and Congress in 1915 to appropriate funds for salaried federal personnel to systematically poison and trap wolves and other predators throughout the West, and to kill wolf pups in their dens. By the early 1930s there were almost no wolves left in the West, and no breeding wolves in New Mexico. Although Mexican wolves continued to cross the border from Mexico, they were summarily killed. In 1945, the Fish and Wildlife Service trapped in southern Colorado what may have been the last wolf born in the American west, and in 1950, Fish and Wildlife began exporting poison and experienced wolf hunters to Mexico, as a dour form of foreign aid, to duplicate its successful domestic wolf extermination program south of the border. As intended, this greatly reduced the number of wolves migrating to the U.S. from northwestern Mexico.[15]

Only after passage of the Endangered Species Act in 1973 (a Nixon initiative) did this intensive persecution end. After the 1976 placement of the Mexican wolf on the endangered species list, the last five Mexican wolves confirmed from Mexico were captured alive between 1977 and 1980 in an emergency effort to save the subspecies via captive breeding; no wolves are known to have survived in the wild in Mexico more recently than the 1980s. Just seven animals total -- the descendants of three of those last five survivors, of three wolves previously live-caught in Mexico, and of one captured in southern Arizona – kept the subspecies from going extinct and served as the sole progenitors of today's captive population of approximately 300 wolves as well as the reintroduced population of approximately 50 wolves inhabiting the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area.

In 1982, the Fish and Wildlife Service approved a Mexican wolf recovery plan which called for continued captive-breeding and for reintroduction to the wild in two areas, with a population goal of at least 100 wolves for the first area. The plan stated that the two populations would not suffice to recover and delist the Mexican wolf but would merely constitute the necessary first steps of recovery. The agency declined to set complete recovery criteria with the information available at the time.[16]

Because the Endangered Species Act requires that recovery plans include objective, measurable criteria for delisting, and also because the 1982 plan did not address the genetic plight of the Mexican wolf stemming from its severe population bottleneck and consequent inbreeding, the Fish and Wildlife Service has three times since the 1990s begun to develop a new recovery plan for the Mexican wolf, prematurely terminating its plan the first two times – in 1995 and 2005. This year the agency activated a new recovery team to develop such a plan. We are hopeful that it will be finalized by next year, three decades after the issuance of the first Mexican wolf recovery plan, which is now a woefully outdated document.

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[14] Robinson, M.J. 2005. Predatory Bureaucracy: The Extermination of Wolves and the Transformation of the West. University Press of Colorado. 473 pages; pp. 25, 27-29, 34 & 394.
[15] Ibid, pp. 31, 79, 284-285, 298.
[16] U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1982. Mexican Wolf Recovery Plan. Albuquerque, 103 pages; pp. 23, 32.

In 1996, Fish and Wildlife issued an environmental impact statement (EIS) on reintroduction that projected that at the end of the ninth year of releases to the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area there would be 102 wolves in the wild including 18 breeding pairs. A 2001 blue-ribbon independent scientific review of the reintroduction program estimated that based on elk and deer numbers alone, the recovery area could support 468 wolves.[17] Notably, deer and elk have rebounded tremendously from the era a century ago when their scarcity assured wolf depredations on livestock.

However, the 2001 science panel predicted that wolf numbers would lag behind the EIS projection due to management and regulatory deficiencies deemed likely to suppress population growth. The scientists recommended reforms to address these foreseeable problems.[18] But due to opposition by the livestock industry, a full decade after issuance of their report none of the management and regulatory reforms that the panel flagged as the most urgent have yet been implemented.

As a result, almost thirteen years after reintroduction began only fifty wolves including just two breeding pairs could be counted in January of this year. Furthermore, wolf fertility and pup survival rates are low in some wolves due to inbreeding depression. The wild population is at risk of extirpation, and the captive population is itself likely to undergo long-term genetic deterioration rendering it incapable of serving as a replacement or stopgap for loss of the wild population.[19]

Lastly, the 150,000-acre-plus Wallow Fire in Arizona threatens to overrun wolf dens and their weeks-old pups, which unlike adults may be incapable of outrunning the flames. Up to four packs may be in peril, a significant portion of the bi-state breeding population.

<u>A rational way forward.</u>

Governor Martinez, we respectfully request that you and your appointees and departments adopt the following four positions:

1) *Support ongoing recovery planning for the Mexican gray wolf to ensure development of delisting criteria*. The appointment of a Mexican wolf recovery team and that team's work to develop a recovery plan promises to lead for the very first time to objective, measurable criteria for delisting the Mexican wolf. Adherence to science-based criteria and fulfillment of recovery actions will provide certainty that the Mexican wolf will not go extinct and provide certainty and a predicted timeline for inaugurating state and tribal authority and management. The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and other state and tribal agencies as well as representatives from the anti-wolf faction and conservationists serve on the recovery team in deliberations that are separate from but intended to mesh with those of scientists.

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[17] U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1996. Reintroduction of the Mexican wolf within its historic range in the southwestern United States final environmental impact statement, Albuquerque, p. 2-8; Paquet, P.C., J. Vucetich, M.L. Phillips and L. Vucetich. 2001. Mexican wolf recovery: three year program review and assessment. Prepared by the Conservation Breeding Specialist Group for the United States Fish and Wildllife Service, 86 pages, p. 47.

[18] Paquet et al, pp. 27, 65-68.

[19] Fredrickson R.J., P. Siminski, M. Woolf and P. W. Hedrick. 2007. Genetic rescue and inbreeding depression in Mexican wolves. Proc R Soc B 274:2365–2371; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2010. Mexican Wolf Conservation Assessment. Albuquerque, 130 pages, pp. 11, 67, 74, 78.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service should be encouraged to continue and expedite recovery planning, and to not delay finalizing the draft recovery plan when it is complete.

Members of Congress should be discouraged from supporting legislation such as H.R. 1819 which would amend the Endangered Species Act to transfer wolf management to the states of New Mexico and Arizona two years after the bi-state wolf population reaches 100 animals and for as long as it remains at or above that figure. Were H.R. 1819 to become law, Fish and Wildlife Service would be unable to complete or implement its upcoming recovery plan once 100 wolves were in the wild for an initial two years, a population number with no basis in science and a standard that is lower than the incomplete goal of the 1982 Mexican wolf recovery plan which called for establishment of two populations as only a first step toward recovery. The peril of only establishing a single, small population is evident in the current risk to that population posed by the Wallow Fire. Furthermore, one-hundred wolves would not be sufficient to reverse the ongoing inbreeding-depression, and an inbred population of that size, unless protected and augmented through continued releases from captivity, would remain at high risk of extinction.

2) *Reaffirm the New Mexico State Game Commission's 2004 position in favor of amending the 1998 Mexican wolf reintroduction rule so as to allow release of wolves that have not yet been in the wild into New Mexico*. The 1998 final rule authorizes releases of wolves from the captive-breeding population only into Arizona's portion of the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area, and authorizes translocations of wild-caught wolves into both Arizona and New Mexico. This national precedent in bifurcating endangered species management by state border is an unhappy artifact of the New Mexico State Game Commission's 1980s and 1990s opposition to releases into the Gila National Forest – reflecting livestock industry opposition. The Arizona Game and Fish Commission took a more cooperative stance including openness to initial releases, and now, ironically, Catron County complains that the wolves released into New Mexico are "habituated" (to human contact) through the process of translocation.

In reality, wolves released into New Mexico were not all involved in livestock depredations, some having been captured only for leaving the recovery area boundaries. Nor is the process of capture a pleasant one that would induce wolves to seek out human company. However, the process of translocation has sometimes ended up splitting apart established packs, leading individual wolves to roam widely and at great risk in unfamiliar terrain. Wolves that were captured and would have been eligible for possible future release have also died as a consequence of the capture.

To minimize disruption of existing wolf packs while increasing the number of wolves, the 2001 science panel advised:

> **Immediately modify the final rule (Parsons 1998) and develop the authority to conduct initial releases into the Gila National Forest.** Several releases conducted during the first 3 years of the reintroduction project resulted in wolves settling much of the primary recovery zone [i.e. the Apache National Forest in Arizona] in the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area. As work elsewhere ([Mike] Phillips unpublished data) has revealed, wolves should not be released in areas that support resident animals. Over time, it will become harder for the [Fish and Wildlife] Service to find suitable release sites in the primary recovery zone. The

> Service can best address this problem by obtaining the authority to conduct initial release in the secondary recovery zone, most notably the Gila National Forest. This recommendation was first made to the Service by a panel of experts (including Phillips) enlisted by the Service to review the reintroduction program in January 1999. Despite the Service's approval of the recommendation, they have taken no implementation action. This is by far the most important and simplest change the Service can make to the existing reintroduction project. The Gila National Forest is approximately 75% of the 4.4. million acre Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area. The Gila Forest includes about 700,000 acres that are roadless and free of livestock. Several high-quality release sites are available in the area. Using them is the best way for improving the cost-effectiveness and certainty of the reintroduction project. Accordingly, we strongly recommend that the Service immediately take whatever action is necessary to conduct initial releases of captive-born (and wild-born if appropriate) Mexican wolves to the Gila National Forest.[20]

The science panel issued this report in June 2001. In April 2004, the New Mexico State Game Commission, after hearing a day of overwhelmingly pro-wolf public testimony in Silver City, endorsed such a rule-change and instructed the game department to urge Fish and Wildlife to undertake it. However, despite Fish and Wildlife Service officials repeatedly stating over the past decade that the agency intends to follow a National Environmental Policy Act procedure to effect such a rule-change, it has not issued the requisite draft environmental assessment to solicit public comment necessary to proceed.

3) *Encourage resumption of releases of wolves into New Mexico*. The Fish and Wildlife Service has authority to release into New Mexico's portion of the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area wolves previously captured from the wild. Such translocations are vital to augmenting the wild population's limited genetic diversity and rescuing the population from inbreeding depression.

The interagency reintroduction project team recently ranked 32 potential wolf release sites in the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area, based on a formula accounting for the results from past releases of wolves at some sites, and for all sites their proximity to residences, towns, livestock, the recovery area boundary and other territorial wolves (all inversely correlated to likely release success), and elk and deer (positively correlated). The three top-ranked sites were all in the Gila Wilderness in New Mexico.[21] Targeted releases of wolves to these areas can enhance the genetics of the wild population while minimizing the likelihood of conflicts.

Currently, it appears that Fish and Wildlife is not releasing wolves into New Mexico in deference to perceived lack of support by your administration. The game commission should endorse additional releases.

4) *Oppose removal of wolves from the wild except for veterinary purposes or when required by the 1998 rule*. The 1998 reintroduction rule requires the live-capture of wolves that establish territories wholly outside of the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area

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[20] Paquet et al, p. 65.

[21] Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project Initial Wolf Release Proposal for Arizona 2011**,** Draft: May 18, 2011; distributed at Arizona Game and Fish Department meeting in Alpine, Arizona on 5/23/2011.

(except for wolves on adjoining tribal or private lands whose owners or managers choose to allow them to stay). But it provides discretion as to removal of depredating wolves. Agency removals from the wild, primarily of depredating wolves and their dependent pups, are the biggest factor in the numeric stagnation of the wolf population and have accelerated loss of genetic diversity in the population, accounting for 34 wolves that were captured and not released (with nine dead of age-related ailments thus far), 18 that died as unintended consequences of capture, and eleven wolves shot by the federal government, including a genetically irreplaceable wolf killed in 2004 over two months after his last depredation and despite having been observed feeding on an elk in the interim.

With strong encouragement from the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, over the past three-and-a-half years Fish and Wildlife Service has not authorized the removal of any wolves in response to livestock depredations. Instead, the department has played a lead role in the interagency field team in helping to discourage depredations. The results are heartening: The San Mateo and Middle Fork packs that depredated in 2009 are not known to have done so since, and only nine confirmed wolf depredations occurred throughout last year in New Mexico and Arizona. All losses were reimbursed.

More broadly, although confirmed fatal wolf depredations on livestock increased each year from 2003 through 2007, with a corresponding increase in all but 2004 in the number of wolves removed from the wild, the numbers of depredations have decreased in each year since 2008 -- the first year of a federal forbearance and cessation of depredation-related removals that continues, tenuously, through today.[22] The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish should be encouraged to continue its successful efforts, which are all the more needed and will be especially challenging during the current drought that makes livestock more vulnerable.

The department and your administration should also stand resolutely against proposals to trap or shoot wolves in response to depredations. The limited data show that the more wolves have been removed, the more wolf depredations occur the following year; and when the option of wolf-removal is foreclosed depredations decrease -- perhaps attributable to greater incentive among stock-owners to exercise reasonable preventive measures and to practice sound animal husbandry when making the wolves a scapegoat and effecting their removal is taken off the table.

Notably, Catron County has requested that you "intervene with US Forest Service's practice of manipulating ranchers' husbandry practices to accommodate wolf management." This request seeks to undercut the Forest Service's modest efforts as part of the interagency field team to manage livestock grazing in a manner least likely to lead to depredations.

[22] Confirmed Fatal Livestock Depredations by Mexican Wolves, 2003-2010, drawn from reintroduction project annual reports (2003-2009) and monthly updates (2010):

Year	End-of-year wolf population	Confirmed fatal livestock depredations	Number of wolves removed
2003	55	4	2
2004	44-48	8	1
2005	35-49	22	6
2006	59	28	14
2007	52	36	16
2008	52	21	0
2009	42	16	3 (not for depredations)
2010	50	9	0

We hope that you will reject Catron County's obstructionist approach, including its suite of unhelpful recommendations, and follow the science and the public interest instead. Your leadership can help ensure the survival and recovery of the Mexican gray wolf, and thereby also improve the health of the entire vast and wild Gila ecosystem -- which would in turn benefit our own species, now and for future generations.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely endorsed by:

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Albuquerque, New Mexico

Michael J. Robinson, Conservation Advocate
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Please direct any questions, requests for additional cited documents, and/or a reply to:

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