

Center for Biological Diversity • Grand Canyon Wildlands Council • Sierra Club – Grand Canyon Chapter • Sierra Club – Rio Grande Chapter • Southwest Environmental Center • The Rewilding Institute • Western Wildlife Conservancy • White Mountain Conservation League • Wolf Conservation Center

For Immediate Release, April 25, 2014

Contact: Sandy Bahr, Sierra Club (602) 999-5790, sandy.bahr@sierraclub.org
Michael Robinson, Center for Biological Diversity, (575) 313-7017

Arizona Game and Fish Endorses Plan to Ramp Up Killing of Endangered Wolves

PHOENIX -- The Arizona Game and Fish Commission unanimously endorsed a plan this week that will make it vastly easier to kill endangered Mexican gray wolves in Arizona and New Mexico and arbitrarily caps the number of wolves in both states at 300, and allowing for a number as low as 125. Significantly, the commission also recommends that management of wolves be taken away from the federal government, where it has been since passage of the federal Endangered Species Act, and given to the state, which has long been hostile to wolves.

The proposal, called the “cooperating agencies alternative,” is a collection of previously discarded policies that failed to promote wolf recovery.

“If this alternative is enacted, it will likely mean a second extinction in the wild for Mexican wolves,” said Sandy Bahr, chapter director for the Sierra Club’s Grand Canyon Chapter. “The document limits the number of animals arbitrarily, restricts the recovery area, eliminates opportunities for connected multiple populations, and promotes more frequent removal or killing of wolves. This is not a proposal to recover a highly endangered species. It is a proposal to exterminate them.”

“This chilling proposal would bring the Mexican wolf even closer to the brink of extinction while advancing the states-rights goal of wresting control of endangered wildlife and bringing both the feds and wild animals to heel,” said Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity. “Arizona Game and Fish has long advocated the killing of Mexican wolves, and now seeks to increase and institutionalize the slaughter, and make the policy of killing wolves immune to any last-ditch efforts to save them in the event of a declining population.”

The proposal, now sent to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is intended to guide management of this endangered wolf population, which now stands at about 83 in the two states.

The Arizona Game and Fish Commission called a last-minute telephonic meeting to endorse this alternative, despite having earlier indicated publicly that this issue would not be addressed until its June meeting. In developing the proposal, Arizona Game and Fish included nearly all of the groups that have historically objected to wolf recovery – livestock interests, trappers, and some counties and hunting groups – but no groups that have supported wolf recovery. The document was not made available for review until right before Tuesday’s telephone meeting and members of the public who wished to comment were required to be present at the Game and Fish office in north Phoenix, rather than being able to participate from satellite offices throughout the state as is often the case.

“Why is Arizona Game and Fish leaving out large segments of the public and rushing through policies to hinder the recovery of a highly endangered species?” said Bahr. “The agency and commission should be embarrassed by both its conduct and the fact that it has endorsed an alternative that is contrary to federal law, contrary to the best science, and clearly intended to limit wolf recovery.”

The proposed “extinction” alternative is indefensible in many ways.

1. The document includes uncited research from the northern Rockies that states Arizona and New Mexico can only accommodate 200-300 wolves (page 4). This is contrary to the best available science from members of the recovery team.
2. It proposes to cap the population of wolves at 300 across both Arizona and New Mexico (page 8), but states that 125 animals will be its fallback number and that it will be willing to try to manage for 200 to 300 wolves only if every wolf beyond the 300 threshold is trapped or killed expeditiously. These numbers are far lower than the 750 minimum threshold scientists on the recovery team have proposed based on the best available science.
3. The alternative includes a broad provision to allow the states to remove or kill wolves to maintain this arbitrary cap, or because they impact game species, or any other reason, including “to avoid conflict with human activities.” (page 25).
4. It allows landowners and livestock permittees to kill wolves for a long list of reasons, including if a wolf “harassed” a pet (page 22).
5. It revives SOP 13.0, a discarded policy that led to the deaths and removals of entire packs of wolves, regardless of the wolves’ genetic value or necessity to dependent pups, until the wild population declined to only 42 wolves in 2009 (page 9).
6. It seeks to limit federal actions to recover Mexican wolves to law enforcement only in areas “claimed” by state authority. The federal government can check on the states’ progress every three years (page 16).

The game department alternative would also grant the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s “Wildlife Services” agency, which kills predators for ranchers, sweeping authority to decide which wolves to kill. The alternative even purports to constrain future U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decision-making on what standards to use in removing the Mexican wolf from the endangered species list.

“This alternative would relegate the Fish and Wildlife Service, which by law must recover endangered species, to two roles: reporting once every three years on the status of the wolf population, and disposing of the carcasses of wolves on an ongoing basis,” said Robinson.

[Please see attached to review the document adopted by the Commission.](#)

The Sierra Club is one of the oldest grassroots environmental organizations in the country with more than 2.4 million members and supporters nationwide. The Sierra Club’s mission is “to explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth; to practice and promote the responsible use of the earth’s ecosystems and resources; and to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environments.

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 775,000 members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

###