

From: [Barrett, Sherry](#)
To: [Humphrey, Jeff](#)
Cc: [John Oakleaf](#); [Charna Lefton](#); [Maggie Dwire](#)
Subject: Re: Commission rules on wolf reintroduction - El Defensor Cheitain
Date: Friday, November 21, 2014 2:58:06 PM

Good job John!

On Fri, Nov 21, 2014 at 11:08 AM, Humphrey, Jeff <jeff_humphrey@fws.gov> wrote:

<http://www.dchieftain.com/2014/11/20/commission-rules-on-wolf-reintroduction>

El Defensor Chieftain

Commission rules on wolf reintroduction

by [John Larson](#) | November 20, 2014 | Filed under: [News](#)

The New Mexico Game Commission ruled at its monthly meeting last week that it will no longer automatically issue permits to allow private landowners to hold carnivores in captivity for the purpose of reintroducing them into the wild.

The commission will have to give its approval on each request.

In this case, Mexican gray wolves.

According to Lance Cherry, assistant Chief of Information for the Game Commission, the new ruling allows for more transparency in the permitting process.

"It will probably go into effect around mid-December," he said. "For the time being, any permits won't be impacted by this rule."

But any future renewal of permits will go through the Game Commission instead of going straight to the director for approval.

"Prior to the change that they made, the permit requests were reviewed internally," Cherry said. "Now there will be a public comment attached to them."

Ranchers in Socorro and Catron counties are happy about the ruling.



Sherry Barrett, Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Albuquerque, said there are officially a minimum of 83 wolves currently in the wild.

"It's a positive thing for New Mexico agricultural producers," said rancher Anita Hand of Datil. The Hand Ranch lies between the San Mateo Mountains and Datil Mountains.

"I appreciate the layer of protection," she said. "There's a process you have to go through, so when carnivores are released a neighbor can be notified, and they're not just randomly released."

Hand said wolf tracks have been seen in and around the area, enough, she said, to warrant a wolf-proof enclosure for the protection of children waiting for the school bus.

"They're raised in captivity. They've been around human interaction," she said. "They have humans feeding them and vaccinating them and taking care of them. They're not scared of humans."

Caren Cowan, executive director of New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association, said, "We're very pleased the state is trying to stand up for our rights and for New Mexico."

"As you probably know we have long opposed the Mexican wolf program, and we fail to see how the federal government has the right to turn loose predators on us with no compensation," Cowan said.

"The new ruling says, that as a private landowner, you can't import a large carnivore, be it a wolf or anything else into the state and release it on your private property," she said. "The genesis of this is that the drafted Environmental Impact Statement that was released last summer contains a provision that private property owners can cooperate with the Mexican wolf program and release wolves on private property. And as you and I know, once you release an animal like that on private property there's no guarantee it's going to stay there. We hope this addresses that situation."

Sherry Barrett, Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Albuquerque, said there is officially a minimum of 83 currently in the wild.

"We have three pre-release facilities, the Ladder Ranch south of Truth or Consequences, Sevilleta, and Wolf Haven in the state of Washington," she said. "Those are large areas that are infrequently visited to really get the wolves more wild before they get released into the wild."

Mexican wolf reintroduction from the Ladder Ranch is the one facility that will be most affected by the ruling, since it is privately owned by Ted Turner Enterprises.

"The facility on the Ladder Ranch is like the one on the Sevilleta," said Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter Wildlife chair Mary Catherine Ray of Socorro County. "It's called a pre-release facility which means the enclosures are larger and they're more natural. That's where wolves go when they're ready to be released into the wild population. For that reason the Ladder Ranch is very important. It's one of the only three pre-release facilities in New Mexico."

She said she believes the action of the Game Commission was politically motivated.

"The Wildlife Conservation Act that requires wildlife officials confer and promote the recovery of endangered species. And they're not doing that," Ray said. "They've actually put a roadblock into the Wildlife Conservation Act. Permitting endangered species should be the purview of biologists. This decision only creates an avenue for political posturing that betrays science, the public trust and the moral obligation to conserve all of nature's creatures."

"Not just wolves, but the way it's written it could be black-footed ferrets. It could be ocelots," she said. "At the meeting in Espanola there were over a dozen people speaking against the proposal and three speaking in favor of it."

"There was no discussion by the commissioners. They went straight to the vote. They knew what they were going to do," Ray said.

Jess Carey of Reserve has seen what cattle depredations look like, up close and personal. He has been investigating them in Catron County since April, 2006 when the county commission named him the county's Wolf Interaction Investigator.

Carey said he is the first one ranchers contact when a dead or injured cow is located.

"What we look for when we get called to the scene are several things," he said. "You're looking along the dirt road for canine tracks and scat. You're also looking up. You'll see ravens and vultures flying up off the ground and into trees."

He said the most significant part of the investigation is carcass detection time.

"The sooner the animal is found the quicker you'll finish the examination," Carey said. "Over time you'll lose evidence from birds scavenging as well as decomposition. All of that hinders preservation of the evidence."

If a wolf was responsible for the depredations, Carey said bite marks are a giveaway.

"Wolves can leave bite marks that are distinguishable from a bear or lion," he said. "And capture and rake marks on its hindquarters. This tells you the cow or calf was being chased."

"They target an animal and run it and run it. Biting at it. All night long sometimes," Carey said. "We've seen where a single wolf would take down a 1,400-pound cow."

"Cows stress down fairly easy and once they do, then the wolves kill through consumption. Eat them while they are still alive, unlike lions or bears which will kill them first before eating them," he said.

Carey is also concerned about wolf-human interaction and said he's answered multiple reports of wolves on porches and in yards.

"This is the fault of the Fish and Wildlife Service," he said. "Feeding them supplemental food, including horse meat and carcasses. We have complained about conditioning these wolves. When it is food conditioned it becomes habituated to human presence."

But John Oakleaf, Field Project Coordinator with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said precautions are taken.

"We do everything we can to minimize interaction with wolves in these pre-release facilities. There are negative things associated with that, so as wolves get handled they're pretty fearful of humans. We evaluate the wolves in captivity to make sure they're still fearful in that distance they are to the edge of the pen."

He said to increase the fear "we'll sometimes haze while they're in captivity to make sure they're fearful of people while in the pen."

"What you see when they're released and they've been in captivity is that they have a fear distance of people about the distance of that pen," Oakleaf said. "That's somewhat shorter than what you'll see with wild wolves that are out there that have a larger fear distance. That tends to worry some folks, but again, when we release wolves we're prepared to actively manage those wolves."

Oakleaf said every report is taken seriously and "we certainly do all kinds of actions if we think there's an issue."

"There's hazing, which is making loud noises, and there's rubber bullets. There's also removal of the animal," he said.

Another technique is called turbo-fladry, an electrified wire hanging flags.

"Wolves will test things with their mouth, so when they test the fladry with their mouth they'll get a shock," he said.

Oakleaf said wolves are re-introduced back into the wild in one of three ways.

"The first is a hard release, which is the translocation of the animal from one spot and releasing it in another spot right out of the crate," Oakleaf said. "Then there's a soft release, which involves a high metal fence out in the wild, and then hold them in the metal fence for a period of time to acclimate them to their surroundings. The other method is a modified soft release, where they are in a mesh enclosure that they can chew their way out of, so they self-release over time."

He said the mesh pen holds them anywhere from one day to a couple of weeks.

According to the Fish and Wildlife Service, all wolves in the program are descendants of seven wolves. Five of the seven were wild-caught in Mexico before 1980, and two were selected from captive populations.

Today's captive breeding program includes more than 300 wolves in 47 zoos and sanctuaries across the U.S. and Mexico.

Jeff Humphrey
Public Outreach Specialist
Fish and Wildlife Service
2321 West Royal Palm Road, Suite 103
Phoenix, Arizona 85021
602-242-0210 ext. 222
<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/>

--

Sherry Barrett
Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator
US Fish and Wildlife Service
2105 Osuna Road NE
Albuquerque, NM 87113
Office: (505) 761-4748
Cell: (505) 363-2797