

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
December 1, 1998

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### **Arizona Ranch Families In Search of the Truth about Wolves**

PHOENIX – Arizona ranch families are looking for the plain, unvarnished truth about the Mexican gray wolf reintroduction program, a spokesman for the Arizona Cattlemen's Association said today.

The fate of the wolves reintroduced to the Apache National Forest last spring has been in the spotlight recently with the death of a fifth wolf. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials reported last week that the animal had been shot. Of the 11 wolves in the program, five have been recaptured, five have been shot and one is missing and is presumed dead. The only pup born in the wild is also missing and presumed dead.

“The only thing that has been revealed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at this point is that several wolves have been shot,” said Barbara Marks, a rancher from Blue, a small community in the area where the wolves were released. “The first killing was reported by the man who shot the wolf while defending his family. Who knows about the others?”

“What I object to is the fact that lies and innuendo from radical environmental activist groups that say ranchers are to blame continues to be restated in the press without question,” Marks said.

Marks said the program has proven to be a cruel experiment. She said the wolves have been drugged, trapped, caged and relocated on a regular basis but, even worse, they have not adapted to living in the wild and are virtually starving.

“There have been accusations that the wolves are being shot by ‘eco-terrorists,’ with the implication that ranchers are responsible for trying to wipe out this experimental group of wolves,” said Marks. “But the \$100,000 fine and the jail time would scare a lot of people.”

“These accusations must have been made by someone who has not seen the wolves,” she continued. “It has been obvious for months that they were starving. If you had a dog in the same condition as these wolves, the Humane Society would prosecute you for mistreatment and neglect.”

Marks said the media should be demanding answers from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service and Arizona Department of Fish and Game about the program's failures, costs and secrets.

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She said reporters should be asking about the many reports of wolves raiding garbage cans around towns and campsites, stealing pet food from porches and even eating dog feces in an attempt to avoid starvation.

In addition, they should demand to see reports about locations where dead wolves were found to answer suggestions that the wolves were shot from the road; pathology reports on the wolves that were shot to see evidence of the wolves' overall condition as well as cause of death; research documentation from the full duration of the program; and reports of the wolves' interaction with humans both in communities and camping areas.

“They are not telling the public or the media that several of the wolves in the program were literally starving to death, some had to be recaptured because they were hanging around towns, or that the wolf pup was researched to death because it starved after it was repeatedly frightened away from an elk carcass by the noise of a motion-detecting camera,” Marks said. “You don't see reports in the media about all the times a wolf was found in or lurking around campers' camp sites or about the pets that were killed by wolves.”

“No one should be surprised that ranch families who make their living caring for animals find this cruel experiment a travesty,” she stated.

She said the program has no support from the people in the local communities affected, not only ranch families but also people who feel their livelihoods, children and freedom to enjoy the outdoors threatened.

“What city dwellers don't understand is that – just like they fear being a victim of crime – these rural families fear being victims of the wolf recovery program,” she said.

Marks demanded full disclosure of all aspects of the program by the agencies involved. She said this is the only way to stop the finger pointing at ranchers as being somehow responsible for the program's failures.

“The attempt to single out ranch families is akin to a hate crime,” she said. “The venom and false accusations against ranching families is just as cruel to them as the wolf recovery program has been to the wolf.”

“There is no question about why the local communities opposed the program,” she concluded. “They knew when it failed they would be blamed and that the self-serving agencies and radical organizations involved in the wolf recovery program would never take responsibility for any failings. What government agency ever has?”