

Official Cattle attacked by wolf.

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Scott Turner – El Defensor Chieftain Editor - Apr 27, 2017 Updated Apr 27, 2017

A wolf was responsible for recent attacks on a bull and a cow in Socorro County, the Board of County Commissioners was told Tuesday.

USDA wildlife official Mike Kelly told commissioners the grown bull and cow may have been killed by the same wolf.

He said there were at least four wolves in Socorro County — three collared wolves and one uncollared wolf. Kelly said the wolves were normally located in an area north of Magdalena and in the San Mateos.

Socorro County Chairwoman Martha Salas asked Kelly about reports she's heard from residents that about a wolf sighting near the city of Socorro.

Kelly said there were confirmed sightings near San Antonio and the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge, but said he believes the wolves are now back in the San Mateos.

Socorro County Commissioner Glen Duggins asked if the bull and cow were healthy. Duggins said he has heard sayings that wolves mainly attacked lame animals.

Kelly said the bull and cow were believed to be healthy.

Kelly said he has investigated other livestock deaths, but most of the attacks were by coyotes. He mainly investigates coyotes, lions and bears.

Socorro County Commissioner Antonio Ray Martinez asked Kelly what residents should do if they saw a wolf on their property. Kelly said residents could contact him, but also advised residents to call the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services.

County Attorney Adren Nance said residents should call U.S. Fish and Wildlife official John Oakleaf at 928-245-1910.

Kelly told the commissioner the law has changed several times but said property owners do have the right to shoot wolves if they are attacking or harassing livestock on their land.

But he urged caution “because they are an endangered species.”

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Biologist Maggie Dwire – who manages the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge's captive wolf facility — also urges residents to be cautious if they come upon one.

She said the Mexican gray wolf normally runs away if it comes in contact with people.

“But wolves are curious animals,” Dwire said in an earlier interview with El Defensor Chieftain. “They may run off for a distance and then stop and look.”

The Albuquerque Journal reported Tuesday the federal government is again free to release Mexican gray wolves into the wild in New Mexico, after a U.S. appeals court vacated a lower court's injunction sought by the state.

In 2015, citing an insufficient management plan, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish denied the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service the permits it needed to release wolves bred in captivity into the wild.

The service claimed federal authority to pursue wolf recovery under the Endangered Species Act and went ahead and placed two young wolf pups in a den in the Gila National Forest in Catron County in early 2016 without a state permit.

Game and Fish subsequently took the service to federal district court and won a preliminary injunction.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit in Tucson ruled that Game and Fish “failed to present sufficient evidence to support a finding that it is likely to suffer irreparable harm absent a preliminary injunction” and vacated the injunction.

The decision essentially gives the service a green light to move forward with its wolf recovery program in New Mexico, according to advocates.

“This ruling is a lifesaver for our beleaguered Mexican gray wolves,” said Michael Robinson, a conservation advocate at the Center for Biological Diversity in Silver City. “The decision makes clear that the Fish and Wildlife Service has the authority to do what’s needed to save the Mexican gray wolf and other endangered species from extinction.”

A spokesman for Game and Fish could not immediately be reached.

The program has faced stiff opposition from southwestern New Mexico ranchers and the Martinez administration. Wolves are known to prey on cattle, and the return of an apex predator to ranch and forest lands in Grant and Catron counties has caused alarm.

The Socorro County Commission passed an ordinance in 2015 forbidding the release of the Mexican gray wolf and other predators on private land.

Nance said at the time there was some question as to whether the ordinance could be enforced on federal land.

The service counted at least 113 Mexican wolves in the recovery zone in Arizona and southwestern New Mexico in early 2017. That was up from 97 wolves in the wild the previous year.

Editor’s note: More from the Socorro Board of County Commissioners meeting will be in the May 4 edition of El Defensor Chieftain.