

Armstrong: 'We are not crying wolf'

5/22/25 - https://www.dchieftain.com/armstrong-we-are-not-crying-wolf/article_d757c6be-ac32-4f5b-b3af-9362da1adbb5.html#tncms-source=home-featured-7-block

The Socorro County Board of Commissioners joined Catron County and unanimously voted to adopt a resolution declaring an emergency due to the ongoing damage caused by Mexican Grey Wolves at their last regular meeting.

Before the vote, Haydn Forward, Catron County commissioner, presented a PowerPoint highlighting economic and public safety concerns. He argued that the wolf program is not effectively managing the coexistence between wolves and people.

He reported that there are approximately 286 wolves, with the possibility of an additional 10-30% that may not have been counted.

"80 to 90% of the wolves are in your friendly neighbor, Catron County and they are coming your way. They're already migrating into Socorro County." Forward said, "Fish and Wildlife attempt to have two collared wolves per pack. They truly don't know how many packs are out there. They truly don't know how many wolves are out there."

He said the wolf reintroduction program costs \$75 million, and Catron County spent \$103,000 in 2024 on wolf management. Catron anticipates needing \$800,000 for additional employees to manage the current situation in their county.

"I'm sorry to tell you this, but it's coming your way." Forward said.

He said there were 51 confirmed kills in 2024 so far, and the wolf population in Catron County is now larger than the wolf population in Yellowstone National Park. He said the wolf program has gotten out of control, and he expects Socorro will begin to see a negative impact on the economy, the loss in cattle and hunting.

Twelve other ranchers also spoke in support of the emergency order.

Eric Kern and his family said they live about 10 miles northwest of Magdalena. Kern said he is the wildlife manager for the Double H Ranch and his wife, Kelly, is the ranch manager for Montosa Ranch.

"The wolves are already at my house, and they're there all the time," Kern said. "I've gotten on video times of these little girls on a trail camera with their dolls, and not much longer, there's four wolves with a killed animal there at the same spot."

He said their kids raise 4-H animals, and they have to walk with their kids to the barn because of the wolf presence. He said it's hard because it scares their young children.

Charity Underwood Saulsberry said she's neighbors to the Kern family, and the border of her ranch is half a mile from the Magdalena Village limits.

She said in 100 years of their ranch's history, there had never been a wolf sighting before recently.

"This is an experimental range program; this is not a reintroduction. This is an introduction of a predator that has never been there. How does that fair to even the wolf, much less us?" Saulsberry said. "We're in the business of feeding America. That's our job. It's our job to feed America's children, not feed the wolves."

State Representative Gail Armstrong said the wolf problem is moving into Socorro County and threatening the economic development in rural New Mexico.

“We choose to live in rural New Mexico for the many reasons you all do, but it’s killing ranchers. It’s going to start affecting more hunters,” Armstrong said, “I would just beg you all to join Catron County, and let’s send a message that this is a crisis... once again, thank you so much for listening and hearing our cries, and we’re not crying wolf.”

County Roads

The board also unanimously voted to appoint Freeholders to view Western, North Starr, and an unnamed road.

County Attorney Adren Nance explained that the statute is from 1905, and defines a freeholder as a landowner.

The freeholders are tasked with going out to assess the roads. If the concludes that a particular road is no longer necessary or is too burdensome to maintain, the commission has the authority to vacate the road, meaning the county will no longer have any claim to it. However, the county cannot take action if the freeholders do not reach either of those conclusions.

No action was taken on Sholle Road.

Other business:

The county passed the preliminary 2025- 2026 budget presented by Sammie Finch, a contract with Marsha Lester Williams as a nurse practitioner for Socorro County Detention Center was approved, and an amendment of the Socorro County Fire Department by-laws also passed.