

# Framing Wolves in New Mexico?

By Greta Anderson

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Late in May 2020, the Arizona Daily Star ran [an article](#) titled, “Advocates question investigations used to target ‘problem’ wolves,” detailing some of the work that Western Watersheds Project has been doing to review and assess Wildlife Services’ work on livestock killed by Mexican wolves in New Mexico.

Together with my colleague – WWP’s Arizona and New Mexico Director Cyndi Tuell – we pored over hundreds of depredation reports from investigations that occurred between 2014 and 2019, and we ended up downright perplexed at some of the agency’s conclusions.

For example, [here’s a depredation report](#) from Catron County, New Mexico from March 4th, 2019. It references a complaint received on February 13, 2019 (the point at which the evidence was apparently gathered on site) and the estimated time of death was three months prior. The report indicates that more than three-quarters of the carcass was already gone (0-25% of carcass remaining) and the attached photograph shows that the agent(s) (whose names were withheld) had very little to work with.

Nonetheless, the agents took the scrap of hide on February 13th and soaked it in a barrel for “numerous” days so the hide would be soft enough to work with. They found a canine spread of 40.2mm and a compression spread of 39mm and thus, “**Knowing that there are collared and uncollared wolves in the area with the other evidence present,\* this cow was killed by Mexican wolves.**”

*\*Elsewhere on the report where it asks for a description of additional evidence that is discovered in the area, the investigator typed “na.”*

So, without any other evidence, a delay of three or more months, a bite mark with *soaked* [dimensions that overlap](#) with those of male mountain lions, large male coyotes, and feral dogs, this unnamed investigator was able to **CONFIRM** that a Mexican wolf was the cause of death.

We note too that the form describes that there are, “collard” [sic] wolves in the area and identifies them as the Prieto Pack. What isn’t clear at all is whether the Prieto Pack was in the area in November, which is when the killing supposedly happened, or in February or March when the investigation occurred and the report was filed, but apparently the time lapse between events wasn’t an issue for these skilled sleuths.

So, presumably, the livestock owner was then able to [take this report to the Farm Services Administration](#) and get their \$1936.91 (at least, that was the rate in 2016) in livestock loss compensation. And this report likely contributed to the tally of cattle deaths that resulted in the fatal removals and [eventual disbanding of the Prieto Pack altogether](#).

Outcomes like these – the lethal disruption of a family of highly imperiled, highly intelligent animals – is why accurate investigations matter deeply to the integrity and success of the Mexican gray wolf recovery program.

If Wildlife Services is signing off on specious conclusions, handing them to Fish and Wildlife Services as fact, contributing to the misperception of wolves as vicious killers, and allowing those reports to validate compensation claims reimbursed from taxpayer money, someone needs to be held accountable.

Dozens more of these Wildlife Services’ depredation investigation reports don’t pass the smell test, and the American public deserves explanations for the sketchy confirmations. And I want those answers before another Mexican gray wolf is removed from the wild or killed in retaliation for her alleged crimes.

