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STEVAN PEARCE

Second District, New Mexico

March 9, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C St, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke,

I am requesting a 90 day extension of the comment period for the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Mexican Wolf Recovery Program's (Program) "Initial Release and Translocation Proposal of 2017." Additionally, I would like to provide you with a brief update on the Service's implementation of the Program in Arizona and New Mexico. The Program has had a number of serious issues throughout its existence and the Service is currently in litigation with the state of New Mexico.

In January 2015, the Service drastically increased the recovery range for the Mexican Wolf without requesting the proper resources needed to manage the program. The results have been disastrous for private citizens who face longer wait times for wolf disturbances, as well as the species.

Last summer, the Department of the Interior's Office of Inspector General released a scathing report (attached) of the Mexican Gray Wolf Recovery Program. The report revealed some serious structural issues with the program as well as disturbing actions taken by Service staff overseeing the Program. To my knowledge, the employee responsible for the activities outlined in this report was simply moved out of a management role, but none of the larger issues with the Program were addressed.

One of the main issues for Mexican Wolf recovery is an extremely outdated recovery plan being utilized by the Service. The Mexican Wolf was first listed as an endangered species in 1976. In 1982, Mexico and the United States signed the Mexican Wolf Recovery Plan, which the Service is still utilizing today. This plan is significantly outdated and is not based on the best available science. The lack of an updated recovery plan eventually prompted Arizona and New Mexico to sue.


On June 8, 2015, the Arizona Attorney General and the Arizona Game and Fish Department filed a lawsuit against the Department of Interior and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service "for failing their statutory duty to develop an updated recovery plan to guide Mexican Wolf recovery."

In April 2016, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish also filed a lawsuit against the Service, claiming that the agency was ignoring the "laws and regulations of New Mexico" by releasing wolves without state permits. Last June, a federal judge sided with the New Mexico State government and granted the state a temporary injunction preventing the FWS from releasing any more Mexican Wolves into the wild.

Despite this action, the Program is now proposing another release of wolves. On February 15th, the Program Coordinator sent a letter (attached) requesting comment on proposed releases and cross-fostering efforts. The comment deadline provided was March 8th. Due to the complexity of this issue and what is at stake, I find this proposal to be unlawful and the comment period to be woefully insufficient. I would like to request that the Department review the actions of the Service and the Program to ensure that they are not breaking federal law in pushing forward these releases. Lastly, I believe a 90 day extension of the comment period is necessary to ensure adequate input.

I have attached additional correspondence between my office and the Service as well as the Department of the Interior on this issue. I hope this background is useful and look forward to working with you to remedy this deeply flawed Program.

Sincerely,



Steve Pearce
Member of Congress