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NEWS RELEASE

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Game and Fish Commission provides new guidance for wolf conservation *State's long-term participation contingent on revised approach, interagency progress*

PHOENIX - The Arizona Game and Fish Commission stated its intentions about Mexican wolf conservation very clearly today, reiterating its support for wolf conservation, but mandating pursuit of Arizona-specific objectives and making continued support contingent upon cooperator progress in several key areas over the next five years.

At its regularly scheduled public meeting today, the commission directed the Arizona Game and Fish Department to pursue the objective of establishing an Arizona population of Mexican wolves that is a component of a larger "metapopulation" capable of sustaining itself in the long term.

It also directed the department to provide continued leadership in collaborative Mexican wolf conservation, but makes that involvement conditional on specific agency and partner actions and fundamental shifts in approach to wolf conservation.

"Achieving success in wolf conservation in Arizona is dependent on a number of factors, many of which are beyond the control of the Arizona Game and Fish Commission and Department. The federal rules of engagement need to be changed," said Commissioner Jennifer Martin.

The commission directed the department to, within five years, collaborate with the federal government to develop a new Mexican wolf recovery plan, complete National Environmental Policy Act compliance for revision of the nonessential experimental rule governing wolf reintroduction in the Southwest, and develop and deploy an incentives-based approach to Mexican wolf conservation.

"We believe these actions are crucial to wolf conservation, and failure to complete them within the next five years could jeopardize continued participation by the State of Arizona in wolf conservation," said Commission Chair Bill McLean.

The commission's directive also included additional actions for the department to take to promote progress in wolf conservation over the next five years.

The Arizona Game and Fish Department's cumulative contribution from its budget toward Mexican wolf conservation has been approximately \$4.5 million from 1991 through 2008. The majority of that amount came from the department's threatened and endangered species funding.

According to Arizona Game and Fish Department Chief of Staff Gary Hovatter, today's commission action recognizes that Mexican wolf conservation is a commendable and appropriate pursuit for Arizona, but must be balanced with the potential impact on other resources and the human environment.

"We believe that Arizona's involvement and leadership are essential to success of Mexican wolf recovery efforts, but the cooperating agencies need to work toward achievable and legally defensible wolf population objectives adequate to justify and sustain delisting," said Hovatter. "No responsible conservation organization can support species conservation efforts that potentially allow for infinite population growth of a species, regardless of the potential impact on other resources and the human environment. We have studied the recent developments in litigation-driven governance of wolf recovery efforts in the Northern Rockies, and are determined to avoid such a train wreck in the Southwest."

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