

## **On the Positive Side**

### **Wildlife policy: Old and new paradigms**

**By Dr. Judy Long For the Sun-News**

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In last week's On the Positive Side, I wrote about our state's history with "predator control," focusing particularly on coyotes. Reading history is always stimulating, and often leaves us with a smug feeling: look how misguided we were in the past (possibly), and look how enlightened we are now. We might have learned a thing or two in the Coyote Wars.

We learned the lesson that mule deer populations were responsive to human activities of road building and development, rather than to the bloodthirstiness of coyotes. We learned that destruction of habitat all too often orphans species that lived in the areas that humans target for development or other economic activity. Grasslands and riparian environments have been targets in the past; current proposals threaten wilderness areas.

This history of the war against coyotes leaves us with strong reservations about efficacy and real worries about "collateral damage." This term, borrowed from warfare by humans against humans, is a euphemism for the killing of thousands of individuals that have no demonstrable history of predation. Another lesson: the use of euphemism signals to the reader that we can dismiss these deaths as beside the point.

Language is powerful. We choose it, it does not happen by accident. So when we see warlike images in our wildlife policy or proposals, we recognize that we are reading old paradigm. We know enough to expect that humans will be the good guys and some unlucky particle of nature will be the bad guys.

Old paradigm with its warlike imagery, continues in competition with new paradigm, emphasizing the interdependence of the eco-system. Maybe it was easier to imagine ourselves as endangered when the enemy was a carnivore, but how do we make owls, trout or lizards into fearsome threats? These humble species are not after human prey. We have made ourselves their enemy. And why?

A handful of current legislation proposed by New Mexico's Congressman Pearce speaks to us in the language of the "old paradigm." It is now painfully obvious that "wildlife policy" of the past protected ranchers and hunters at the expense of wildlife. What, then, are the interest groups behind the present push? According to Rep. Pearce, the Mexican spotted owl impedes logging in the national forests; Gila trout are in the way of all-terrain vehicles; and the mighty Dunes sagebrush lizard threatens the whole oil industry.

Proposals sponsored by Congressman Pearce fly in the face of the new paradigm. In these instances the "unforeseen consequences" that undercut conservation concerns can, in fact, be seen in advance, as Kevin Bixby has indicated in a recent op-ed piece in the Las Cruces Sun-News.

Do we really think the spotted owl can be persuaded to leave the forest to live in designated "sanctuary" areas? Is this habitat sufficient to sustain it? How will change affect the owls? Is it realistic to expect that they will continue hunting and reproducing amid the noise and habitat destruction unleashed by logging? And since it is our national forests that will be transformed by the proposed changes, is it in our best interests, and has anybody asked us?

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