



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Ecological Services
Ventura Field Office
2493 Portola Road, Suite B
Ventura, California 93003

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May 15, 1995

MEMORANDUM

To: Interested Parties

From: Robert Mesta, California Condor Program Coordinator

Subject: Proposal to establish a California Condor Release Site in Northern Arizona

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is proposing a long term program to release young captive-hatched California Condors in northern Arizona. This proposal is part of the Service's long term commitment to re-establish California condors within their historic range. It is consistent with the recovery goals as written in the California Condor Recovery Plan, recommendations of the Condor Recovery Team, and the Service's Condor Recovery Program Reintroduction Plan.

The Service will have lead responsibility for the development of this proposal, but will be working closely with the following cooperating agencies; Arizona Game and Fish Department, Bureau of Land Management, Grand Canyon National Park, Kaibab National Forest, and the Hualapai and Navajo Indian Reservations.

The Service is currently evaluating three areas in northern Arizona as possible release sites; the Echo Cliffs located on the western edge of the Navajo Indian Reservation, the Vermillion Cliffs located on the southern edge of the Paria Plateau, and Prospect Valley located in the eastern half of the Hualapai Indian Reservation.

The purpose of this memorandum is to inform you that the Service is initiating National Environmental Policy Act compliance by beginning the scoping process necessary to develop an environmental assessment for this proposal. In order to insure the development of a full disclosure document, I am requesting comments on any important issues, possible alternatives, or special concerns relative to this proposal. Please address your comments to this office at your earliest convenience.

The environmental assessment is scheduled for completion by September 30, 1995.

If you have any questions on the subject proposal you can contact me at 805/644-1766, ext.316.

Robert Mesta

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,
The Arizona Game and Fish Department
and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management
announce a public information (scoping) meeting on the proposed release of

California Condors in Northern Arizona

**Marble Canyon Lodge
Wednesday, July 6, 1995
6:30-9:00 PM**

Representatives from the cooperating agencies will be present to hear your
comments and answer questions.

ARIZONA DAILY SUN, Flagstaff, Arizona, Monday, July 3, 1995—3

Condor meeting

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Arizona Game and Fish Department and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management announces a public information meeting on the proposed release of California condors in northern Arizona. The meeting will be from 6:30 to 9 p.m. Wednesday at Marble Canyon Lodge. Representatives from the cooperating agencies will be present to hear your comments and answer questions.

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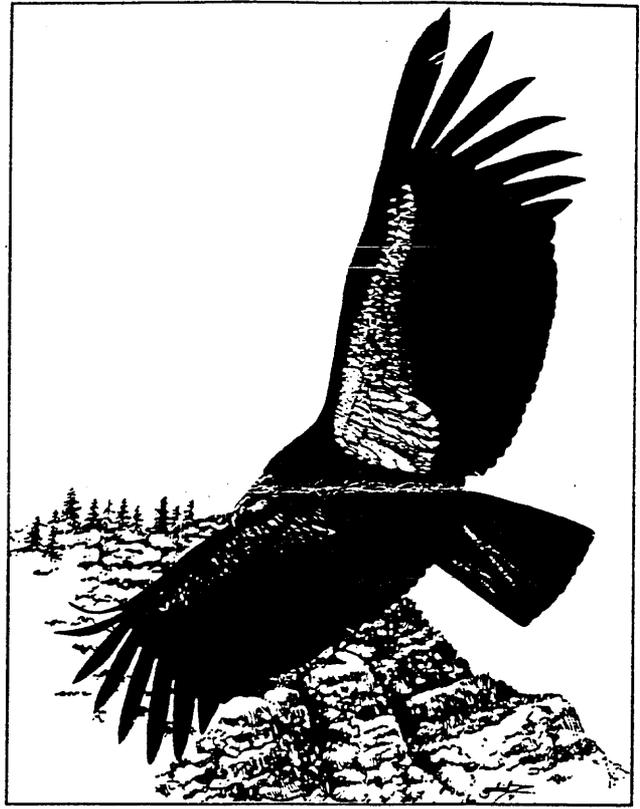


CALIFORNIA CONDOR PROJECT UPDATE

June 1995

Welcome to the first California condor newsletter published by the Arizona Game and Fish Department! It is intended to update and inform you on issues involving the possible release of condors in northern Arizona.

The species was extirpated in Arizona in the early 1900s. The remaining wild population, which was restricted to California, was reduced from 15 to 9 birds in 1985. Current threats to the species include low population numbers, lead poisoning, shooting, limited food availability, and lack of suitable reintroduction habitat for growth of the species. Condors have been released back into the wild in California since 1992, however, the condor recovery plan calls for establishment of populations in at least two separate areas to ensure viability.



In 1989 the Arizona Game and Fish Department (Department) began investigations of the potential for condor re-establishment in Arizona. Several areas in the north part of the state are considered superior to all others in the United States for reintroduction; the Echo Cliffs located on the northwestern side of the Navajo Indian Reservation, the Vermillion Cliffs located on the southern part of the Paria Plateau and east of Kaibab National Forest, and Prospect Valley located in the eastern half of the Hualapai Indian Reservation near the Grand Canyon.

The Department follows a 12 step schedule of activities for proposing nongame and endangered species re-establishment projects. Currently, the Department is on Step 8 of the schedule of activities which entails drafting a site-specific reestablishment proposal in cooperation with the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). It will then be distributed for public and agency review in August 1995. We also plan to hold public meetings in northern Arizona in the near future. Barb Garrison, Nongame Bird Biologist, is coordinating the condor project for the Department.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will have lead responsibility for the project since the California condor is listed as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act. They will be working cooperatively with the Department, Bureau of Land Management, Grand Canyon National Park, Kaibab National Forest, and the Hualapai and Navajo Indian Reservations, each of which has responsibilities for land and/or wildlife management in the areas involved. The Peregrine Fund has been contracted by the Service to complete the environmental compliance document for Arizona releases. They will also manage field logistics which includes the releasing and monitoring of the birds.

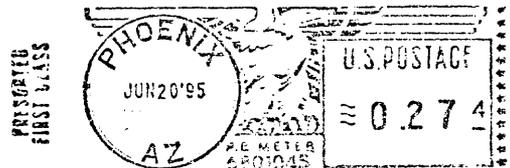
An orientation/planning meeting was held in Flagstaff on May 8th followed by a two day field trip to three proposed release sites. All agencies and organizations involved were invited to attend. Robert Mesta, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Condor Coordinator, and Mike Wallace, Los Angeles Zoo Curator, presented an overview of the California project. Also on the agenda was the selection of release alternatives, discussion of the reintroduction plan and identification of specific tasks. According to Robert there are currently 102 condors in captivity in breeding facilities in California. 5-10 fledglings will be available for release in northern Arizona by the end of 1995.

The California Condor Project Update is published periodically by the Nongame Branch of the Arizona Game and Fish Department. If you want more information or want to be put on the California condor mailing list to receive this newsletter, contact the Condor Project, Nongame Branch, Arizona Game and Fish Department, 2221 W. Greenway Rd., Phoenix, Arizona 85023.



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Address Correction Requested



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Flagstaff, AZ 86002



CONDOR UPDATE - 3

June 20, 1995

Field Program

A major break through for the release program occurred on 20 May when all six condors released in February were observed feeding on a sheep carcass on the southern edge of the Cuyuma Valley! This is the first time captive-hatched California condors have found and fed on carrion not provided to them by field biologists. Just as significant, none of the condors showed any interest in visiting downtown New Cuyama, all six returned to Lion Canyon after they fed and one condor went back to feed again the next day.

The six condors released in February are continuing to expand their range and are currently traveling up to 25 to 30 miles. In their travels there has been a few close encounters with humans, but in all cases they were flushed away from the area before any type of interaction could occur. In one case three of them landed next to a group of hang gliders on Pine Mountain two days in a row but were flushed from the area both times and have not returned. Field biologist plan to conduct more human aversion training sessions to discourage any more close encounters. To date, none of the condors have been observed perching on any powerline poles! So far this cohort has been the best behaved of all those released since January 1992.

Video teams from Television New Zealand and Australia were shooting video of the field program, the captive breeding facilities, and conducting interviews with Condor Program biologists this month. The video shot will be used to produce TV nature specials on condors and other vultures.

More good news, one of the female Andean condors released into the Sespe Condor Sanctuary in 1988 as part of the Andean release experiment conducted from 1988 to 1991, bred in the Chingaza National Park, Colombia. A broken, but fertile egg was discovered in a nest in the park, the parents are not yet known. The Andeans used in this experiment were captured and re-released in areas of Colombia where the species had become extinct in the wild.

The condor rearing facility at Hopper Mt. Nat'l Wildlife Refuge is near completion and should soon be ready for a cohort of young condors scheduled for release this year. The facility has a 30x50x20 ft. flight pen, 6 isolated pens that are 8x12x8 ft., and 6 nest caves that are 3x3x6 ft.

Last but not least, long time Ace condor biologist Greg Austin will be leaving the Condor Program for a job as a wildlife biologist with the Channel Islands National Park. The Condor Program will be hosting a going away potluck party for Greg at Hopper Ranch on the 27th of this month. If your interested it starts at 6 p.m. and goes all night, so bring a sleeping bag. Hasta la vista Dude!

California Condor Recovery Team (CRT)

The CRT has two new members; Dave Clendenen, all around, old timer condor biologist with the Hopper Mt. Nat'l Wildlife Refuge and Bill Heinrich, peregrine release specialist with The Peregrine Fund. Do we congratulate these two or offer our condolences? (just joking)

The next CRT meeting is scheduled for the 10th and 11 th of July and will be hosted by the Los Angeles Zoo.

Arizona

The Peregrine Fund has been selected to establish and conduct the condor release program in northern Arizona. They are currently working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Arizona Game and Fish Department to complete the environmental assessment by the end of this summer. We are shooting for a release by the end of this year.

Barb Garrison is the new condor biologist for the Arizona Game and Fish Department and will be working closely with us to get the Arizona release off the ground.

San Diego Wild Animal Park

The SDWAP had another good year producing 9 chicks, 7 will be released to the wild this year. Paxa and Almiyi's second chick was physically traumatized the day after it hatched when Almiyi saw the chick for the first time picked it up by the head and carried out into the roost box. Condor keepers became suspicious when they observed Paxa laying out in the roost box, when they investigated they discovered the chick laying at his side. Paxa incubated the egg from pip to hatch. The chick is out of danger but is blind as a result of the physical trauma its head suffered. This week the chick is scheduled to undergo a catscan and be examined by two avian optomologists. AC-4 and Sespe's second chick was found dead 10 days after it hatched, it died in the nest box and a definite cause of death could not be determined.

The first four chicks hatched this year were transferred to the LAZ on 14 June for pre-release socialization and possibly aversion training.

The SDWAP produced three parent hatched and reared chicks for release to the wild. The pairs raising these chicks are AC-2 and Inaja, Ac-5 and AC-8, and Nojoqui and Molloko.

The SDWAP will begin the conversion of the Canyon holding facilities to breeding chambers this month. Three pairs will be transferred to this facility for next year's breeding season.

Los Angeles Zoo

The LAZ successfully hatched all seven of their eggs this year, including a tricky break-out of Squapuni and AC-9's chick. During the embryo development the membrane separating it from the air cell tore and air penetrated to the embryo. This made egg rotation without impacting the embryo a bit difficult. Kaweah and Anyapa just couldn't get it together to rear their second chick, so it was pulled and is currently being puppeted. This is the scenario as well as I can understand it. Kaweah hatched the chick then picked it up and carried it out to the roost box. The condor keeper became concerned and pulled the chick and Kaweah. With Kaweah gone the chick was given to Anyapa to brood overnight. Anyapa also carried the chick out to the roost box, then rolled it back into the nest box and in doing so injured the chick. The next day Kaweah was returned to pen and he quickly proceeded to carry the chick back out to the roost box! At this point the condor keepers stepped in and removed the chick. The chick suffered from skin torn from its back but is now doing just fine. Nancy, did I get that right?

The first three chicks hatched this year are being held in the chick barn with the four chick transferred up from the SDWAP but in a separate chamber. They will be introduced to each other soon and will begin the socialization process that is necessary to established a compatible cohort for release to the wild.

The LAZ produced one parent hatched and reared chick for release to the wild, Mandan and Tama are the parents. A total of four parent hatched and reared chicks will be released to the wild this year.

World Center or Birds of Prey

The two pairs that laid this year were given fertile Andean eggs to hatch. Shasta and Tecuya received an egg from the National Zoo on 31 May and Tumusa and Piru received an egg from the Cleveland Memorial Park Zoo on 9 June. Both chicks hatched successfully and condor keepers say that the two pairs are great parents. These two Andean chicks will eventually be transferred to Venezuela for release into the wild.

T-Shirts

A few of the Fourth Annual California Condor Release T-Shirts are left, if you want one better get your order in now! They are 100% cotton pre-shrunk, come in L or XL, and are \$13.00 per shirt (add \$2.50 for shipping). For information on how to purchase these collector items call me (Robt Mesta) at 805/644-1766, ext. 316.

1995 Production

We broke 100 this year with a total of 104 condors!

<u>PAIRS</u>	<u>DATE LAID</u>	<u>STATUS</u>	<u>HATCH DATE</u>	<u>FACILITY</u>
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1.	AC-2 & INAJA SDWAP	1/17	Fertile	3/15,	Self-hatch+puppeted
2.	XOLXOL & OJAI SDWAP	2/2	Fertile	3/31,	Break-out+puppeted
3.	KAWEAH & ANYAPA LAZ	2/6	Fertile	4/4,	Break-out+puppeted
4.	SEQUOIA & UN-1 LAZ	2/12	Fertile	4/9,	Break-out+puppeted
5.	PAXA & ALMIYI SDWAP	2/9	Fertile	4/11,	Break-out+puppeted
6.	TUMUSA & PIRU WCPB	2/12	Infertile		
7.	AC-4 & SESPE SDWAP	2/14	Fertile	4/13,	Self-hatch+puppeted
8.	AC-2 & INAJA SDWAP	2/17	Fertile	4/16,	Parent-hatch+reared
9.	AC-5 & AC-8 SDWAP	2/19	Infertile		
10.	CUYUMA & CACHUMA LAZ	2/21	Fertile	4/19	Self-hatch+puppeted
11.	SHASTA & TECUYA WCPB	2/25	Infertile		
12.	NOJOQUI & MOLLOKO SDWAP	3/7	Fertile	5/2	Self-hatch+puppeted
13.	PAXA & ALMIYI SDWAP	3/11	Fertile	5/8	Self-hatch, Physically traumatized by Almiyi
14.	SEQUOIA & UN-1 LAZ	3/13	Fertile	5/10	Self-hatch+puppeted
15.	AC-4 & SESPE SDWAP	3/15	Fertile	5/12	found dead in nest box 10 days after hatch
16.	MANDAN & TAMA LAZ	3/20	Fertile	5/17	Hatched+reared by parents
17.	SQUAPUNI & AC-9 LAZ	3/21	Fertile	5/17	Break-out
18.	KAWEAH & ANYAPA LAZ	3/23	Fertile	5/19	Parent hatched, removed from nest box
19.	SHASTA & TECUYA WCPB	3/26	Infertile	Egg #2	
20.	AC-5 & AC-8 SDWAP	3/21	Fertile	5/24	Parent hatched+reared
21.	NOJOQUI & MOLLOKO SDWAP	4/5	Fertile	6/24	Parent hatched+reared
22.	TUMUSA & PIRU WCPB	4/9	Infertile	Egg #2	

TOTALS FOR 1995 BREEDING SEASON

Eggs Fert. Infert. UnK. Died Hatched Male Female Total Pop.

22 17 5 0 1 17 0 0 104*

* 6 in the Wild

LOS ANGELES ZOO

PAIRS NON-BREEDERS EGGS CHICKS FERTILE INFERTILE TOTAL POP.

7 21 7 7 7 0 45

SAN DIEGO WILD ANIMAL PARK

PAIRS NON-BREEDERS EGGS CHICKS FERTILE INFERTILE TOTAL POP.

7 10 11 9* 10 1 33

*1chick died, 1chick blind

WORLD CENTER FOR BIRDS OF PREY

PAIRS NON-BREEDERS EGGS CHICKS FERTILE INFERTILE TOTAL POP.

2 16 4 0 0 4 20

Common Questions About California Condors in Northern Arizona

- What is a condor? What do they look like?

The California Condor is a member of the vulture family, a family characterized by small unfeathered heads, strong hooked beaks for eating carrion, and weak talons unsuited for grasping live prey. They are known for their great soaring abilities. The California Condor is the largest flying bird in North America: adults weigh approximately 22 pounds and have a wing span up to 9.5 feet.

- Are they native to Arizona?

The California Condor ranged over much of the United States until the end of the Pleistocene (about 11,000 years ago). Abundant condor remains have been found in various caves in the Grand Canyon, and the species clearly nested there until the late Pleistocene. Although no modern specimens were collected in Arizona, there is reason to believe that at least a few individuals of the species persisted in the State into the early 20th century based on reviews of several sight records. The last probable sighting was in 1924, in the vicinity of Williams, Coconino County.

- If condors used to be here, what happened to them?

At the end of the Pleistocene, condors retreated to the Pacific coast region, possibly in response to the extinction of the many large animals that lived during the Pleistocene. Their continued decline during historical times was apparently due primarily to shooting and several types of poisoning.

- What do they eat? Will my livestock or pets be in danger?

No. Condors are strictly scavengers; they only eat dead animals. They prefer ungulate carcasses (such as deer or elk) or livestock carcasses, but will also eat smaller animals. The young condors released in Arizona will receive "supplemental food," for example, roadkills or dead livestock from area ranches.

- Will they have to be fed forever?

Probably not. It is hoped that eventually the condors will learn to locate carcasses on their own. However, biologists are uncertain how long it will take to wean the condors, wholly or partially, from supplemental food.

- Why should we release condors in northern Arizona?

There are many reasons for bringing condors back to northern Arizona. Some people believe that California Condors are a part of the state's biological heritage and feel that it would be a spectacular sight to see condors soaring over the Grand Canyon. From a biological perspective, at least one more wild population of California Condors (in addition to the birds now living in the wild in California) will be necessary before the species is safely out of danger of becoming extinct. Finally, there is a clear legal mandate, from the 1973 Endangered Species Act, to undertake projects that will help to remove the condor from the Endangered Species List and this release is part of the overall recovery plan.

- Where would the condors to be released in northern Arizona come from?

The condors would come from captive breeding facilities in California and Idaho. They will be young birds that will take their first flight from the cliffs where they are released.

- Where are the release sites that are being considered for northern Arizona?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is considering several sites in northern Arizona: the Vermilion Cliffs north of House Rock Valley, the Echo Cliffs on the Navajo Indian Reservation, and the Prospect Valley on the Hualapai Indian Reservation. Depending on what is learned as the project proceeds, condors may eventually be released from all of these sites.

- After the condors are released and learn to fly, where will they go?

No one can say for certain where the condors will go. Daily movements exceeding 100 miles have been documented in California, and movements of 50 to 75 miles per day are not uncommon. It is probable that for the first year or so, the young birds will stay in the same cliff system where they are released. Eventually the condors may occupy other suitable habitat in northern Arizona, including Grand Canyon National Park.

- Why not put them in Grand Canyon National Park in the first place?

Biologists who have studied condors in California surveyed all of the possible release locations and concluded that the logistical problems of feeding and monitoring condors in the Park, much of which is difficult of access, would be extremely difficult.

- I understand that condors are an endangered species. If they are released in northern Arizona, would condor management take priority over all other human uses?

No. The condors released in northern Arizona would receive a special designation, called a "non-essential, experimental population." This designation enables much more flexible management than is possible with other introductions of endangered species. The condor release must be blended with other uses and condor management will not take precedence over other human activities or land uses.

- What will the presence of condors mean for livestock grazing, recreation and sport hunting in the release area?

The nonessential, experimental population designation that would apply to the released condors means that none of these activities would be adversely affected by the release. It is hoped that a spirit of cooperation would develop among all these user groups so that the presence of the condors would be accommodated. However, no restrictions (such as changes in allotment management, hunting closures, or restrictions on types of ammunition) will accompany the release. One exception is that a small area immediately around the release site (less than 25 acres) will be closed temporarily while the young birds are learning to fly and getting accustomed to their new surroundings.

- What if a condor decides to roost or nest on my private property?

The condors to be released in northern Arizona will receive aversive conditioning to train them to avoid contact with humans and human developments. It is unlikely that condors will choose to roost or nest near human activity or habitations. However, should this occur, the non-essential, experimental designation means that the provisions of the ESA that pertain to "takings" (causing accidental or intentional death, destroying habitat, or otherwise harming an endangered species)

are relaxed. The cooperation of private landowners in accomodating the presence of condors will be voluntary.

- Does this mean that someone could shoot a condor and not be prosecuted?

No. The intentional killing of California Condors would be prohibited under the ESA, the Federal Migratory Bird Act and other state and federal laws that protect migratory birds and non-game species.

July 6, 1995

Ranchers like birds, not feds

Wary that California condor may bring bureaucracy with it

By LUKAS VELUSH

Sun Staff Reporter

California condors are great, but the government that would accompany them isn't, northern Arizona ranchers said Wednesday at a meeting on introducing the endangered bird to the Vermilion Cliffs area.

"The condor doesn't concern me," said Dave Johnson, manager of Kane Ranch at the base of Vermilion Cliffs, about 120 miles north of Flagstaff. "As a matter of fact, I'd like to have the birds if they didn't bring all of the people and government restrictions."

Johnson and about 30 others expressed their opinions on releasing condors at an environmental assessment public scoping meeting held at Marble Canyon Lodge last night.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is spearheading an effort to release the condor outside of California for the first time since it was on the brink of extinction in the 1980s. The bird has prehistoric roots in northern Arizona, but hasn't lived in the area recently.

The numbers of the continent's largest free-flying bird had dwindled to 21 at one point. Now there are nearly 100 in captivity and six in the wild.

"We're looking at getting the birds reintroduced by the end of the year or early next year," said Rob Marshall, U.S. Fish and Wildlife ornithologist. "We're at the point where we want to expedite the process."

Robert Mesta, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Condor Program coordinator, said plans call for releasing four or five birds every year until a population base of around 150 is created in northern Arizona. The hope is to eventually see the birds migrate into the Grand Canyon.

Vermilion Cliffs, located upstream of the Grand Canyon on the Colorado River, is the preferred site in the environmental assessment, Mesta said. Two other possible sites in northern Arizona are Echo Cliffs, located on the western edge of the Navajo Reservation, and Prospect Valley, located in the eastern half of the Hualapai Reservation.

The assessment is scheduled to be finished next month. After a comment period on the document, U.S. Fish and Wildlife and Arizona Game and Fish officials will decide whether the condor has a future in Vermilion Cliffs.

Johnson and other ranchers said the government turned them into skeptics in 1984, when Hack Canyon and Upper Pools wilderness areas were proposed in the Arizona Strip area. Johnson said they were told their ranching operations would not be impaired by the change, but now things like putting salt out for cattle or traveling across wilderness land are bureaucratic hassles.

"We don't trust anything anymore," Johnson said.

Dennis Curtis, Bureau of Land Management Arizona Strip District area manager, said ranchers in the area have some legitimate gripes: He said BLM, which manages Vermilion Cliffs land, will make sure ranchers are able to continue their operations.

Not everyone was wary of the proposal.

"I'm looking forward to it going on," said John Hull, who teaches on the Navajo Reservation and lives at the Lee's Ferry Lodge at the Vermilion Cliffs. "I don't see it as more restrictions, I see it as an opportunity to make the environment more rich."

The Arizona Game and Fish Department is backing the move to introduce the condor in Arizona, but wants to make sure the rights of ranchers, hunters, and others are protected, said wildlife manager Bob Lemons. The department will offer its input once the environmental assessment is finished next month, he said.

"This 10-J rule seems to be the thing that will address a lot of our concerns," Lemons said.

The project is being proposed under the 10-J rule, a provision of the Endangered Species Act that allows species to be reintroduced without all of the normal restrictions placed on people who use land in the species' territory. Mesta said that should help condors and ranchers get along.

Although killing a condor outright would be illegal, Mesta said, the 10-J rule allows for an indirect kill without repercussions. For instance, if a bird dies from eating a lead bullet in a carcass left by a hunter, the hunter would not face penalties.

Also under the rule, ranchers, hunters, hikers and others would not have to change the way they go about their business.

See BIRDS, Page 5

BIRDS

From Page 1

"We have to have grass-roots support for this to get it off the ground," Mesta said.

Condors, which eat carrion, could wind up helping ranchers, Mesta said.

"We don't want to see your cattle die, but they certainly will clean them up for you if they do," Mesta joked.

Mesta said there are enough condors in captivity to risk some losses. But he said he believes the condors would fit in with the Vermilion Cliffs community with little impact.

The area lacks the large populations, buildings and power lines of southern California, the only other place the bird has been reintroduced into the wild. Five of the 11 birds released there have died — four ran into power lines and the fifth drank anti-freeze.

Before the birds are released in Arizona, they would undergo aversion training to keep them away from power lines and people, Mesta said.

A common theme at the meeting was a desire to form a group that would enable residents to express their concerns as the project goes along. Marshall said such a group will be put together, but just what form it will take has not been determined.

Another concern brought up at the meeting is the people who would travel to the Vermilion Cliffs area to see the condors.

Albert Harting, a consulting wildlife biologist conducting the environmental assessment, said concentrating visitors along side highways in pullouts, education centers at either end of the cliffs and other measures will help control the impact.

Marshall, the ornithologist, said the area is going to be seeing more visitors with or without the condor.