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Department of Health Confirms Rabies in a Raccoon, Fox from Sierra County Owners Urged to Vaccinate Their Pets, Horses

(Santa Fe) – A raccoon and a fox found dead on ranchland in Sierra County have tested positive for rabies. No known human or pet exposures were reported. The New Mexico Department of Health and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish are urging pet and livestock owners in Sierra County and surrounding areas to protect their dogs, cats, horses and other valuable livestock by getting them vaccinated against rabies.

The raccoon was submitted by a private veterinarian, and a New Mexico Department of Game and Fish officer picked up the fox last week. Both animals were found on ranchland about 15 miles southwest of Truth or Consequences and tested positive at the Department of Health's Scientific Laboratory in Albuquerque. Testing done at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta confirmed that both animals had the Arizona gray fox rabies strain. Fox rabies has been a problem for several decades in Arizona and spread into western New Mexico and was first detected in the Glenwood area in 2007.

“Since first finding fox rabies in Catron County in 2007 there has been steady animal-to-animal movement of the virus into Grant, Hidalgo, and Sierra counties,” said Paul Ettestad, public health veterinarian with the Department of Health. “These latest cases demonstrate a significant eastward movement of the fox rabies strain past the Gila and Black Range and closer to human and animal populations in the Rio Grande valley.”

Pet dogs and cats that roam and hunt can come into contact with rabid animals and potentially transmit it to people, it is very important to make sure all dogs and cats are up-to-date on their rabies vaccinations. Several pet dogs have been euthanized because they were not vaccinated against rabies and were bitten by a rabid fox.

If you see a sick or dead wild animal or a wild animal that is acting abnormally in this area, report it to New Mexico Department of Game and Fish at (575) 532-2100 or the Sierra County USDA Wildlife Services Specialist at (575) 640-1449. Rabid animals may show no fear of people and may even seem friendly or become aggressive.

Rabies is a deadly viral disease that affects all mammals and can be prevented but not cured. The following guidelines can help protect you and your family from rabies:

- Keep pets on a leash at all times. Pets should be up-to-date on rabies vaccinations and wearing current license tags on their collar. If your cat or dog has been bitten or scratched, call your pet's veterinarian, even if the wound is superficial.
- Horses and other valuable livestock should be considered for rabies vaccination to protect them from wild rabid animals that may attack them.
- Stay away from wild or unfamiliar animals. Do not attempt to feed, approach or touch wild animals. Teach this important message to your children, and keep a close eye on your kids at all times.
- If you or a loved one are bitten by an animal or come into contact with an animal's saliva, wash the exposed site immediately with soap and water. Be sure to report the bite to local animal control and seek medical care as soon as possible.

For more information about rabies call the Department of Health at (505) 827-0006 or visit the Department of Health website at <http://nmhealth.org/ERD/HealthData/rabies.shtml>.