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MCC Professor Andrew Holycross Leads Rattlesnake Distribution Research Team

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October 10, 2017

MESA, Ariz. – Oct. 10, 2017, 2017 -- Mesa Community College Red Mountain Campus faculty Andrew

Holycross has received a \$50,000 grant from the Coronado National Forest (U.S Forest Service) to study the

threatened New Mexico Ridge-nosed Rattlesnake in Arizona's Peloncillo

Mountains. These reptiles are found in only three places on our planet -- the

Peloncillo and Animas mountains in Arizona and New Mexico, and the Sierra

de San Luis in Mexico.



Previous research expeditions led by Holycross located 18 of the rare snakes in the Peloncillo Mountains. In late September, Holycross and grant co-manager Bruce L. Christman, another MCC Life Science staff member, led a team of 20 individuals from agencies such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, New Mexico Game and Fish Department, and the Arizona Game and Fish Department to investigate the northern distributional limits of this endangered species in the Peloncillo Mountains. The team invested approximately 150 person-days of searching and while they found dozens of snakes, they found only one New Mexico Ridge-nosed Rattlesnake, demonstrating that the species is persisting in very low numbers. Finding the snake is also significant because it demonstrates that the species occurs further north, and at lower elevations, than previously documented in this mountain range.

Holycross' expertise with the rare rattlesnake began with research in the early 1990s. He is an author on more than 25 peer-reviewed scientific publications including "Reproduction in Northern Populations of the Ridge-nosed Rattlesnake" (May 2001) and "Anthropogenic impacts drive niche and conservation metrics of a cryptic rattlesnake" (May 2016).

Although the venomous nature of the critters precludes students from participating in the on-the-ground searching, tagging and tracking, they will be able to join in the research through reviewing initial logistics and assisting in data handling and reports. "This offers our students a valuable opportunity to work on a government grant, see the elements of a project that was successfully funded, learn how to manage data, create graphs and compile the required reports," said Holycross. "For those looking toward a career in wildlife resources, contact with members from all the involved government agencies is great for future networking."

A member of MCC's faculty since 2005, Holycross holds both a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Arts in Biology from the University of Nebraska at Omaha and a Doctorate in Zoology from Arizona State University. In addition to teaching full-time for MCC, he has taught biology and herpetology at ASU and developed guides to amphibians and reptiles for Arizona Game and Fish.

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Contact Dawn Zimmer, dawn.zimmer@mesacc.edu (mailto:dawn.zimmer@mesacc.edu), 480-461-7892

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