

Arizona Game and Fish Department
Update on Commission Mexican Wolf Conservation Guidance
February 4, 2010

This document provides brief updates on 13 activities the Commission tasked to the Department in October 2008, plus one (#14) the Commission assigned in August 2009.

1. Continue to provide leadership and assertively represent the interests of the Commission and the State of Arizona in all areas of Mexican wolf conservation. **Update 2/4/10:** The Department continues to Chair the AZ-NM Mexican Wolf reintroduction Project Adaptive Management Oversight Committee and to assertively represent the interests of the Commission and the State of Arizona at every opportunity.
2. Collaborate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to complete a revised Mexican Wolf Recovery Plan that provides recovery context (i.e. achievable and legally-defensible population objectives adequate to justify and sustain delisting) for wolf conservation efforts in Arizona and elsewhere. **Update 2/4/10:** The Department continues to advocate recovery planning at every opportunity. Although USFWS¹ hired a Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator in 2009, there has been no discernible progress toward developing a recovery plan.
3. Renew the existing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area reintroduction project's signatory cooperators, to continue providing a foundation for collaborative adaptive management of the project. **Update 2/4/10:** In October 2008, all signatory agencies voted to extend the 2003 MOU indefinitely while determining whether and how to modify it. Progress on revision was impeded by lack of comment from NMDGF (2008 through June 2009) and USFWS (November 2008 through January 2009). In December 2009, USFWS determined in a consent decree with NGO litigants that for its purposes the MOU had expired and USFWS was no longer a signatory participant in the Reintroduction Project's Adaptive Management Oversight Committee (AMOC). These problems have been resolved (tentatively) and AMOC and USFWS will convene on March 3-4, 2010 to discuss revision of the existing MOU or creation of one or more replacements.
4. Continue to commit funds sufficient to sustain all Department commitments under the renewed MOU. **Update 2/4/10:** The Department has continued to commit sufficient funding, staff and other resources to meet all obligations under the existing MOU. Discussions with Arizona stakeholders continue to indicate that, other than some elements of the conservation community, they are very appreciative of the Department's level of commitment and engagement.
5. Secure private and Federal funding sufficient to provide incentives for and underwrite full participation in the renewed MOU by willing Native American Tribes within the existing experimental population area in Arizona, particularly the White Mountain Apache Tribe, which has demonstrated its substantial commitment to wolf conservation over these past several years. **Update 2/4/10:** No progress. WMAT is actively engaged in the Reintroduction Project but continues to be significantly underfunded without apparent remedy. SCAT is not

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all USFWS references herein are to Region 2, Albuquerque.

a project cooperator and has yet to come to agreement with USFWS on sufficient funding support to enable integration into the project. Decreasing casino and Indian Gaming revenues probably preclude progress in the near-term, absent a significant increase in federal funding.

6. Secure commitment of financial and other resources by the State of New Mexico that are sufficient to sustain New Mexico Department of Game and Fish commitments under the renewed MOU, such that State of Arizona and Federal resources needed for wolf conservation efforts in Arizona are not directed to operations in New Mexico. **Update 2/4/10:** NMDGF hired a new Director in November 2008 and, consequently, over the past year has significantly elevated constructive engagement in and commitment of resources to Mexican wolf reintroduction.
7. Pursue Congressional funding for an interdiction, incentives, and compensation program that appropriately addresses the impacts of Mexican wolf reintroduction and recovery on the private sector and creates incentives for enhanced conservation and stewardship. **Update 2/4/10:** After considerable delay, in 2009 Congress appropriated funding for an enhanced incentives (interdiction and compensation) program for the gray wolf. The Department is fully engaged in trying to ensure that an appropriate portion of the funding comes to Arizona. Lack of information from USFWS is an impediment in this area but USDA Wildlife Services is offsetting that to some extent by providing information to which it is privy in Washington D.C. USFWS has also established an interdiction and incentives program through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation but has yet to move forward with developing the required infrastructure, securing adequate funding, or engaging the Department and other cooperators and stakeholders in making the program operable. The Department and WMAT continue to discuss a pilot program on FAIR but Tribal concerns about the December 2009 USFWS consent decree with various NGO litigants have stymied progress.
8. Productively engage public lands grazing permittees and private lands livestock operators in voluntary, incentives-based Mexican wolf conservation measures. **Update 2/4/10:** The Department has significantly increased its efforts and success in this area. Local ranchers in Arizona who are most affected by wolf presence are increasingly engaged and several have expressed considerable appreciation for the Department's efforts and financial commitment. This has translated into considerable support from the ranching community for retention of Heritage and Wildlife Conservation funding.
9. Continue, as incentives-based conservation measures are developed and deployed, to modify reintroduction project operating procedures and management efforts as necessary to:
 - a. Offset unlawful killing of Mexican wolves and enforce applicable laws. **Update 2/4/10:** No meaningful progress.
 - b. Achieve the project's annual population objectives. **Update 2/4/10:** The 2009 "End-of-year Count" total is 42 wolves (AZ: 27 with 2 breeding pairs; NM: 15 with no breeding pairs). This is a decrease from 2008: 52 total with 2 breeding pairs.
 - c. Increase genetic diversity of the wild population to reflect better representation by all three Mexican wolf lineages and reduce inbreeding coefficients to acceptable levels.

- Update 2/4/10:** This is a long-term objective; progress or lack thereof since October 2008 cannot be measured.
- d. Ensure that wolf conservation benefits accrued through the project are appropriately balanced by on-the-ground interdiction, incentive, and compensation measures that offset impacts on the private sector. **Update 2/4/10:** This is a long-term objective but significant increases since October 2008 in interdiction and incentive measures in Arizona and in New Mexico have not resulted in increased wolf conservation benefits (as measured by population size).
10. With regard to the phrase “applicable circumstances” in clarification 9a of the public review draft SOP 13.0 Clarification Memo, ensure that the final Clarification Memo affirms that the following information will be considered in reaching a Project decision regarding management response for the wolf or wolves under review:
- a. Depredation and nuisance history.
 - b. Response to previous management actions.
 - c. Past, current, and likely future alpha status (including age and breeding potential).
 - d. Certainty of existence of dependent pup(s).
 - e. Effects of removal on pack continuity through the current and next breeding season.
 - f. Genetic lineage and inbreeding coefficient.
 - g. External factors contributing to most recent depredation incident(s).
 - h. Total number of permanent removals and unlawful killings within the Project area during the past 12 months.
 - i. Any other relevant factors or information.
- Update 2/4/10:** The Clarification Memo was modified consistent with the guidance above. A USFWS consent decree with NGO litigants in December 2009 has no substantive effect on consideration of the guidance above, which is completely consistent with the post-consent decree USFWS approach to making decisions on depredation response.
11. Continue to ensure that, in accordance with reintroduction project operating procedures, responses to potential depredation incidents in Arizona are initiated within 24 hours of receiving such reports and that initial releases and planned translocations of Mexican wolves in Arizona are vetted with the public. **Update 2/4/10:** This standard continues to met more 100% of the time for initial releases and translocations and more than 95% of the time for depredation response. The latter is a result of excellent permittee-IFT cooperation and IFT response (particularly by USDA Wildlife Services).
12. Collaborate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through the National Environmental Policy Act process and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to objectively evaluate the potential benefits and costs, in terms of wildlife and social capital, of any changes in the current nonessential experimental population boundaries, management guidelines, and population objectives for Mexican wolf reintroduction in the Southwest, and to bring recommendations on the draft EIS to the Commission for discussion and approval prior to submittal to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. **Update 2/4/10:** No progress.

13. Provide briefings on each of the preceding actions at the Commission's October meeting each year through 2013, which would be the final year of the renewed MOU. **Update 2/4/10:** The October 2009 briefing was deferred to February 2010.

14. Coordinate with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Mexico on wolf reintroduction in northern Mexico and obtain answers to 12 questions posed by the Commission in August 2009. **Update 2/4/10:** USFWS has provided answers to only two of the questions. If anything, USFWS coordination with agencies in AZ and NM on wolf reintroduction in Mexico has worsened since August 2009. The Department strives to compensate by coordinating directly with Mexico but the results have been uneven. [See Document "MW AGFC Questions Regarding Consequences of Release in Mexico.Updated.20100204.docx"]