

Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project Monthly Update

February 1 – 28, 2006

This is a summary of Mexican wolf reintroduction project activities in Arizona on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests (ASNF) and in New Mexico on the Gila National Forest (GNF). Additional information can be obtained by calling (928) 339-4329 or toll free at 1-888-459-9653, or by visiting the Arizona Game and Fish Department web site at http://www.azgfd.gov/w_c/es/wolf_reintroduction.shtml or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service web site at <http://mexicanwolf.fws.gov>. Past updates may also be viewed on either web site or interested parties may sign up to receive this update electronically by visiting <http://www.azgfd.gov/eservices/subscribe.shtml>. This update is a public document and information in it can be used for any purpose. The reintroduction project is a multi-agency, cooperative effort among the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD), New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF), USDA Forest Service (USFS), USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services (USDA-WS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT). Other entities cooperate through the Adaptive Management Work Group that meets quarterly in Arizona and/or New Mexico, including the San Carlos Apache Tribe (SCAT), the Turner Endangered Species Fund (TESF) and Defenders of Wildlife (DOW).

To view the wolf location map, which contains the most recent three months of wolf aerial locations, please visit http://www.azgfd.gov/w_c/es/wolf_reintroduction.shtml.

Please report any wolf sightings or suspected livestock depredations to: (928) 339-4329 or toll free at 1-888-459-9653. To report incidents of take or harassment of wolves, please call the Arizona Game and Fish Department's 24-hour dispatch (Operation Game Thief) at 1-800-352-0700.

Numbering System: Mexican wolves are given an identification number recorded in an official studbook that tracks the history of all known Mexican wolves. Capital letters (M = Male, F = Female) preceding the number indicate adult animals 18 months or older. Lower case letters (m = male, f = female) indicate sub-adults, younger than 18 months, or pups. The capital letter "A" preceding the letter and number indicate alpha wolves.

Definitions: For the purposes of the Monthly Update, a "wolf pack" is defined as two or more wolves that maintain an established home range. The Interagency Field Team (IFT) recognizes that wolves without radio telemetry collars sometimes form packs. If the IFT confirms that wolves are associating with each other and are reasonably resident within the same home range, they will be referenced as a pack.

CURRENT POPULATION STATUS

As of the end of February, the collared population consisted of 22 wolves with functional collars dispersed among eight packs and including four lone wolves. Of these lone wolves, several have been documented sporadically together; however, at this point, none are yet considered packs.

Wolf observation reports from the public are important, and should be reported immediately. All wolf-sighting reports are recorded and evaluated. Please call 1-888-459-9653 to report a wolf observation as soon as possible after the sighting. Thank you for your help.

SEASONAL NEWS

For the third consecutive year, the IFT began daily wolf monitoring activities on February 21 to document Mexican wolf prey selection. This monitoring activity involves daily telemetry flights, weather permitting, and will continue through March 31. Packs included in this year's effort include the Hawks Nest and San Mateo Packs in Arizona and the Luna and Saddle Packs, as well as lone wolf M1008, in New Mexico.

IN ARIZONA:

Bluestem Pack (collared AF521, AM507, M990 and m991)

The IFT located the alpha pair, AF521 and AM507, with sub-adult M990 and pup m991 throughout February within the pack's traditional home range in the west-central portion of the ASNF. On one telemetry flight, the IFT located

the pack slightly north of its core use area. However, the IFT found the pack within its traditional home range with all other telemetry locations. Results from laboratory blood work confirm that M990 and m991 are offspring of the Bluestem alpha pair.

Hawks Nest Pack (collared AF486 and AM619)

This pack continued to use its traditional home range northeast of the Big Lake area on the ASNF.

Hon-Dah Pack (collared AM578) located on the FAIR

Wolf locations and pack information on tribal lands are not disclosed per an agreement with the WMAT.

Rim Pack (collared AF858 and AM992)

IFT personnel continued to locate these two wolves together throughout February within their traditional home range in the central portion of the ASNF. However, the pack was located for two consecutive days on the SCAR before returning east to the ASNF. Results from laboratory blood work determined that M992 is the offspring of the Bluestem alpha pair.

San Mateo Pack (collared AF903 and AM796, with a non-functional collar, but believed to be with AF903)

During February, the San Mateo Pack continued to utilize areas along the Arizona/New Mexico border, with some locations occurring in New Mexico during the first two weeks of the month and locations occurring in Arizona during the last two weeks. On the February 23 telemetry flight, project personnel observed two wolves, one of which they believed was AM796. IFT personnel have attempted to dart AM796 on several occasions to replace its failed radio collar, but have been unsuccessful to date.

NEW MEXICO:

Aspen Pack (collared AF667 and AM512)

Throughout February, IFT personnel located the Aspen Pack in the eastern portion of the Gila Wilderness. During February, the IFT located sub-adults M871 and F861 together (see below).

Luna Pack (collared AF562, AM583 and m925)

The alpha pair, AF562 and AM583, as well as pup m925, remained together and within their traditional home range area in the central portion of the GNF. On the February 26 telemetry flight, the pack was located approximately five miles south of M1008.

Saddle Pack (collared AF797 and uncollared AM732)

Note: M863, M864 and m1007 have been moved to the “Single Wolves” category below.

During the February 6 telemetry flight, IFT personnel located AF797 south of its traditional home range area in the Gila Wilderness. However, it soon returned north and has since remained in the traditional Saddle Pack home range area in the southern portion of the GNF. During the February 24 telemetry flight, project personnel observed AF797 with an uncollared wolf, likely AM732.

Collared sub-adults F861, formerly of the Saddle Pack, and M871, formerly of the Aspen Pack

The IFT located these two wolves together on a consistent basis throughout February, along the periphery of the Aspen Pack’s core use area. However, on February 27, IFT personnel located F861 and M871 within three miles of the Aspen Pack alpha pair.

SINGLE WOLVES

M1008 in New Mexico

This wolf has remained in the general vicinity of its capture last month, just northwest of the Luna Pack in the GNF. On the February 24 telemetry flight, project personnel observed M1008 traveling alone.

Collared sub-adults M863 and M864, and pup m1007, formerly of the Saddle Pack, in New Mexico

With one exception, the IFT located these three wolves together throughout February. On February 10, project personnel observed the three collared wolves with an uncollared wolf.

INCIDENTS

On February 12, WS personnel investigated an incident that resulted in injuries and subsequent euthanasia of a 3-month old domestic dog. WS determined the injuries to be consistent with a wolf and confirmed wolf involvement. Currently, no wolves are known to inhabit the area surrounding the incident. IFT personnel are monitoring the area closely, and should they find fresh wolf sign, they will initiate trapping to place collars on any uncollared wolves.

On February 28, WS personnel investigated a dead calf and an associated sighting of a wolf in the same general vicinity as the dog incident that occurred on February 12. However, WS could not confirm wolf involvement in the calf incident.

CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Captive management personnel documented two wolf pairs mating in captivity, one on February 10 and the other pair on February 11. These wolves were allowed to breed for potential releases to occur later this year in the Primary Recovery Zone of Arizona. By knowing the approximate date of whelping, the IFT can better plan the releases to minimize stress on the females.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

On February 9, John Morgart, USFWS Recovery Coordinator, gave a presentation to 30 attendees at the monthly Albuquerque Wildlife Federation meeting in New Mexico.

On February 15, Dan Groebner and Jon Cooley answered questions and provided information about the wolf project at the Arizona State Capital as part of the "2006 Meet the Legislature Day," sponsored by AGFD.

On February 22, Shawna Nelson provided a presentation to 20 Sierra Club work group volunteers, from various part of the U.S., at The Nature Conservancy's Muleshoe Ranch, located near Willcox, Arizona.

On February 24 and 25, Shawna Nelson, in cooperation with the USFWS and the Living Desert Zoo and State Gardens, provided a presentation to 36 educators and zoo docents on wolf recovery and reintroduction at the Mexican Gray Wolf Teachers Workshop in Carlsbad, New Mexico, as part of a credit course offered through New Mexico State University.

On February 28, Shawna Nelson gave a presentation to 62 students at Round Valley High School in Eagar, Arizona, as a component of a school project on wolves.

PROJECT PERSONNEL

Nothing new to report.

REWARDS OFFERED

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is offering a reward of up to \$10,000 and the Arizona Game and Fish Department Operation Game Thief is offering a reward of up to \$1,000 for information leading to the conviction of the individual(s) responsible for the shooting deaths of Mexican gray wolves. A variety of public interest groups are offering an additional \$35,000, for a total reward amount of up to \$46,000, depending on the information provided.

Individuals with information they believe may be helpful are urged to call one of the following agencies: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service special agents in Mesa, AZ, at (480) 967-7900, in Alpine, AZ, at (928) 339-4232, or in Albuquerque, NM, at (505) 346-7828; the White Mountain Apache Tribe at (928) 338-1023 or (928) 338-4385; Arizona Game and Fish Department Operation Game Thief at 1-800-352-0700; or New Mexico Department of Game and Fish Operation Game Thief at 1-800-432-4263.

Killing a Mexican wolf is a violation of the federal Endangered Species Act, and can result in criminal penalties of up to \$50,000 and/or not more than one year in jail, and/or a civil penalty of up to \$25,000.