

Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project Monthly Update

March 1 – 31, 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/wolf> 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/signup>. 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.

To view the wolf distribution map, which contains the most recent three months of wolf aerial locations, please visit <http://www.azgfd.gov/wolf>. Under “Mexican Wolf Conservation and Management,” scroll down to the links under “Distribution.”

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 AGFD’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 March, the collared population consisted of 19* wolves with functional collars, down from 22 in February, dispersed among nine packs (new pack name assigned) and including three lone wolves. Of these lone wolves, several have been documented sporadically together; however, none are yet considered packs.

* See Luna Pack AF562, M1008 and M863 for more information.

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

Mexican wolf pups are generally born mid-April to mid-May. In the upcoming months, the IFT will be actively monitoring to determine if females are denning in order to document wild-born pups.

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 March within the pack's traditional home range in the west-central portion of the ASNF. On two telemetry flights, the IFT located the pack slightly north of its core use area. On March 6, IFT personnel observed six, possibly seven wolves, and, on March 27, they observed six wolves with the pack.

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. Visual observations continue to confirm only the presence of the alpha pair.

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)

The IFT located these two wolves together throughout March within their traditional home range in the central portion of the ASNF.

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

During March, the San Mateo Pack continued to utilize areas near the Arizona/New Mexico border, with all locations occurring in New Mexico. On the March 7, 15, 17 and 18 telemetry flights, project personnel observed two wolves, one of which they believed was AM796. The IFT continued efforts to trap AM796 to replace its failed radio collar, but has not been successful to date.

NEW MEXICO:

Aspen Pack (collared AF667 and AM512)

Throughout March, the IFT located the Aspen Pack in the eastern portion of the Gila Wilderness. Attempts to locate AM512 have not been successful, indicating that the Global Positioning System (GPS) collar, placed on AM512 in June 2005, had exhausted its expected battery life.

Luna Pack (collared AM583 and m925 and uncollared AF562)

The alpha pair, AF562 and AM583, as well as pup m925, remained within their traditional home range area in the central portion of the GNF. On March 13 and 23, IFT personnel observed four wolves in the pack, one of which was an uncollared wolf, likely the sibling of m925. The following day, the IFT observed m925 with the uncollared wolf, and on March 15 and 25, they observed the alpha pair together. During March, the GPS collar on AF562 began to malfunction due to battery failure. On March 29, the IFT remotely released and recovered the GPS collar from AF562.

Saddle Pack (collared AF797 and uncollared AM732)

During March, the alpha pair continued to use traditional Saddle Pack home range areas in the southern portion of the GNF. On March 7, 20, 27 and 30, the IFT observed two wolves in the Saddle Pack, and on March 23, IFT personnel observed the pair chasing elk.

Middle Fork Pack (collared sub-adults F861 and M871)

The IFT located these two wolves together without exception throughout March, along the periphery of the Aspen Pack's core use area in the Gila Wilderness.

SINGLE WOLVES

M1008 in New Mexico

On March 26, a coyote trapper captured M1008 in a leg-hold trap on private land just outside the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area boundary. IFT personnel removed the wolf from the trap and transferred the wolf to the Sevilleta Wolf Management Facility where it will be temporarily held for translocation later in 2006. Despite being observed with an unknown uncollared wolf in January 2006, the IFT has documented M1008 as traveling widely and alone throughout February and March.

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

The IFT located m1007 and M863 together throughout March with one exception, on March 22, when three miles separated them. On March 8, IFT personnel observed m1007 with an unknown, uncollared wolf. The IFT suspects this uncollared wolf is likely the individual first observed with M863, M864 and m1007 during January. During aerial telemetry flights on March 13, 20 and 25, the IFT observed m1007 and M863 together.

On March 28, WS personnel captured M863 just inside the Recovery Area boundary on private land. IFT personnel transported it to the Sevilleta Wolf Management Facility. (See "Incidents" below for more information.)

Throughout March, the IFT located M864 alone. It continued to exhibit dispersal behavior, being located several times just outside the northeast boundary of the Recovery Area boundary.

INCIDENTS

On March 14, the IFT discovered a dead cow near the Luna Pack's territory and notified the permittee. A WS investigation determined the cow died of pneumonia. While investigating the cow carcass, the IFT also discovered a dead colt. A WS investigation determined that the wounds were consistent with a wolf depredation. The IFT believes that a single, uncollared wolf was responsible for the colt depredation, as they confirmed that the Luna Pack was elsewhere.

On March 15, during the winter study telemetry flight, the IFT observed the San Mateo Pack near a dead calf. They investigated and found the remains of the calf, along with an uninjured cow stuck in a nearby cattle guard. IFT personnel and a local resident freed the cow. The location of the incident was on an inactive allotment. A WS investigation confirmed the calf to be a wolf depredation.

During the March 20 telemetry flight, the IFT observed M863 and m1007 bedded down near a cow and newborn calf. Using the plane, the IFT successfully hazed the wolves from the area. On a follow up investigation, the IFT discovered an injured calf, with M863 and m1007 in close proximity. The IFT continued hazing the two wolves throughout the week. The mother subsequently rejected the injured calf, and it died several days later. The IFT found a second injured calf in the same area, but it survived. As a result, m1007 and the previously mentioned uncollared wolf associated with it have one depredation incident, while M863 now has two depredation incidents, including one that occurred while with the Saddle Pack in August 2005. Per protocol, WS personnel initiated trapping for M863. On March 28, they captured M863 inside the Recovery Area and took it to the Sevilleta Wolf Management Facility. The IFT will continue to monitor m1007 closely.

On March 26, a permittee observed the Luna Pack harassing horses on private land. The permittee hazed the wolves, and they left the area. WS personnel examined the horses and found one that was favoring a front leg, however, they did not find any wounds or obvious injuries.

On March 28, WS investigated a dead cow in Catron County, New Mexico. The investigation did not find any indication of wolves in the area or that wolves were responsible for the cow's death, but did confirm that a bear had fed on the carcass.

CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Nothing new to report.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

On March 2, Maggie Dwire gave a presentation to about 30 people from the Sierra Club at the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico.

PROJECT PERSONNEL

On March 5, Amanda Chambers, a Cincinnati zookeeper, began working with the Project as part of the zoo's employee enrichment program. She will be with the project until April 8.

On March 6, Jennifer Mannas, recently with the Swift Fox Project in South Dakota, began working with the Project as a USFWS volunteer.

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.