

Blue Range Mexican Wolf Reintroduction Project Monthly Update

October 1 – 31, 2005

This is a summary of Mexican wolf reintroduction project activities in Arizona on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests (ASNF) and 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-WOLF (9653), or by visiting the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service web site at <http://mexicanwolf.fws.gov>. Past updates may also be viewed on this web site or interested parties may sign up to receive the update electronically by visiting <http://azgfd.gov>. This update is public property and can be used for any purpose. The reintroduction project is a multi-agency cooperative effort among the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD), New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF), USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services (USDA-WS), USDA Forest Service (USFS), the White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT) on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation (FAIR), the San Carlos Apache Tribe (SCAT) on the San Carlos Apache Reservation (SCAR), and other supporting organizations including the Turner Endangered Species Fund (TESF) and Defenders of Wildlife (DOW).

Please report any wolf sightings or suspected livestock depredations to: (928) 339-4329 or toll free at 1-888-459-WOLF (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 purpose of this update, a "wolf pack" is defined as two or more wolves that maintain an established territory and are proven breeders. In the event that one of the two alpha wolves dies, the remaining wolf, regardless of pack size, retains the pack name. A "group" of wolves is defined as two or more wolves that travel together on a consistent basis, but are not proven breeders. The Interagency Field Team (IFT) recognizes that wolves without radio telemetry collars may form a group or a pack. If they are confirmed through trapping, sightings or other field methods, they will be included in the appropriate category.

CURRENT POPULATION STATUS

As of the end of October, the collared population consisted of 24 wolves in nine packs, including three lone wolves. Of these 24 collared wolves, the IFT maintained contact with 23 wolves through the end of the month. San Mateo AM796 has still not been located, despite search efforts, and it is presumed to be due to a GPS collar failure. Two wolves, f862 and M795, are now designated as "Fate Unknown," as three months have elapsed since their last radio signal contact. They are no longer included in the tally of wolves with radio collars.

Estimates of uncollared wolves are best made when wolves are most visible, and when populations fluctuate the least. The final population estimate of wolves for 2005 will be provided in the January 2006 monthly update.

In Arizona: Bluestem Pack (AF521, AM507, m990, m991 and M992), Hawks Nest Pack (AF486, having non-functional collar, but visually confirmed in October, and AM619), Rim Pack (AF858), San Mateo Pack (AF903, AM796, having non-functional collar, but believed to still be with the pack, and uncollared pups m927, m928 and f929), sub-adult F873, and lone wolf Cienega F487. Hon-Dah Pack (AM587) and F613 were located on the FAIR.

In New Mexico: Aspen Pack (AF667, AM512, sub-adult M871, and uncollared pups m973, m974 and f975), Luna Pack (AF562, AM583 and m925), Ring Pack (AF799), Saddle Pack (AF797, and sub-adults F861, M863 and M864).

Observation reports of wolves from the public are important, and should be reported immediately as many of the wolves are currently dispersing. All wolf-sighting reports are recorded and evaluated. Please call the toll free number listed above to report a wolf sighting as soon as possible after the sighting. With fall hunting season

underway, hunters can be instrumental in helping to monitor wolf populations. Please report wolf observations to your local game and fish department. Thank you for your help.

MONITORING

The IFT continues to focus on placing radio collars on free-ranging wolves and monitoring wolf activity, reproduction and recruitment, as well as on confirming other uncollared wolves in the wild.

In Arizona:

On October 12, The IFT investigated a report of large canid tracks found near the Blue river corridor. Since there are currently no wolves with radio collars in the area, the animal could potentially be a large dog or an uncollared wolf. No sightings or additional sign has been reported or observed.

On October 16, upon locating fresh sign in an area adjacent to and off of the FAIR, IFT personnel set leg-hold traps for members of the Bluestem pack. On October 17, the IFT captured Bluestem AM507, replaced its radio collar, and released it on site. The male was in good condition, weighing 69 pounds. On October 18, the IFT captured a sub-adult male, a male pup and an adult male within one mile of where they captured Bluestem AM507. The IFT assigned the wolves studbook numbers 990, 991 and 992, respectively. They placed conventional VHF radio collars on each of the wolves. During the October 27 telemetry flight, IFT personnel located m992 approximately 14 miles north of the Bluestem alpha pair, and they located m991 over ten miles northwest of the Bluestem alpha pair. They located sub-adult male 990 with the Bluestem alpha pair for the first time since its capture on October 17. Blood tests are pending to determine the genetics and relationship of m990, m991 and M992.

On October 19, the IFY set a trapline for uncollared members of the Rim Pack. Currently there is only wolf in this pack fitted with a radio collar (AF858). On October 28, IFT personnel pulled all traps due to increased hunter activity in the area.

The San Mateo Pack, translocated from New Mexico to Arizona in July 2005, remained a few miles away from their release site in the ASNF.

Sub-adult F873 moved onto the SCAR in late June 2005, and remained there throughout October. At the tribe's request, USFWS IFT personnel initiated trapping efforts to remove F873 and an uncollared wolf observed traveling with the female.

At the end of October, the IFT located the Bluestem, Hawks Nest, Hon-Dah and Rim Packs, along with F613 and Cienega F487, in their traditional home ranges on either the ASNF or the FAIR.

In New Mexico:

On October 12, the IFT initiated trapping efforts for members of the Luna Pack to replace radio collars and/or place radio collars on this year's pups. On October 14, IFT personnel captured a 35-pound male pup from the Luna Pack. They placed a conventional radio collar on the pup and released it on site. They assigned the pup studbook number 925. On October 15, IFT personnel observed Luna AF562 with a non-project, leg-hold trap on its paw. On October 17, a capture team, using a helicopter and net gun, successfully caught AF562. Due to injuries sustained from the trap, IFT personnel transported the female to the project's veterinarian in Arizona for treatment of the injured paw. On October 22, the IFT returned Luna AF562 to its traditional home range after surgery in which the veterinarian amputated the toes and pad of the right front paw. Three of the four members of the Luna Pack now have radio collars.

On the October 27 aerial telemetry flight, the IFT located Saddle AF797 with sub-adult M863. They found Saddle sub-adult f861 in the Gila Wilderness, 16 miles to the southwest of Saddle AF797. Despite being observed on the October 20 telemetry flight, the IFT did not locate Saddle sub-adult m864 during the October 27 flight.

The IFT located the Luna, Ring and Saddle Packs in their traditional home ranges within the GNF.

INCIDENTS

Wildlife Services (WS) IFT personnel investigated a dead bull in Apache County and determined that it died as a result of getting caught in a cattle guard. There was no evidence of wolves scavenging on the carcass.

On October 3, WS IFT personnel investigated a dead cow on the SCAR. They could not determine a cause of death, however, predators were not involved.

CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

On October 21, M190 and F628, formerly of the Pipestem Pack and removed from the wild in 2002 for depredations, were sent from the Sevilleta Wolf Management Facility to the Wolf Conservation Center in South Salem, New York.

On October 26, F838, residing at the Wolf Conservation Center in South Salem, and M806, from the Wild Canid Center in Eureka, Missouri, were both sent to the Sevilleta Wolf Management Facility where project personnel paired them as potential future release candidates.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

On October 1 through 5, Shawna Nelson, Maggie Dwire, John Oakleaf and Dan Stark gave presentations at the International Wolf Center's Frontiers of Wolf Recovery Conference. Several hundred people attended the presentations.

On October 14, the Adaptive Management Oversight Committee (AMOC) conducted two public meetings, in Morenci, Arizona, and Glenwood, New Mexico, as part of an ongoing process and commitment by project cooperators to keep the public informed on issues and actions pertaining to the Blue Range Mexican Wolf Reintroduction Project. Discussion and decisions included the AMOC's decision to enact a one-year moratorium on new wolf releases, finalization of previously referenced Standard Operating Procedures, and status of the project's Five-Year Review.

On October 15, in conjunction with Wolf Awareness Week, Maggie Dwire gave a wolf program at the Sevilleta facility open house to about 50 people and at Wildlife West to ten people.

On October 15, Shawna Nelson worked a wolf information booth at the Fall Family Festival and Health Fair, hosted by the White Mountain Regional Medical Center in Springerville, Arizona. Approximately 50 people visited the booth.

On October 15, Shawn Farry and John Oakleaf led 25 University of Arizona and Arizona State University wildlife students and staff on a field trip within the BRWRA.

On October 16, in conjunction with Wolf Awareness Week, Melissa Woolf gave a presentation at the Gila Cliff Dwellings in New Mexico to approximately 15 people.

Members of the IFT began moving into their new AGFD office, located in Alpine, Arizona.

PROJECT PERSONNEL

Jeff Dolphin began on October 8 as a USFWS volunteer for the wolf project.

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. An additional \$35,000 is being

offered by a variety of public interest groups for a total amount of up to \$46,000, depending on the information provided.

Anyone 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, or Springerville, AZ at (928) 333-5245, or 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 hotline at 1-800-352-0700; or New Mexico Department of Game and Fish Operation Game Thief hotline at 1-800-432-4263.

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