

Blue Range Mexican Wolf Reintroduction Project Monthly Update

November 1 – 30, 2005

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-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/wolf>. 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 (USDA-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. In the event that one of the two alpha wolves dies, the remaining wolf, regardless of pack size, retains the pack name. The Interagency Field Team (IFT) recognizes that wolves without radio telemetry collars may form 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 November, the collared population consisted of 20 wolves in eight packs and one lone wolf.

In Arizona: Bluestem Pack (AF521, AM507, m990 and m991), Hawks Nest Pack (AF486, having a non-functional collar, but believed to still be with the pack, and AM619), Rim Pack (AF858 and M992), San Mateo Pack (AF903, AM796, having a non-functional collar, but believed to still be with the pack, and uncollared pups m927, m928 and f929), and lone wolf Cienega F487. The Hon-Dah Pack (AM587) was 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), Saddle Pack (AF797 and sub-adults F861, M863 and M864).

The IFT makes estimates of uncollared wolves when the animals 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.

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 help the IFT monitor wolves by reporting wolf observations to your local game and fish department. Thank you for your help.

MONITORING

The IFT continues to focus on monitoring wolf activity, reproduction and recruitment, as well as on confirming other uncollared wolves in the wild.

In Arizona:

On November 4, IFT personnel verified a report of lone wolf F613 associating with domestic dogs on the FAIR. Due to the past behavior of this wolf, including the confirmed production of a hybrid wolf/dog litter in 2005, the IFT, after consultation with the WMAT, initiated efforts to remove F613. On November 14, IFT and WMAT personnel trapped F613 and transported the wolf to the Ladder Ranch Wolf Management Facility in New Mexico.

At the request of the SCAT, USFWS IFT personnel continued trapping efforts on the SCAR for F873 and an associated uncollared wolf. On November 7, IFT personnel trapped an uncollared male wolf traveling with F873. The IFT gave the captured wolf studbook number 993 and transported it to the Sevilleta Wolf Management Facility in New Mexico. On November 9, IFT personnel trapped F873 on the SCAR and transported it to Sevilleta as well. The IFT anticipates making a recommendation to the Adaptive Management Oversight Committee that F873 be eventually translocated back to the wild with M993; however, specific details have not yet been finalized.

On November 10, the IFT located Cienega F487 within two miles of the Hawks Nest Pack in the traditional Hawks Nest home range. It continues to travel alone.

On the November 11 telemetry flight, the IFT located m990 with the Bluestem alpha pair. On November 17, the IFT located m990 and m991 together, but they were 10 miles from the Bluestem alpha pair. On November 28, the IFT found m990 and m991 again with the Bluestem alpha pair. The IFT did not locate M992 with the Bluestem alpha pair, m990 or m991 during November, but they did find M992 with Rim AF858 on the last three telemetry flights.

On November 19, at the request of the WMAT, IFT personnel began trapping efforts on the FAIR to capture and place radio collars on uncollared wolves in the Hon-Dah Pack traditional home range. Efforts ceased a few days later because the wolves moved out of the area, coupled with temperatures falling below freezing, which increases the potential of injuries to the trapped animal.

During late November, the San Mateo Pack, translocated from New Mexico to Arizona in July 2005, traveled east to the New Mexico border, 20 miles from their release site. They have since moved back towards their traditional use area within Arizona. IFT personnel made attempts, all unsuccessful, to confirm the presence of San Mateo AM796, which has a non-functioning radio collar.

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

In New Mexico:

On the November 4 telemetry flight, IFT personnel discovered Ring Pack AF799 dead in Collins Park in the GNF. They also found a bald eagle carcass within three yards of the wolf. The death is under investigation, and necropsy results are pending. The IFT believed the Ring Pack had as many as two pups; however, intensive ground searches failed to locate any additional mortalities or sign of surviving pups in the area. Because both Ring alpha wolves are deceased, the Ring Pack is now considered defunct.

During November, the IFT located Saddle AF797 with sub-adult M863. On November 18, IFT personnel observed AF797 and M863 with an uncollared wolf. Based on the distinct coloration of the uncollared wolf, the IFT suspects that it may have been AM732. During most of November, the IFT located Saddle sub-adult F861 by itself in the Gila Wilderness. However, on November 28, F861 had moved north into the GNF, and the IFT located it within a few miles of the Luna Pack. After not being located on two consecutive telemetry flights, the IFT found Saddle sub-adult M864 on November 11 in the San Mateo Mountains, over 50 miles from the Saddle pack. The following week, M864 had returned 20 miles to within the GNF boundary, but still was 30 miles from the Saddle Pack. On November 28, the IFT located m864 along the eastern edge of the ASNF, 40 miles northeast of its location the previous week and 35 miles from the Saddle Pack.

On November 29 and 30, IFT personnel observed what they believed to be the Luna Pack, due to the presence of four wolves, which is the current size of the pack.

On November 4 and 10, the IFT located Aspen Pack AM512, AF667 and sub-adult M871 along the eastern edge of the Gila Wilderness. On the November 20 telemetry flight, the IFT located the Aspen Pack 20 miles further to the southwest, along the southern wilderness boundary. By month's end, the Aspen Pack returned 15 miles northeast to the center of their traditional home range within the Gila Wilderness.

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

INCIDENTS

Nothing new to report.

CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Nothing new to report.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

On November 5, Shawna Nelson gave three presentations on the wolf project to 53 teachers and zoo docents at the Mexican Wolf Teacher's Workshop at the Rio Grande Zoo in Albuquerque, NM. The USFWS Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge, the Rio Grande Zoo and the Arizona Game and Fish Department sponsored the teacher's workshop.

On November 11, Shawna Nelson provided a presentation in the GNF to seven members of the Southwest Environmental Center, based out of Las Cruces, NM, as part of their wildlife viewing field trip.

On November 19, Colby Oakleaf and Laura Kelly provided an update to eleven boy scouts and their leaders from Snowflake, AZ.

The IFT finished moving into their new AGFD office located in Alpine, AZ.

PROJECT PERSONNEL

On November 4, the NMDGF conducted interviews for the New Mexico IFT leader. The candidate may begin as soon as January, and will be based within the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area.

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 Springerville, AZ, at (928) 333-5245, 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 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.