

Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project Monthly Update

December 1 – 31, 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 1-888-459-9653, or by visiting the Arizona Game and Fish Department web site at <http://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://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 (DOW).

Please note new information: To better address the needs of cooperators and the public to be informed of areas that wolves recently occupied, the Interagency Field Team (IFT) has created a wolf location map. This map will be updated monthly and will contain the most recent three months of wolf location information. To view the map, click here: http://www.azgfd.gov/w_c/es/images/10-05_12-05LocationMap_000.gif

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 these Monthly Updates, a "wolf pack" is defined as two or more wolves that maintain an established home range. In the event that one of the two alpha wolves dies, the remaining wolves, regardless of pack size, retain the pack name. The IFT recognizes that wolves without radio telemetry collars sometimes form packs. If the IFT confirms that wolves are associating with each other and reasonably resident within the same home range, they will be referenced as a pack.

A "breeding pair" is defined as an adult male and an adult female wolf with at least two pups produced during the previous breeding season that survived until December 31 of the year of their birth.

CURRENT POPULATION STATUS

As of the end of December, the collared population consisted of 20 wolves with functional collars in eight packs, one lone wolf, two dispersing sub-adults and one wolf whose collar has been non-functional for the past 90 days. Relying on field survey methods, the IFT believes this latter wolf to still be traveling with the pack, but it is no longer included in the count of collared wolves above.

The final population estimate of wolves for 2005 will be provided in the February 2006 monthly update.

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.

IN ARIZONA:

Bluestem Pack (collared AF521, AM507, m990 and m991)

This pack is considered a "breeding pair" per the definition above.

The alpha pair, AF521 and AM507, continued to be located throughout December with their suspected offspring, m990 and m991, within their traditional home range in the west-central portion of the ASNF. Blood-work to determine the genetic lineages of m990 and 991 is still pending.

Cienega F487 (collared lone wolf)

F487, the former alpha female of the Cienega Pack, continued to travel alone throughout December, confirmation of which was last obtained on December 21 when IFT personnel observed F487 traveling alone in the central portion of the ASNF. On December 27, after several months of sedentary behavior in what was traditional Cienega Pack territory, IFT personnel located F487 over 20 miles to the northeast in New Mexico. The IFT first observed the wolf traveling alone in February 2005.

Hawks Nest Pack (AF486, with a non-functional collar, and collared AM619)

On December 20, IFT personnel observed two wolves with this pack, one of which was known to be AM619. The IFT believes the second wolf is AF486. This pack continued to use its traditional home range east 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 M992)

On December 4, IFT personnel observed M992 crossing a road a few minutes after a visual contact of AF858; both wolves appeared healthy. The IFT also heard M992 howling. On December 13, IFT personnel again observed M992 and AF858 traveling together. Upon examining the area, they located two sets of tracks. IFT personnel continued to locate these two wolves together throughout December. The IFT captured M992 on October 19 and attached a radio telemetry collar on it. They captured it within traditional Bluestem pack territory, but it since has moved from the area. Blood-work to determine the genetic lineage is still pending.

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

This pack is considered a "breeding pair" per the definition above.

Since late November, this pack has continued to use areas northeast of its initial release site, at times traveling more than 20 miles to just east of the New Mexico border. On December 1 and 2, IFT personnel observed one adult with the pack. On December 4 and 14, they found four sets of wolf tracks near the location of AF903, indicating the probable presence of AM796. This wolf would have been designated "Fate Unknown," since 90 days have elapsed since its last radio signal contact. On December 14, IFT personnel again attempted to locate and then dart AM796 to replace the failed Global Positioning Satellite collar, but were unable to see the animal. On December 23, IFT personnel observed two, large, healthy-looking wolf pups crossing a road near the location of AF903.

IN NEW MEXICO:

Aspen Pack (collared AF667, AM512 and sub-adult M871)

Throughout December, IFT personnel located the three collared members of the Aspen Pack together in the eastern portion of the Gila Wilderness. However, on December 27, they located sub-adult M871 nine miles to the south of the alpha pair. This is the first documented separation of M871 since the pack's translocation in June.

Luna Pack (collared AF562, AM583 and m925)

This pack is considered a "breeding pair" per the definition above.

The alpha pair, AF562 and AM583, as well as m925, remained together and within their traditional home range area in the central portion of the GNF. IFT personnel documented the only exception on the December 5 telemetry flight, when they located m925, a pup of the year, 2.5 miles from the alpha pair.

Saddle Pack (collared AF797, uncollared AM732 and collared sub-adult M863)

Throughout December, IFT personnel located AF797 in the traditional Saddle Pack home range area in the southern portion of the GNF. On December 27, during an aerial telemetry flight, IFT personnel observed AF797 with a second, uncollared wolf. Based on observable physical characteristics, they determined the uncollared adult to be AM732. The IFT lost radio signal contact with this wolf in 2004.

Dispersal Wolves (collared sub-adults F861 and M864)

Saddle sub-adult F861 continued to exhibit dispersal behavior during December, with consistent locations 10 miles from the pack, along the GNF and Gila Wilderness boundary. M864 also continued dispersal behavior during December, with movements 30 miles to the north, as well as 30 miles to the northeast of the Saddle pack territory. Saddle yearling M863 has also begun to demonstrate dispersal behavior during December. After leaving the alpha pair, the IFT located it with M864 on the December 20 and 27 telemetry flights.

LITIGATION

On December 20, Craig Manson, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, released a statement that the Service will not appeal the U.S. District Court decision made earlier this year striking down the Service's reclassification of gray wolf populations from endangered to threatened for much of the species' current range in the United States. The court decision will not affect gray wolves in 47 contiguous states, except where gray wolves are listed as part of an Experimental Population for reintroduction purposes in the northern Rockies and for Mexican gray wolves in parts of the Southwest. The exceptions to this decision are Minnesota, where wolves are listed as threatened, and Mexico, where wolves are listed as endangered.

INCIDENTS

Nothing new to report.

CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Nothing new to report.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

The next Mexican Wolf Adaptive Management Work Group (AMWG) meetings will be held January 26, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., in Thatcher, Arizona (moved from Safford, Arizona, due to room constraints) and January 27, from 12 p.m. to 4 p.m. in Silver City, New Mexico. These meetings are open to the public. County, federal, state and tribal agency cooperators involved in the Reintroduction Project will be represented.

PROJECT PERSONNEL

On November 21, Sharon Hansen, Wildlife Specialist for the AGFD, was hired to assist with the Mexican wolf and jaguar projects, as well as other AGFD efforts.

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 wolf is a violation of the federal Endangered Species Act, and can result in 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.