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Arizona Game and Fish Department**NEWS RELEASE**

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Arizona Game and Fish pleased by decision to release male wolf in eastern Arizona

PHOENIX – The Arizona Game and Fish Department is pleased by a decision to authorize the release of an adult male Mexican wolf into eastern Arizona later this month or in January to help restore the stability of the Hawks Nest Pack and promote future breeding to further the Mexican Wolf Reintroduction project. The department had approved the release, but also needed U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) approval.

The Service's decision was in response to a request made by the project's Interagency Field Team that was supported by cooperating agencies and stakeholders, and endorsed by Game and Fish's director, Larry Voyles.

The release is hoped to lead to a mating of the male with the pack's currently unpaired adult female, increasing the number of potential Mexican wolf breeding pairs. Two adult males from the Hawks Nest Pack, including a breeding male, were illegally killed last summer.

"The goal of this translocation is to augment the breeding wild wolf population in the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area and also increase the genetic diversity of the current population," says Terry Johnson, endangered species coordinator for Game and Fish.

Cooperating agencies are concerned that since 2003 the Mexican wolf population in the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area has stagnated between 40 and 60 known (documented) radio-collared and uncollared wolves. An annual survey conducted in January 2010 counted 42 documented wolves. The annual survey will be carried out again in January 2011. The project's population goal is at least 100 wolves in the recovery area.

Game and Fish, in coordination with the project's field team, began discussions in mid-August with project cooperators and local stakeholders about a potential translocation in the aftermath of the Hawks Nest Pack killings.

Game and Fish held a public meeting in Alpine, Ariz. on Nov. 17 to discuss the translocation with local stakeholders.

"It is critical to the success of the wolf program that the project team works with local stakeholders prior to a translocation, and this public meeting was very constructive," said Johnson. "Local public-lands livestock permittees that participated made suggestions to mitigate potential impacts, but they did not oppose the release, and in fact, recognized the need to help the Hawks Nest Pack through translocation of a new male wolf."

At the meeting, Barbara Marks, a local rancher from Blue River, Ariz., spoke out against the unlawful killing of the breeding male from this pack saying, "Based on the history of this pack not depredating on livestock and avoiding people in the area, the killing of the male wolves this past summer was disappointing and a burden on the recovery program. We feel the loss of the alpha male could predispose the alpha female to potentially start depredating on livestock or frequenting residences just trying to support her pups and the other sub adult wolves in the pack. She needed some help one way or another."

Game and Fish estimates that approximately 90 percent of the free-ranging wolves were born in the wild. Wolves that have been wild for several generations are the key to the long term success of the wolf project.

Unlawful killings continue to be a major challenge for the project, and sometimes necessitate the need to release or translocate naïve (captive-born) wolves.

The project has not permanently removed a wolf since 2007.

The Hawks Nest release could occur on national forest land in the recovery area either in the Springerville or Alpine Ranger Districts south of Eager, Ariz., and is dependent on a number of factors, including the pack's location at the time of translocation, weather, and available road access. The translocation could also be postponed if relevant circumstances change, such as if a free-ranging male wolf bonds with the pack's adult female.

The male wolf proposed for release was removed from New Mexico as a dependent pup from the depredating Saddle Pack in 2007. The release required prior concurrence by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service because the wolf is coming to Arizona from an out-of-state (New Mexico) management facility. It was never implicated in any livestock depredations and is eligible for translocation.

Arizona's involvement in Mexican wolf conservation began in the mid-1980s, with exploration of the feasibility of reintroducing wolves in Arizona and New Mexico. In 1996, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service selected the Blue Range area in east-central Arizona as the reintroduction site, and the first 11 captive-reared wolves were released there in 1998. The Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area encompasses east-central Arizona and west-central New Mexico. The Fort Apache Indian Reservation also plays an integral part in the reintroduction effort.

For more information on wolf conservation, visit www.azgfd.gov/wolf.