

MEXICAN WOLF ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
Summary Notes for Meetings of January 25 - 26, 2006

Location: Eastern Arizona Activity Center, 1014 N College Avenue, Thatcher, AZ 85552
Date/Time: January 25: 1300 – 1700 (AZ Time)
January 25: 1800 – 2100 (AZ Time)
January 26: 0800 – 1500 (AZ Time)
Host: Arizona Game and Fish Department and Greenlee County
Participants: AMOC Lead Agencies: AGFD – Terry B. Johnson (Chair), Bill Van Pelt, Dan Groebner, Sharon Hansen, Shawn Farry, Janess Vartanian; NMDGF – Chuck Hayes, Saleen Richter; USDA APHIS WS – Dave Bergman; USFS – Wally Murphy; USFWS – John Morgart, and John Oakleaf.

AMWG Signatory Cooperators: Greenlee County AZ – Hector Ruedas and Yvonne Pearson.

Note: some participants were not present for the entire meeting.

January 25 – 1300-1700

A. Welcome, Introductions, Ground Rules, and Agenda Review

Terry Johnson called the meeting to order at 1300 local time. After a brief welcome and introductions, the agenda was followed.

B. Discussion of Summary Notes from January 17, 2006 Conference Call

John Oakleaf requested the following revision: delete the “Old Ring Pack” reference and state “confirmed cattle kill today by 1008 and other animal.”

C. AMOC Communications Review

Greenlee County has been an integrated AMOC stakeholder since 2003 and must be included in “critical” internal AMOC communications. For example, Hector Huedas and/or Kay Gale must be contacted when AMOC information impacts their jurisdiction. This issue became evident recently when a signatory agency did not contact Greenlee County before contacting a permittee about deliberative information that was not considered public information.

It is paramount that communications among political delegates regarding moratorium issues and end-of-year count discussions be coordinated through AMOC Lead Agencies and Greenlee County. Communication between AMOC and Greenlee County is critical.

Phone contact is critical on urgent issues. Email and voice mail are not the preferred forms of communication when the information being transmitted is time sensitive because you cannot be sure the message was received. The bottom line is that the communication obligation has not been completed until the information has been received by the target individual(s). If the

communication has potential for impacting the project, it is considered a sensitive issue and not public information until a determination has been made by AMOC. The IFTLs and FPC were reminded to reiterate with all IFT members that communications with regional or county officials should be held in strict confidence by all involved.

D. End-of-Year Count

The IFT discussed end-of-year count spreadsheets and provided a presentation of their counts and efforts. The end-of-year count consists of 5 breeding pairs that are part of the maximum count of 49 wolves in the field. This maximum number differs from the October 2005 maximum estimate due to pup mortality.

WMAT aerials surveys were conducted as part of the year-end efforts. To maximize field operations efficiency and wolf surveying, WMAT ground surveys need to be conducted. The IFT survey flight costs (\$28,000) included helicopter (\$16,860) and airplane (\$6800) time. The IFT thought the end-of-year survey was a success, with an aggressive approach to implementing flight surveys, and will submit an assessment to AMOC. The IFT will debrief the end-of-year survey efforts at their February 1, 2006 meeting.

Action Item: AMOC will follow-up with WMAT regarding authorization for non-Tribal IFT members to conduct unescorted ground surveys when no WMAT professional is available.

Action Item: IFT will meet with WMAT (Cynthia and Krista) in February 2006 to discuss wolf survey sightings and program coordination efforts.

Action Item: The IFT will submit a written process documenting flight pattern protocol, an assessment of the process and costs by February 20, 2006. The IFT will provide Hector Ruedas a 1-page synopsis of the same information.

E. Moratorium

John Morgart briefed AMOC on the USFWS perspective regarding the moratorium, affirming that it does not constrain trans-jurisdictional release of wolves. However, as the moratorium indicates (and USFWS policy supports), AMOC should endeavor to keep translocated problem wolves in the jurisdiction of origin, unless impossible. USFWS is clarifying the trans-jurisdictional issue with the appropriate NM congressional and county officials.

Action Item: John Morgart will follow-up with AMOC officials by February 28, 2006 regarding trans-jurisdictional issues.

F. NEPA Discussion

Wally Murphy briefed AMOC on his recollection of the historical Mexican Wolf (5-year old) NEPA process for release and translocation sites. The 1997 NEPA effort addressed all 7

approved sites. The Forest Service then conducted a Section 7 Consultation, narrowing the sites to 3. USFS issued a categorical exclusion for the 3 sites and issued a special use permit for use and occupancy for on-site release pens.

Cathy Taylor is researching the Section 7, categorical exclusion, and special use requirements for the other 4 sites to ensure that the record is accurate. USFS might need adopt the USFWS NEPA or do its own NEPA analysis. Apache National Forest officials will be contacted to determine their opinion of the situation. A special use permit may not be required, if the site is not occupied and uses a soft release technique that does not involve a physical on-site pen.

Wally Murphy met with New Mexico National Forest officials to discuss NEPA issues. The New Mexico National Forest staff did not have any issues, and accepted \$7000 from the regional USFS office for IFT and AMOC to do the scoping for updated environmental compliance.

Meeting ended at 1715.

January 25 – 1800-2100 (Dinner Meeting)

G. Engineer Springs discussion with Frank Hayes

Dialog at the meeting included NEPA discussions and whether Engineer Springs is a good release site. Aldo discussed were: livestock depredations; human interactions; the Arizona drought; and lack of wildlife (wolf prey) populations to the East of the Engineer Springs. It was determined that prey base population discussions for the region need to be held. Wally Murphy reported that it was a fruitful meeting among AMOC, Frank Hayes, and the **NON-PUBLIC INFORMATION REDACTION**.

Action Item: Jon Cooley of AGFD Region 1 will meet with A-S NF Supervisor and District Ranger Frank Hayes to discuss wolf release, elk population, and Rodeo-Chediski issues.

January 26 – 0800-1500

H. NEPA Discussion, continued

USFS employees Deb Bumpus and Cathy Taylor briefed AMOC on the NEPA process, building on the previous day's discussion among AMOC.

Cathy Taylor, USFS, indicated that a special use permit issued in 1997 included Engineer Springs and 6 other sites. The permit does cover building pens, if necessary. The permit expiration date is 2007. USFS needs to review the EA to determine if the affects analysis is unchanged and provide a letter indicating there are no new actions. With that document in hand, the Apache-Sitgreaves is "good to go." USFS also needs an Annual Operating Plan.

USFS NF Supervisor signatures will need to be retained for update purposes. Any change of conditions will depend on how the EA is worded with regard to existing conditions.

Action Item: IFT will draft the Annual Operating Plan for 2006 for AMOC review by February 28, 2006.

Action Item: USFWS will draft a letter for current assessment to determine any change of conditions from the original EA. AGFD and WMAT will review and provide concurrence as appropriate.

Action Item: USFS will check all Arizona sites to determine whether they have updated special use permits.

I. IFT Translocation and Initial Release Recommendations

The IFT presented their 2006 translocation and initial release recommendations to AMOC. Available information indicates the main livestock density in the Engineer Springs area is between the potential Engineer Springs release site due west to SCAR. IFT recently held wolf release discussions with **LAW ENFORCEMENT INFORMATION REDACTION**. Discussions with the Clifton Ranger District range conservationist and ranger have occurred in the past, but not recently (until last night).

The release recommendation discussions encompassed the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed sites. Release techniques, methodology of pairing and alternatives to existing operational procedures were explored. It was determined that the wolf project is within one release of meeting the original reintroduction goal, and more deliberation is required. It was determined to split up F638 and M 730 and 731.

The IFT will evaluate the cost options of two hard releases in the Blue Range Primitive Area. Each release would require one day to erect a soft pen, backpacking materials to the site, and renting pack mules. Two months of supplemental feeding with carnivore logs would cost approximately \$5000.

Action Item: The IFT will meet with AGFD Game Ranger Steve Nahar regarding the wolf program and wildlife prey base populations by February 10, 2006.

Action Item: **TRIBAL INFORMATION REDACTION**.

Action Item: The IFT will reassess the initial and reintroduction releases for AMOC discussion via a conference call on February 28, 2006.

Action Item: The IFT will provide a firm cost estimate for two hard releases in the Blue Range primitive area.

J. New Mexico Game Commission Update

Chuck Hayes briefed AMOC on the New Mexico Game Commission presentation. A New Mexico Commissioner suggested AMOC review the Minnesota wolf program model because the Arizona/New Mexico reintroduction program seems to have more problems than Minnesota had. Mr. Hayes mentioned that Catron County expressed appreciation that NMDGF and AMOC have been responsive to their requests.

Action Item: AMOC will invite big game representatives to discuss prey bases. This activity is also included in the 5-Year Review Recommendations.

K. 5-Year Review: USFWS Response

USFWS would like a letter from AMOC transmitting the recommendations and indicating that the 5-Year Review has been completed, so USFWS can accept the recommendations or a portion of the recommendations. USFWS is reviewing the AMOC 5-Year Review process. The previous USFWS Regional Director was part of the AMOC timeline determination and now serves as USFWS Director. USFWS is investigating whether additional public comment needs to occur prior to accepting the AMOC recommendations. The USFWS is the lead agency on recommendations 1–14 and 33 (regulatory items), while AMOC is responsible for recommendations 15–32 and 34-37. AMOC recommended that USFWS document that the 5-Year Review is done, and accepted.

Action Item: The USFWS will meet with Brian Arroyo and move the recommendations acceptance process forward by February 2, 2006. John Morgart will determine which dates USFWS is available to meet with AMOC regarding progress on the recommendations.

L. New Mexico Participation Update

Chuck Hayes indicated that Bud Starnes had 5-Year Review Recommendations concerns regarding New Mexico not having sufficient input and might have further issues, depending on how the subcommittees are composed and what recommendations result from said committees. AMOC and the AMOC Directors accepted the recommendations at the December 8, 2005 meeting. NMDGF AMOC representative and the NMDGF Director feel that the recommendations process should not have gone directly to the directors without going through the AMOC committee and IFT. The Chair noted that the NMDGF AMOC representative and surrogate were absent from a number of November and December 2006 conference calls among AMOC regarding the recommendations and from the USFWS recommendations review on January 9, 2006. The participation opportunities were there, but NMDGF did not use them.

Action Item: Chuck Hayes will ensure that NMDGF is represented by himself or his surrogate at future AMOC meetings and conference calls.

M. Other Pending AMOC/IFT Action Items: August 2006 Workshop

Dave Bergman handed out a tentative agenda for the August Mexican Wolf Management workshop to be held at Hon-Dah on August 29–31, 2006. The banquet room and a block of 60 rooms are being held until 2 weeks prior to the starting date. It was questioned whether Paul Paquet could provide additional information beyond the Mark McNay presentation. AMOC discussed the possibility of helping fund some participant's travel costs. Bergman will work with Cynthia to determine conference costs. Bergman suggested having AMOC Directors serve as moderators.

Action Item: AMOC comments on draft agenda are due to Dave Bergman by February 5.

N. Budget update

Hector Ruedas will lead the Recommendation 37 action, requiring that a funding request be completed by February 28, 2006. NMDGF suggested that AMOC needs a congressional champion and support for an incentives program (Recommendation 12).

Action Item: AMOC will give Hector Ruedas a finalized FY07 needs list by February 28.

Wally distributed the FY 2006 Mexican Wolf Interagency budget for discussion. Each agency will provide footnotes defining the numerical references. Recently, there was a congressional inquiry on the program costs and it was identified that the EIS development was included in the costs. USFWS has Section 6 funds that can be used as dedicated wolf funds. \$170,000 USFWS funding is needed for non-personnel costs such as fixed wing flights, helicopter time, workshop funding, release pens and other operational expenses. NMDGF has unfunded Section 6 needs from 2005. AGFD suggested that the USFWS funds be distributed on a pro-rated basis based on state contributions to the 2005 budget. AGFD also suggested funding Recommendation 29 for a landowner-relations/animal husbandry position that works with ranchers in both states.

Action Item: Each agency will give Wally Murphy its FY06 and FY07 budget needs and footnotes defining numerical references by February 10.

Action Item: There will be an AMOC conference call on March 13 at 10:00am to discuss budgets.

O. December 21, 2005 Conference Call Action Items

Action Item: Terry will take over action item #5 to work with IFT on draft changes to SOP 17.0 and 18.0 addressing WMAT access issues.

Action Item #7 – (completed). IFT will continue to provide a clear distinction among collared, uncollared, pack, breeding pairs, packs, family groups and other terms used in all their communications.

Action Item #10 – (completed). It was reiterated that communications among AMOC and cooperators, especially on issues under active deliberation are not to be taken public until consensus is made among agencies.

Action Item #11 – (completed). This was a significant issue, resulting from a lack of NMDGF participation in AMOC conference calls during November and December 2005. It was brought up during the December 8, 2005 Director's Summit and reiterated again.

P. AMOC/AMWG Meeting Dates for 2006

February 13: 1:30pm. AMOC conference call to discuss unfinished action items (Wally - scoping rule changes).

March 13: 10am. AMOC conference call

April 20–21, Pinetop AZ. AMOC and AMWG meetings

July 20–21, Reserve NM. AMOC and AMWG meetings

August 29–31, Hon-Dah AZ. AMOC hosted workshop

October 19–20, Morenci AZ. AMOC and AMWG meetings

December 7, Phoenix AZ. Director's Summit

Q. Handouts

FYI handouts: Morgart - Dan Starks' research paper; Bergman - 1-page summaries of various research topics: Coordinating Research for the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program; Calculating the Asset Value of a Range Beef Cow; and Developing a Population Protocol for Mexican Wolves.

R. Carcass Movement

SOP #9: moving tested carcasses across county lines is now acceptable to NMDGF.

Action Item: Chuck will send text changes to Terry for an SOP update.

S. Mythbusters

Action Item: Chuck Hayes will provide the latest "mythbusters" document to Terry for conversion by AGFD to pdf for posting on the website.