

MEXICAN WOLF ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT WORK GROUP
Final Summary Notes for Meeting of April 21, 2006

Location: Arizona Game and Fish Department Pinetop Regional Office, 2878 East White Mountain Boulevard, Pinetop, AZ 85935
Date/Time: April 21, 2006: 1330– 1700 (AZ Time)
Host: Arizona Game and Fish Department
Participants: AMOC Lead Agencies: AGFD – Terry B. Johnson (Chair); NMDGF – Chuck Hayes; USDA APHIS WS – Dave Bergman; USFWS – John Oakleaf; WMAT – Cynthia Dale

AMWG Signatory Cooperators: Greenlee County AZ – Hector Ruedas

Ca. 30 members of the public.

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

Terry Johnson called the meeting to order at 1:30 pm. After a brief welcome and introductions, ground rules were given and the agenda reviewed, without changes made.

B. Translocations and New Releases in 2006

Chuck Hayes provided information about the two translocations in NM. The first is the North Seco site with the release on April 25th. This translocation will be two wolves (993 and 873) that were picked up for a boundary issue last year. The second translocation will be at one wilderness site later yet to be determined. This translocation will occur in early June. This will be a group of three animals, 2 female Francisco pups and a male that was captured for a boundary and depredation issue.

Terry Johnson talked about removal of the Hon-dah pack for depredation issues. It was also explained that the decision for proposed initial releases will be made the week of May 1st.

Shawn Farry provided information about initial release sites that may be used in 2006. Shawn explained the restrictions to initial releases within the primary recovery area and explained other factors that are used to determine the most appropriate location for release. Shawn then talked about the sites that are currently on the table for this year's releases. Rousensock and Bear Valley were presented as the preferred sites at the recent public meetings regarding potential initial releases in 2006.

C. 5-Year Review Outcomes and Implementation Actions

Terry Johnson gave an update on the 5-Year Review. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has given verbal approval for implementation of operational recommendations within the 5-Year Review, and work is beginning on these. Recommendations 1-14 will require USFWS rule and/or policy changes, and are still being reviewed. The 30-day public comment on the 5-Year Review closed on April 14. USFWS is reviewing comments that

were received regarding the 5-Year Review. If the comments warrant it, adjustments might need to be made in the work that is already underway. However, most of the work is simply gathering relevant information, so that seems to be unlikely.

D. General Discussion and Other Business

Comment: A concern was expressed that there is not enough open space for these animals and that there is continued loss of open space. As ranches are being squeezed out these lands become subdivisions, which will reduce water and create habitat fragmentation. It is vital that a closer look is taken at this or everyone will lose.

Comment: Rousensock could be a problematic release site due to low prey and reduction of available water from drought. Don't understand why this site was chosen for consideration.

Comment: If two releases added breeding pairs to the current number of 2005 breeding pairs that are still out, this would only allow for 6 breeding pairs at the end of 2006. Why are there not 3 or 4 initial releases proposed for this year.

Response: There are other free-ranging packs that have the potential to become breeding pairs in 2006. Additionally, initial releases can only occur in the Primary Recovery Zone, which currently has limited space for new wolf packs.

Comment: Is the Hon-dah Pack a two strike situation?

Response: Hon-dah is a four depredation "strikes" and one injury to livestock. One of the Hon-dah pack members has been removed.

Comment: When sites are evaluated is there consideration for separate water sources for wolves and livestock?

Response: Potential release sites do not require separate water sources for livestock, prey, and wolves. It is most important for water to be available for prey.

Comment: Would you release wolves into an area where you thought they would fail?

Response: No.

Comment: If USFWS modifies the recommendations from the 5-Year Review, will the public be informed?

Response: The public will be informed by a variety of informational outlets when USFWS acts on the 5-Year Review recommendations.

Comment: Recommendations call for an increase in wolf-related educational and outreach efforts (75% of the total) to be within the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area (BRWRA). Would the White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT) lands be considered part of the reintroduction project area for the purpose of these educational efforts?

Response: Yes, educational resources would be available to WMAT, to the extent they desire, as well as to other cooperating entities for use within the BRWRA, and to a lesser degree for educational efforts on a broader geographic scope.

Comment: The timeline for implementation of 5-Year Review recommendations shows that one deadline has been missed. Will this deadline be updated and will this timeline for all recommendations be reassessed?

Response: Yes, the timeline for all 5-Year Review recommendations will need to be re-evaluated.

Comment: Concerning the timeline for the 5-Year Review recommendations, why is the timeline to complete a plan for the subsequent programmatic review scheduled to be done before a rule revision is drafted?

Response: The timelines for completion do not represent a sequence of tasks with no overlap. The tasks mentioned above will at some times be occurring simultaneously. The drafting of the rule revision is expected to be a longer and more in-depth process, and therefore has a later completion date (by 3 months). Also, it was felt that developing the next programmatic review while the 5-Year Review process was fresh in everyone's minds would be beneficial.

Comment: Could litigation in Arizona change aspects of this project in the future?

Response: Yes, the reintroduction project could change in the future due to changes in law, biological factors, etc. This is the essence of adaptive management.

Comment: What are the genetic implications of a decline in reproduction of the captive population, and is the captive population in trouble?

Response: Captive wolves occur in multiple facilities spread across the United States and beyond. There is no reason to believe that the captive population is in trouble.

Comment: Why is there a need for expansion of the recovery area and expansion of the experimental area?

Response: The premise behind the recommendation for an expanded reintroduction project area is that the reintroduction can goal not be achieved, and a contribution to recovery and delisting of the Mexican wolf cannot be reached under the existing rule without accruing disproportionate effects to people and/or resources within the current reintroduction project area.

Comment: If there is expansion do you think that wolves will move into and occupy all of that area?

Response: No, wolves would use not all the areas. However, there are areas that almost surely would be used by some wolves.

Comment: If the 10(j) (experimental population) rule is opened up, would you expand the boundary down to the U.S.-Mexico border?

Response: Expansion could occur in any direction. There is no formal rule change recommendation that has been developed at this time. The 5-Year Review calls for interaction among the cooperating agencies, stakeholders, and others to develop a specific recommendation for revising the 10(j) rule.

Comment: Is there planning and movement toward reintroduction of wolves in Mexico?

Response: There is planning and movement in that direction, but no precise timeline for when and if it will happen.

Comment: By opening up the recovery area you increase the number of stakeholders and further complicate the process, what is the benefit to this action?

Response: The current area appears to be small to provide adequate habitat for the population goal of 100 wolves, without having disproportionate numbers of wolf-livestock interactions occurring within a relatively small area.

Comment: Is there any one on AMOC that believes that 125 wolves in the expanded area would constitute recovery?

Response: No. The number of 125 wolves was included simply as an arbitrary threshold for increased flexibility in applying management actions, not as a reintroduction or recovery goal. The number would be discussed extensively and no doubt revised through the processes inherent to the first 14 recommendations.

Comment: Has AMOC considered whether there is enough room for 100 wolves including the WMAT lands?

Response: AMOC currently considers WMAT as part of the recovery area, so inclusion of WMAT lands does not change the belief that there is a need to expand the reintroduction project area.

Comment: What is the reason for the cap of 125 wolves in the expanded area?

Response: The 125 is not a cap but a number of wolves at which there could be permits issued for take, not to reduce the population but to allow for more effective and efficient management actions. Again, the number 125 is primarily to establish a point of initial discussion and is not set in stone.

Comment: If SOP 13.0 is scrapped, then can wolf recovery be reached?

Response: No. If SOP 13.0 were scrapped, the public would be more likely to take wolf management into its own hands. SOP 13.0 allows for management of the population and response to conflicts that may occur.

Comment: Do we have assurance that completion of the recommendations of the 5-Year Review will not get in the way of on-the-ground management and recovery progress?

Response: It is impossible to foresee all future tasks associated with any project. The cooperating agencies have structured their participation in the Mexican wolf reintroduction project so that there are operational, field-based personnel, and administrative personnel who

deal with programmatic-level aspects of the Mexican wolf reintroduction project. So while there can be no guarantees that future workloads will not interfere with availability of staff for on-the-ground management, it is the intent to the cooperating agencies to have sufficient field-level staff to address wolf management and conservation issues as needed.

Comment: Concerning the 125 number, the point at which you would allow take, do you honestly think that it wouldn't become a cap for the population?

Response: It is not a cap. The recommendation says that if a need arises, there will be allowance for take. The odds are extremely low that the number would become a cap for the population. We have had management and control actions for this population since inception of the Mexican wolf reintroduction project, and it has been able to grow to its current size.

Comment: I can't believe that you would consider this type of management action when the population has been declining in the last few years.

Response: The recommendations contained within the 5-Year Review reflect a long-term view. They include measures believed necessary to move the population toward a Mexican wolf reintroduction project goal, and to more effectively manage the project both now and in the future.

Comment: The way this recommendation should have been set up is by not using a number but to say that the number needs to be established in the future using data.

Response: AMOC agrees. The proposed threshold for increasing flexibility of management actions (125 wolves) could and will be refined and modified by analysis of existing data, and information currently being collected. Again, the number of 125 wolves was developed as an arbitrary starting point, to stimulate thought and discussion of an appropriate threshold for these actions.

Comment: Is wolf recovery addressed in National Forest planning?

Response: AMOC includes a dedicated member and active participation from the U.S. Forest Service so that wolf-related considerations can be included within forest planning as needed.

E. Schedule and Locations of 2006 AMWG Meetings

AMWG: July 21, Reserve, NM, 1:30-5:00 pm

Blue Range Wolf Reintroduction Project Workshop, Aug. 29-30, Hon-dah Resort/Casino

AMWG: October 20, Morenci, AZ, 1:30-5:00 pm

Meeting adjourned at ~4:30 pm.