

MEXICAN WOLF BLUE RANGE REINTRODUCTION PROJECT¹

Management Decision: San Mateo Pack (AM1114 and AF903)

Final: September 12, 2008

DECISION OF LEAD AGENCY DIRECTORS:

The Lead Agency Directors considered the AMOC and IFT recommendations below on September 12, 2008 and USFWS conveyed their final decision via the following email message, sent Fri 9/12/2008 4:17:

Under the final 10(j) rule (50 CFR part 17) of January 12, 1998, the FEIS of November 1996, SOP 13.0 (Control of Mexican Wolves; dated October 2005) and the draft SOP 13.0 Clarification Memo (dated May 2008), two confirmed livestock depredation incidents on September 3 and September 8, 2008 by male Mexican wolf 1114, triggered a decision as whether this wolf should remain or be removed from the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area.

As per SOP 13 and the draft SOP 13.0 Clarification Memo, on September 10, 2008, the Interagency Field Team (IFT) made the recommendation to permanently remove via lethal control Mexican wolf M1114 (document attached). Their decision was based on the facts that wolf M1114 had four cumulative confirmed depredation incidents; removal would likely stop the depredation cycle, that he had not shown a strong pair bond with San Mateo female wolf F903, and had been in the area of three injured calves and one probable depredation. In a conference call on September 11, 2008, five of the six Adaptive Management Oversight Committee (AMOC) lead agency representatives (AGFD, NMDGF, USDA-WS, USFS, USFWS, and WMAT) and a representative of Greenlee County accepted the IFT's recommendation and recommended immediate permanent removal of wolf 1114. Five members recommended control by lethal means, while New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) recommended trapping the animal from its current location and translocating it into the Gila Wilderness in hopes that it would pair with F1028, who is currently traveling alone.

I fully appreciate the hard work that has gone into the IFT's, AMOC's and AMOC Director's recommendations. It is my intention to exercise the maximum flexibility in SOP 13.0, and I am making my decision in full consideration of the following:

1. Because of a significant number of recent unlawful and natural mortalities, as well as removal actions, in recent years the Mexican wolf 10(j) population has remained relatively stable, oscillating between 40 and 60 wolves. The lack of desired population growth is a matter of concern.
2. The history of the female in this pack includes a previous removal of an adult male (M796). Subsequent to this removal, F903's depredation incidences dropped. Removing or translocating M1114 may accomplish the same objective, and alter the depredating behavior of both animals. The likelihood of this possibility is enhanced because both

¹The Reintroduction Project is a state- and tribally-led collaborative effort among six Lead Agencies and five Signatory Cooperators. Lead Agencies are: Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD); New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF), USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services (WS), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT). Signatory Cooperators are: Graham, Greenlee, and Navajo counties, Arizona; New Mexico Department of Agriculture; and Sierra County, New Mexico.

wolves have exhibited good wild wolf behavior in terms of not having a history with human interaction.

3. It is unknown whether M1114 has a pair bond with F903. Denning behavior was observed in the spring, but no pups were ever documented with this pack. Based on telemetry location data for the past 3 months, the IFT cannot confirm if M1114 and F903 are a functioning alpha pair.
4. There is a desire to retain wild born wolves in the wild population. M1114 is a wild born wolf with unknown genetic origins.
5. There exists a potential to relocate this wolf within the Gila Wilderness to an area well away from livestock, people and where a genetically valuable female (F1028) has established a territory. F1028 is 25% Aragon and 25% Ghost Ranch lineage. If M1114 was to pair with F1028, there is a good chance he would stay within the wilderness where there are no permitted livestock.

Therefore, it is my decision to immediately translocate M1114 into the Gila wilderness. If, following translocation, M1114 returns to his prior home range where the depredation incidents occurred, he will be immediately removed.

Signed,
Benjamin N. Tuggle
Regional Director

AMOC RECOMMENDATION

In a conference call on September 11, 2008, all six AMOC Lead Agency representatives, a representative from Greenlee County, and three members of the IFT discussed the IFT recommendation regarding management action on San Mateo Pack AM1114, as a result of recent depredation incidents and other events within that pack's territory (i.e. livestock injuries inflicted by unknown wolves and one probable wolf depredation). After carefully considering all relevant information, including the draft Clarification Memo for SOP 13.0 (Control of Mexican Wolves), AMOC offered the following majority and minority recommendations:

1. AGFD, USDA-WS, USFWS, and WMAT recommend immediate permanent removal of AM1114 by lethal means, to reduce risk of additional livestock depredation or injury.
2. USFS also recommends immediate permanent removal of AM1114, but expresses no preference for lethal or non-lethal means.
3. NMDGF recommends immediate live capture of AM1114 for translocation to the Gila Wilderness, New Mexico, for release in proximity to Laredo Pack AF1028. AF1028 is thought to be unpaired, and is genetically valuable (50% McBride, 25% Ghost Ranch, and 25% Aragon lineage). The genetic history of AM1114 is unknown.

IFT RECOMMENDATION

By consensus among the AGFD, NMDGF, USDA-WS, USFS, USFWS, and WMAT lead representatives, the IFT recommends permanent removal of AM1114 by lethal means. This recommendation is based on the following:

1. AM1114 has been assigned four depredation incidents within a period of 365 days: March 29, 2008; June 26, 2008; September 3, 2008; and September 8, 2008. AM1114

was also implicated in a probable wolf depredation on July 13, 2008 and was in the area when non-fatal, wolf-caused livestock injuries occurred on July 30, August 4, and August 15, 2008.

2. The most efficient method of removal (lethal control) should be used to stop the depredation cycle as quickly as possible.
3. The scientific literature suggests that removing an adult male wolf is likely to disrupt pack behavior and cease depredation events.
4. Flight and ground telemetry indicate AM1114 was traveling separately from San Mateo Pack AF903 within the pack's territory between early July 2008 and late August. AM1114 was localized in the area in which three livestock injuries and one probable wolf depredation occurred during that period. AF903 was traveling more widely; no livestock depredations or injuries were reported where she was. AM1114 and AF903 began to be located together again after August 30, but based on bite marks only AM1114 was implicated in the depredation incidents that occurred on September 3 and September 8.

Minority Alternatives

If the above recommendations are not acceptable, in response to concerns regarding limited population growth the IFT proposes the following alternatives:

NMDGF, USFWS, and WMAT recommend trapping and translocating AM1114 to the Gila Wilderness to pair with the Laredo Pack female (AF1028).

USFS recommends trapping AM1114 and permanently removing it to captivity.

AGFD and USDA-WS do not concur with either minority alternative recommendation. They advocate only the original recommendation: lethal removal of AM1114.

BACKGROUND

All six Lead Agency IFT representatives discussed the depredation and other history of the current San Mateo Pack (AM1114 and AF903), the draft Clarification Memo for SOP 13.0 (Wolf Control), BRWRA wolf population dynamics (i.e. oscillation from 2003 through 2007 between 40 and 60 total known wolves), and recent unlawful and natural mortalities in the wild population (i.e. during 2007). All six representatives agreed that AM1114 alone is culpable for recent depredations (and possibly for three livestock injury events and one probable wolf depredation) in the San Mateo Pack's territory. Thus, all agreed that control action, whether removal or translocation, should be focused on AM1114.

All six IFT lead representatives also agreed that AF903, which has been assigned only two depredation incidents in the past 365 days, should be left in the wild and monitored closely to ensure that appropriate interdiction action is taken to minimize the risk of it depredating on livestock. History (see below) indicates that AF903 is not prone to depredation when it is not associated with a depredating male. This suggests that removal of AM1114 might result in AF903 remaining in the wild without immediate risk of depredation.

History of the San Mateo Pack (currently AM1114, AF903)

2004 (AM796 and AF903)

- By January, AM796 had dispersed to the San Mateo Mountains on the Cibola National Forest in New Mexico.
- During April, the IFT observed AM796 with an uncollared pregnant wolf, which was later assigned studbook number AF903. Genetic testing identified the female as possible offspring of the Gapiwi pair. Both wolves were outside the recovery area in the San Mateo Mountains.
- On May 1, the IFT investigated a depredated newborn calf carcass near the San Mateo Mountains. The kill was determined to be a confirmed wolf depredation by AM796 and uncollared female AF903.
- The pair was monitored extensively throughout the summer to confirm presence of a pup(s); however, no pup was confirmed.
- On August 11 and 22, AF903 and AM796 were captured, respectively, because they were outside the recovery area. They were transferred to captivity.
- On September 30, AM796 and AF903 self-released from a soft mesh translocation pen at McKenna Park New Mexico, in the Gila Wilderness. Approximately 20 days later, the pair returned to the San Mateo Mountains.
- In early December, contact with AM796 was lost when the newly affixed GPS collar prematurely dropped off.

2005 (AM796, AF903, mp927, mp928, fp929)

- On March 30 and April 2, AM796 and AF903, respectively, were trapped for persisting outside the recovery boundary. Both were transferred to the Sevilleta Wolf Management Facility in New Mexico.
- On April 6, AF903 whelped four pups in captivity; three pups survived.
- On June 13, the San Mateo Pack (AM796, AF903, mp 927, mp928, and fp929) was translocated to the ASNF, near Home Creek, Arizona. Radio collars were placed on both adults prior to translocation. All five wolves self-released that evening.
- In August, contact was lost with AM796's GPS collar.
- In November, the San Mateo Pack began to move, settling east of Escudilla Mountain, Arizona by the end of the year.

- In December, the pack was confirmed to consist of four animals, including AF903, two uncollared pups of the year, and a visually-confirmed AM796. The pack was confirmed as a “breeding pair” per the definition in the Final Rule.
- There were no confirmed mortalities in or depredations by the San Mateo pack in 2005.

2006 (AM796, AF903, m927, 2 uncollared pups)

- Early 2006, the pack was located in areas near the Arizona/New Mexico border.
- On February 23, the IFT observed two wolves; one was believed to be AM796. The IFT unsuccessfully tried to dart AM796 on several occasions to replace its failed radio-collar.
- On March 15, the IFT observed the San Mateo Pack near a dead calf. Subsequent investigation confirmed a wolf depredation. This was the first confirmed depredation incident for AM796 and AF903 in a 365 day period.
- On May 6, m927 was captured and fitted with a GPS collar.
- During July, AF903 exhibited denning behavior, but the IFT could not confirm pups.
- On August 27, two pups were observed with an uncollared adult wolf.
- On the September 11 telemetry flight, the IFT observed four to five wolves; at least one was a pup.
- On September 23, the IFT investigated a dead cow and calf in the San Mateo Pack’s territory. Wolves had not killed the cow but the calf was a confirmed wolf depredation. The pack consisted of AM796, AF903, and m927. This was the first depredation incident for m927, and the second for AM796 and AF903 in a 365-day period.
- On September 26, the IFT investigated an injured horse in Apache County, Arizona and confirmed that wolves caused the non-fatal injuries. Due to the location of the incident, it was attributed to the San Mateo Pack.
- On November 10, m927 was found dead. Necropsy determined the cause of death was asphyxiation on vomit after attack by other wolves, likely the Bluestem Pack, based on telemetry locations.
- As of December, the San Mateo pack consisted of four animals, including AM796, AF903, and two uncollared pups-of-the-year. Therefore, the San Mateo Pack was confirmed as a “breeding pair,” per the definition in the Final Rule.
- During 2006, the San Mateo Pack established a territory ranging from the east side of the Escudilla Mountain in Arizona to Black Peak in New Mexico.

- No removal or translocation involving the San Mateo Pack occurred in 2006.

2007 (AM796, AF903, 2 uncollared pups)

- During January, the San Mateo Pack continued to use areas east of Escudilla Mountain in the Apache National Forest, New Mexico.
- On January 31, the IFT investigated a calf carcass in the San Mateo Pack territory in New Mexico. Subsequent evaluations determined it to be a confirmed wolf kill. This was the third depredation incident in a 365-day period for AM796.
- On February 5, USFWS issued a permanent removal order for AM796 due to its involvement in three depredation incidents within a 365-day period. The removal order only applied to AM796, as examination of the canine bite measurements in two previous confirmed cattle depredation incidents and one horse injury were consistent with AM796.
- On February 20, the IFT lethally removed AM796 in an area east of Escudilla Mountain in New Mexico's Gila National Forest.
- During March, the San Mateo Pack continued to use areas east of Escudilla Mountain in the Apache National Forest in New Mexico.
- On April 9, the IFT investigated a freshly killed calf while monitoring AF903 and confirmed that AF903 was responsible for the mortality. This was the second depredation incident in a 365-day period for AF903.
- In June and July, the IFT documented possible denning behavior in the San Mateo Pack, based on location data.
- In August, the IFT no longer suspected the pack had pups, based on movements and observations of AF903 alone.
- From September through December, AF903 traveled widely throughout the central and west central portion of the Gila National Forest, including movements outside the BRWRA.

2008 (AM1114, AF903)

- On January 20, the IFT captured and collared an adult male wolf associated with AM903 and assigned it studbook number AM1114.
- On March 29, the IFT investigated a freshly killed calf and confirmed that wolves were responsible for the mortality. This was the first depredation incident for AM1114 and the second for AF903 in a 365-day period.

- On April 9, due to expiration of the deprecation incident on April 9, 2007, AF903 dropped from two deprecation incidents to one deprecation incident in a 365-day period.
- In April and May, the IFT documented possible denning behavior in this pack, based on location data.
- On June 26, the IFT discovered a dead cow on private land near the San Mateo Pack. The IFT confirmed the dead cow as a wolf kill. This was the second deprecation incident for AM1114 and AF903 in a 365-day period.
- On July 13, a 2-week old dead calf was discovered on East Sand Flats allotment, New Mexico. Telemetry indicated that only AM1114 was in the area. The IFT determined this to be a probable wolf deprecation.
- On July 30, an injured calf was discovered on the East Sand Flats allotment, New Mexico. The IFT confirmed the injuries as wolf caused. The calf remained alive following the injuries, therefore no deprecation incident was assigned.
- On August 4, an injured calf was discovered on the East Sand Flats allotment, New Mexico. AM1114 was in the area. The calf remained alive following the injuries, therefore no deprecation incident was assigned.
- On August 15, an injured calf was discovered on the East Sand Flats allotment, New Mexico. The injuries were to the same calf that was injured on July 30. AM1114 was in the area where the injuries occurred. The calf remained alive following the injuries, therefore no deprecation incident was assigned.
- On September 8, the IFT received and investigated a permittee deprecation report for the Canyon Del Buey Allotment, New Mexico. The investigation determined that a cow calf had been killed on September 3. USDA-WS confirmed the deprecation incident as a kill by a single wolf. All six Lead Agency representatives on the IFT agreed the incident should be assigned to AM1114, based on bite marks.
- On September 8, the IFT received and investigated a permittee deprecation report for the East Sands Flat Allotment (NW of Indio Canyon Tank), New Mexico. The investigation determined that a cow calf had been killed; the carcass was discovered and reported by the permittee about 12 hours prior to the IFT investigation. USDA-WS confirmed the deprecation incident as a kill by a single wolf. All six Lead Agency representatives on the IFT agreed the incident should be assigned to AM1114, based on bite marks.

Appendix 1. USFS confirmation of lawfully present livestock associated with each of the depredation incidents assigned to San Mateo AM1114. Note: Italicized information has been added to clarify the emails received from USFS Staff.

(1) 09/11/2008 09:57

John [Oakleaf],

This letter is to confirm that the Canyon Del Buey and the East Sandflat allotments are in, and continue to be in good standing with the National Forest, and the livestock in question were legally permitted on National Forest System Lands at the time the depredations occurred on August 8 [*sic; they occurred on September 3 and 8*], 2008.

Stan Towner
Range Mgt Specialist
Quemado Ranger District
(505)773-4678

(2) June 26, 2008 depredation incident occurred on private land, thus cattle were considered legally present without an associated email from USFS.

(3) 04/04/2008 11:38 AM

John [Oakleaf],

As per our conversation, this note is to confirm that the cattle in question were legally present on the Toriette allotment at the time (3/29/08) the depredation occurred. If you need any more supporting information regarding this, or anything else, please let me know.

Stan Towner
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