

# **Blue Range Mexican Wolf Reintroduction Project Adaptive Management Oversight Committee Standard Operating Procedure**

**Title:** Mexican Wolf Transport

**Number:** 24.0

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**Purpose:** This SOP provides context for conducting wolf transport, transfers and removals and complements SOPs 13.0 (Control of Mexican Wolves), 14.0 (Trap Preparation and Use), 15.0 (Helicopter and Aerial Gunning), 20.0 (Requirements for Pharmaceutical Storage, Access, and Record-Keeping), 21.0 (Handling, Immobilizing, and Processing Live Mexican Wolves), 22.0 (Chemical Darting), and 23.0 (Blood Collection, Handling, and Storage). It supersedes relevant sections of the 1998 Mexican Wolf Interagency Management Plan (USFWS 1998), and therefore represents, in part, the “Service Approved Management Plan” referenced in the Mexican Wolf Final Rule (50 CFR 17.84(k)).

**Exceptions:** None. Per SOP 2.0, AMOC must approve any exceptions to this SOP.

**Background:** Mexican wolves are often transported by vehicle between wolf management facilities (i.e. Sevilleta and Ladder Ranch) and the field, due to temporary removals, permanent removals, releases, and translocations. The IFT and wolf management facility caretakers strive to ensure that each animal is transferred and received in good condition. However, capture, transport, and handling inevitably involve risks. From 1998 to July 31, 2006, the IFT and wolf management facility caretakers transported wolves 217 times, resulting in three wolves (1.4%) dying during or shortly after removal and transport. Three other wolves died in captivity from disease (parvovirus) shortly after removal and transport. Although these types of mortalities are rare, the Project’s goal remains to minimize and ideally eliminate such occurrences. Therefore, the purpose of this SOP is to outline procedures that ensure proper evaluation, care, and handling of wolves prior to, during, and after transport of wolves.

## **Procedures:**

- (1) Personnel designated to remove and transport wolves must be authorized by their individual agency to do so.
  - a. Each agency will authorize individuals to handle wolves according to its own training guidelines and applicable permits.
    - i. USFWS requires permittees to have handled wolves in captivity and to attend the annual chemical immobilization training prior to being the lead on any handling event.
    - ii. Permitting requirements may vary among other cooperators in the Project. All persons transporting wolves must be aware that possession of a federal permit does not obviate the need to comply with applicable permitting requirements of other resource management agencies.

- b. Training is available to all cooperating agencies and includes yearly chemical immobilization training and opportunities to handle wolves at the Sevilleta and Ladder wolf management facilities.
  - c. Contact information for key personnel identified below (e.g. Ladder and Sevilleta wolf management facilities, and project veterinarians) is available in SOP 0.C: Key Contacts, or from the Alpine field office.
- (2) All employees handling wolves are expected to be familiar with and able to follow SOPs 20 through 23 prior to any handling event.
- (3) The IFT Incident Commander (IC) responsible for the trapping or capture activity will:
  - a. Coordinate with the Alpine field office and the appropriate wolf management facility prior to any removal operation so they know to which facility the wolf will be transported.
  - b. Ensure adequate staff is available to transport the wolf or wolves to the designated wolf management facility.
  - c. Notify a project veterinarian that a capture operation is being conducted so they are aware, and can be contacted, in case of emergency.
- (4) All wolves transported must be handled and processed in accordance with SOP 21.0.
- (5) If serious injuries are observed or there is other cause for concern for the well being of a wolf, it should be stabilized and transported immediately to a project veterinarian for evaluation. The decision on transfer to a veterinarian shall be made by someone experienced in wolf processing and health assessment, based on the following:
  - a. Overall health of the animal. Obvious injuries or health concerns, such as emaciation, trap wounds or symptoms of shock, would require transferring the animal immediately to a project veterinarian.
  - b. Individual jurisdiction. An individual agency might require all wolves captured within its jurisdiction to be immediately transported to a veterinarian for examination prior to transport to a wolf management facility.
- (6) Unless immediate transport is required to prevent imminent possibility of death, wolves should not be transported while they are under the effects of drugs (except for approved mild sedatives [e.g. butorphanal, or valium]), or with a trap on a foot or while hobbled or wearing a muzzle. Whenever possible, transport kennels should be taken to the wolf at the capture site. However, a physically restrained (i.e. muzzled and hobbled) wolf may be carried to a crate. For example, a physically restrained wolf might be taken to a processing site via a helicopter (see SOP 15.0 for a full description). Note: a noose pole is a restraint tool and should never be used to move or carry a wolf any distance.
- (7) For transport, use a Model 500 Vari-Kennel (40" long x 27" wide x 30" high), or its equivalent, with a bolt latch system. Dial latch systems are not suitable for wolf transport. The 500 Vari-Kennel is sturdy enough to withstand the rigors of shipping, is well ventilated, and is just large enough for a wolf to lie down, turn around, and stand. Shade cloth should be attached to the crate's doors and windows (plastic "zip" ties

work well for attachment) for added privacy/security for the wolf. During transport, the crate should be secured in the transport vehicle with tie-down straps and the doors wired shut for added security. Containers (e.g. water dishes) should not be placed in the crate. If necessary, use ice to provide water in the crate.

- (8) Wolves must be kept in kennels for as little time as possible and while in kennels they must be secured against escape and protected from harm. Kenneled wolves should be kept out of direct sunlight, especially in hot weather, and should not be kept in areas of excessive noise or commotion. Kennels should be covered by a light shade screen or tarp that does not inappropriately restrict air flow. If placed in a vehicle for transport, the vehicle must be well ventilated and the interior temperature monitored to ensure the wolves do not become hyper- or hypothermic. The maximum time to consider containing a wolf in a kennel is 24 hours.
- (9) Equipment such as nets, nooses, medical kits, and cell phones should be taken along during transport, in case problems arise.

**Approval:**

The Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project Adaptive Management Oversight Committee approved this SOP on January 28, 2007.