

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

**Title:** Media Production Access to the Field Project

**Number:** 25.0

**File Name:** MW SOP 25.Media Production Access to the Field Project.Final.20080507.doc

**Purpose:** This SOP establishes guidelines regarding evaluation of requests from professional media outlets to produce documentaries or other extended coverage of the Project that would require a significant presence in the field, thus precipitating the need for a Special-Use Permit from the USFS, and the process that such requests must go through for approval. It is intended to address requests for access to document Project field activities on National Forests within the Project area in Arizona and New Mexico. It does not apply to simple requests for information (e.g. a reporter calling AMOC or the IFT to ask a question), to media requests for access to Tribal Trust Lands, or to USFWS refuges or other properties serving the Project as wolf breeding or holding facilities.

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

**Background:** Media coverage can be a significant asset to Project outreach efforts and it can help improve public understanding of the realities of wolf reintroduction. Public interest in the Project is seemingly inexhaustible; this ensures that a broad variety of media interests will continually request access to document various activities, cover issues, etc. Access requests can range from simple inquiries for specific information (e.g. a phone call that can be handled immediately) to requests to videotape, photograph, or otherwise document the overall Project or a specific event, such as an initial release or translocation.

The Project strives to provide as much media access as possible to Project staff, facilities, and operations, when consistent with its primary obligation to manage wolves to contribute toward recovery while minimizing negative impacts on humans. However, some access requests, perhaps because of timing or the nature of the proposed activity (e.g. scope, intensity, logistics), must be modified or denied because of possible detrimental effects on wolves (e.g. noise or human presence-induced stress) or interference with essential IFT work (e.g. possible disruption of a release, translocation, or control action). Some can simply require more time and attention than the Project can provide.

Many, if not all, of the more complex access requests, if granted, require Special Use Permits from the USFS for accessing public lands in the Apache and/or Gila National Forests. This SOP is intended to help ensure that appropriate Project personnel review such media requests before Project access is granted, and that the media follow proper procedures to obtain approval for any USFS permit that is required. When reviewing a media request, the primary considerations are avoiding impacts upon the wolves, avoiding impacts on accomplishing IFT work objectives, and meeting USFS Special Use Permit requirements.

## **Procedures:**

1. When Project personnel or cooperating agencies receive a media request for production access, the request will be forwarded to the Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator (Recovery Coordinator) and to the Interagency Field Team Leader (IFTL) for the State or Tribal wildlife agency of jurisdiction, as well as the Public Information Officer (PIO) of the USFWS, and the designated wolf project PIO at the State or Tribal wildlife agency of jurisdiction. Requests will be evaluated on a first-come, first-considered basis by applying the criteria listed below. The first contact should request a film proposal in writing.
2. The IFTL and Recovery Coordinator will determine whether the request is reasonable (e.g. gives appropriate notice [lead time] and/or provides sufficient detail about the proposed project).
  - a. If more than one request is received for a particular event, and all requests cannot be accommodated, efforts will be made to have pool coverage of the event. For example, media outlets not chosen as the pool camera could make copies of a pool photographer's footage.
  - b. If the IFTL and Recovery Coordinator determine that media presence might cause undue stress to wolves, or where logistical constraints exist (e.g. remote release site), and access cannot be accommodated, the Project may offer stock photographs or footage.
3. During initial discussions with the requestor or review of the request, the IFTL and/or Recovery Coordinator will inform the requestor that, if access is granted, they will be asked to acknowledge the Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project in the finished product, provide a disclaimer in the finished product indicating that the agencies are not responsible for its content, and to voluntarily provide, free of charge, a copy of the finished product to the IFT (P.O. Box 856, Alpine, AZ, 85920), along with a signed release authorizing the Project to use the finished documentation from the requestor for the purpose of archival history and use the footage for education and training. These are truly requests and not conditions requisite to approval.
4. The IFTL and/or Recovery Coordinator will discuss the request with appropriate representatives of the State or Tribal wildlife agency of jurisdiction, and USFS if access to National Forest lands is requested, before making a decision on providing media access.
5. If access is recommended by the IFTL and Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator, they will:
  - a. Jointly agree on an IFT Liaison to oversee the proposed project, if it is eventually permitted by USFS; and
  - b. Provide the IFT Liaison and the appropriate USFS Forest Supervisor's Office and the appropriate Ranger District(s) with written affirmation of their initial approval and appropriate guidance on any constraints or special conditions the IFT Liaison will require of the proposed project; and
  - c. Refer the requestor to the appropriate USFS Ranger District(s) to request the required Special-Use Permit at least 30 calendar days prior to any activity on the ground to allow the USFS time to evaluate the effects of the proposed activity on the forest(s).

6. The USFS decision on the access request will be forwarded to the AMO Chair for distribution to AMOC Lead Agencies, Signatory Cooperators, and Public Information Officers within the Lead Agencies.
7. Special-Use Permit requests must be reviewed, including Section 7 consultation (if applicable) with USFWS, and approved by USFS before any commercial filming or photography can occur on national forests. The Recovery Coordinator and the appropriate USFWS Ecological Services Field Office (Arizona or New Mexico) coordinate these Section 7 consultations.
8. For each Special-Use Permit, the USFS will need an application containing an accurate and appropriately detailed description of the proposed activity, such as size of film crew, number of days of filming, mode of transportation, vehicle access, and other activities proposed on national forest lands (e.g. camping and proof of insurance).
9. Special-Use Permits are authorized for the appropriate Ranger District within a national forest, multiple districts on a National Forest, or for multiple National Forests. If multiple National Forests are involved, one National Forest will take the lead. If USFS issues a Special-Use Permit to provide access, it shall also provide appropriate Forest maps to the permittee.
10. The IFT Liaison will coordinate all Project-related logistics necessary to an approved access request, and provide appropriate guidance and direction to the media work crew. The IFT Liaison will ensure that recording activities mesh appropriately with essential Project operations, staff duties, and the safety of wolves and Project personnel.
11. To ensure the highest accuracy possible, the IFT Liaison, with assistance from the appropriate IFTL(s) and other Project staff, will offer to review narration scripts, draft productions, etc., prior to distribution/or release. The permitted media outlet can choose to decline such offers.

**Approval:**

The Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project Adaptive Management Oversight Committee approved this SOP (with Lead Agency Director concurrence) on April 22, 2008.

**Reference:**

Arizona Game and Fish Department Operating Manual rule L.1.7, Media Relations and Public Communications.