



Contact

Bruce Sitko (928) 367-4281
Public Information Officer

Arizona Game and Fish Department

NEWS RELEASE

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New wolf pack roaming eastern Arizona

PINETOP, Ariz. – A new pack of Mexican gray wolves is now roaming eastern Arizona as part of the reintroduction of the endangered species in the region. Last week, wildlife biologists placed the family group of four gray wolves in a temporary holding pen to acclimate them to their new home range near Middle Mountain in the Apache National Forest. The group, called the Meridian pack, consists of an alpha male and female and two 12-week-old pups.

Arizona Game and Fish Department officials report the pack chewed their way out of the nylon mesh, low-impact acclimation pen within five hours of being placed there on July 6. Shawn Farry, the department's wolf project field team leader, says the animals are now free-ranging and appear to be doing well.

"With this release, we are attempting to augment the breeding wolf population now in the wild and also to maintain the genetic diversity of the current population," Farry adds. "The Meridian pack joins nine other packs now living in the wild in the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area in Arizona and New Mexico."

The release site, about 10 miles southwest of Alpine, Ariz., has a signed, one-mile public closure surrounding it, ordered by the USDA Forest Service, to protect the wolves from disturbance. The closure will remain in effect while the wolves occupy the area.

The Arizona Game and Fish Department has been actively involved in Mexican wolf recovery efforts since the mid-1980s. In 1998, in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 11 wolves were released into the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area in eastern Arizona. In subsequent years, additional releases have occurred. Management activities have included public opinion surveys, public outreach and education, site feasibility studies, surveys along the Mexican border for naturally occurring wolves, intensive coordination with other cooperating agencies, and adaptive management with the public.

The reintroduction of the Mexican gray wolf is a cooperative, multi-agency effort of the Arizona Game and Fish Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, White Mountain Apache Tribe, USDA Forest Service and USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services.

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