

Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project Monthly Update

January 1 – 31, 2007

The following is a summary of Mexican wolf reintroduction project activities in Arizona on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests (ASNF) and in New Mexico on the Gila National Forest (GNF), collectively known as the Blue Range Wolf Reintroduction Area (BRWRA). Additional information can be obtained by calling (928) 339-4329 or toll free at 1-888-459-9653, or by visiting the Arizona Game and Fish Department Web site at <http://www.azgfd.gov/wolf> or by visiting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Web site at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/mexicanwolf>. Past updates may be viewed on either Web site, or interested parties may sign up to receive this update electronically by visiting <http://www.azgfd.gov/signup>. This update is a public document and information in it can be used for any purpose. The reintroduction project is a multi-agency cooperative effort among the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD), New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF), USDA Forest Service (USFS), USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services (USDA APHIS WS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT) located on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation (FAIR). Other entities cooperate through the Adaptive Management Work Group (AMWG) that meets quarterly in Arizona and/or New Mexico, including private individuals, organizations and tribes.

To view the wolf distribution map, which contains the previous three months of wolf aerial locations, please visit <http://www.azgfd.gov/wolf>. Under "Mexican Wolf Conservation and Management," scroll down to the links under "Distribution."

Please report any wolf sightings or suspected livestock depredations to: (928) 339-4329 or toll free at 1-888-459-9653. To report incidents of take or harassment of wolves, please call the AGFD's 24-hour dispatch (Operation Game Thief) at 1-800-352-0700.

Numbering System: Mexican wolves are given an identification number recorded in an official studbook that tracks their history. Capital letters (M = Male, F = Female) preceding the number indicate adult animals 18 months or older. Lower case letters (m = male, f = female) indicate wolves younger than 18 months or pups. The capital letter "A" preceding the letter and number indicate alpha wolves.

Definitions: For the purposes of the Monthly Update, a "wolf pack" is defined as two or more wolves that maintain an established home range. The Interagency Field Team (IFT) recognizes that wolves without radio telemetry collars sometimes form packs. If the IFT confirms that wolves are associating with each other and are resident within the same home range, they will be referenced as a pack.

CURRENT POPULATION STATUS

At the end of January, the collared population consisted of 31 wolves with functional radio collars dispersed among nine packs and five single wolves. This number is different from last month as the IFT captured five wolves from the Paradise, Aspen, Luna and Saddle packs and fitted them with radio collars during the end-of-year survey. The Meridian pack no longer exists due to the dispersal of AM806 to the Bluestem pack and f1028 traveling alone. M990, formerly of the Bluestem pack, is now considered separate from the pack. M991, formerly of the Bluestem pack, is now associating with the Rim pack. The San Mateo pack and single M863 have moved from Arizona to New Mexico.

The IFT completed its 2006 end-of-year survey in January. During the survey, the IFT observed 31 collared wolves and 18 uncollared wolves associated with collared wolves, for a total of 49 wolves observed. The IFT used tracks, scat and other sign to identify 10 additional wolves, bringing the minimum end-of-year wolf population estimate to 59. Among these 59 wolves, the IFT confirmed seven breeding pairs. A "breeding pair" is defined as an adult male and an adult female with at least two pups produced during the previous breeding season that survived until December 31 of the year of their birth.

IN ARIZONA:

Bluestem Pack (collared AM806, AF521, m1041 and f1042)

This pack is considered a breeding pair and consists of seven wolves observed during the helicopter population survey operation, four with functioning radio collars. Throughout January, the IFT located AM806, formerly of the Meridian pack, with AF521. Other members of the Bluestem pack continued making wide-ranging movements. The IFT located the pack in their traditional home range on the ASNF. M990 is separate from the pack and is no longer considered a Bluestem pack member. M991 is associating with the Rim pack and no longer considered a Bluestem pack member.

Hawks Nest Pack (collared AM619 and AF486 with a non-functional collar)

During the helicopter operation, the IFT observed three wolves with this pack, one with a functioning radio collar. The IFT located AM619 in its traditional home range northeast of the Big Lake area on the ASNF.

Rim Pack (collared AM991, AF858, M992 and m1043)

This pack is considered a breeding pair and consists of four wolves observed during the population survey, four with functioning radio collars. Throughout January, the IFT located M991, formerly of the Bluestem pack, with AF858 and located the pack within Rim pack traditional home range in the central portion of the ASNF. The IFT located pup m1043 separate from the alpha pair.

M990 (collared) – Formerly of the Bluestem pack

During January, the IFT located M990 on the FAIR and observed it with an uncollared wolf during the helicopter operation.

f1028 (collared) – Formerly of the Meridian pack

The IFT observed f1028 alone during the population survey. Throughout January, f1028 made wide-ranging movements. On the January 14 telemetry flight, the IFT located it in the northern portion of the recovery area in Arizona. By the end of January, the IFT located f1028 near its release site at Middle Mountain in Arizona.

FAIR:

Paradise Pack (collared M1044, M1045 and M795)

This pack is considered a breeding pair. On January 16, the IFT captured two wolves, M1045 and M795, with the Paradise pack and fitted them with radio collars. The IFT last located M795 in 2005, when it was traveling as a single wolf and before its radio collar failed. The pack remained in the northwest corner of the BRWRA and the northeast portion of the FAIR.

IN NEW MEXICO:

Aspen Pack (collared AF667, m1038, m1039, f1040, f1046 and uncollared AM512)

This pack is considered a breeding pair and consists of six wolves observed during the population survey, five with functioning radio collars. On January 23, the IFT captured f1046 and fitted it with a radio collar. Throughout January, the Aspen pack continued to use areas to the northeast and southeast of the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument.

Luna Pack (collared AM583, f1047 and uncollared AF562)

This pack is considered a breeding pair and consists of five wolves observed during the population survey, two with functioning radio collars. On January 23, the IFT captured f1047 and fitted it with a radio collar. During January, the Luna pack remained north of the Gila Wilderness.

Middle Fork Pack (collared AM871 and AF861)

This pack consists of two wolves observed during the population survey, both with functioning radio collars. Throughout January, the IFT located the alpha pair together in the central and northern portion of the Gila Wilderness.

Saddle Pack (collared AM732, AF797, M1007 and f1016)

This pack is considered a breeding pair and consists of five wolves observed during the population survey, four with functioning radio collars. On January 18, the IFT captured f1016 and fitted it with a radio collar. The pack remained in the northern portion of the Gila Wilderness.

San Mateo Pack (collared AF903 and AM796 with a non-functional collar)

This pack is considered a breeding pair and consists of four wolves observed during the population survey, one with a functioning radio collar. During January, the San Mateo pack continued to use areas east of Escudilla Mountain in the Apache National Forest in New Mexico. On January 31, the IFT confirmed that AM796 was involved in a calf depredation. This is the third depredation incident for AM796. See Incidents below for more information.

M863 (collared)

The IFT observed M863 alone during the population survey. M863 continued to make wide-ranging movements from New Mexico to Arizona and back to the northern portion of the GNF in New Mexico.

F923 (collared)

The IFT observed F923 alone during the population survey. During January, the IFT located F923 in New Mexico in the east-central portion of the GNF.

M925 (collared) – Formerly of the Luna pack

The IFT observed M925 alone during the population survey. M925 made dispersal movements, and the IFT located it widely separate from the Luna pack.

INCIDENTS

On January 9, the IFT investigated a report of a dead horse on private property in Grant County, New Mexico. The IFT confirmed that wolves killed the horse. Because of the incident location, the IFT believes Aspen pack AM512 was responsible. The IFT was unsuccessful at capturing and removing uncollared AM512 during the end-of-year helicopter survey operation and thus began intensive daily hazing efforts of the pack from the area. The pack has since moved back into the Gila Wilderness Area and efforts to remove AM512 have ceased at this time, barring additional incidents. The IFT will continue to monitor the pack closely.

On January 9, the IFT discovered two cow carcasses in Catron County, New Mexico. On January 10, the IFT investigated the carcasses, but was unable to determine the cause of death due to the advanced state of decomposition of both carcasses.

On January 13, the IFT investigated an injured sheep in Catron County. The investigation determined that dogs were responsible.

On January 16, the IFT discovered a cow carcass in Apache County, Arizona. On January 18, the IFT investigated the carcass, but was unable to determine the cause of death due to the advanced state of decomposition.

On January 18, the IFT investigated a cow carcass in Catron County. The investigation revealed that wolves were not involved, and the cow died of unknown causes.

On January 25, the IFT investigated a dead calf in Catron County. Based tracks and observations of wolves in the area, the IFT investigation determined it was a possible wolf depredation.

On January 25, the IFT investigated an injured miniature donkey in Grant County. The investigation determined that dogs were likely responsible.

On the evening of January 26, the IFT received a report of a wolf near houses in Catron County observed by a resident while riding her horse. The IFT hazed the wolf from the area the next morning. The IFT suspects, based on visual information provided by the rider, that the wolf was F923.

On January 27, the IFT investigated a cow carcass in Catron County. There was very little left of the carcass; however, the IFT determined it to be a possible wolf depredation, based on tracks in the area.

On January 29, after receiving two sighting reports of wolves the previous day near Mule Creek along the Arizona-New Mexico border, the IFT investigated and visually confirmed the two animals to be feral dogs. At the time of the investigation, one had been struck and killed by a vehicle on Highway 78, while the other remained close by.

On January 30, the IFT investigated a horse carcass in Catron County. The IFT was unable to determine the cause of death, but the investigation revealed it was not wolf-related.

On January 30, the IFT investigated the remains of two calves in Catron County discovered by the IFT while searching for M863. The investigation was unable to determine the cause of death due to lack of remains. Upon leaving the area, the IFT investigator discovered another calf that was determined to have died from natural causes.

On January 31, the IFT investigated an injured dog in Catron County. The investigation confirmed that a wolf had injured the dog.

On January 31, the IFT investigated a cow carcass in Catron County. The IFT determined that it was a possible wolf depredation.

On January 31, the IFT investigated a calf carcass in the San Mateo pack territory in New Mexico. The initial investigation did not reveal any evidence of wolf involvement, but further evaluation on February 1 determined it to be a confirmed wolf kill. This is the third depredation incident for San Mateo pack AM796.

CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

On January 30, captive management personnel separated two pairs of wolves at the Ladder Ranch Wolf Management Facility to prevent breeding.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

On January 11, Shawna Nelson gave a presentation at the 14th Annual Wings Over Willcox Birding and Nature Festival to 35 members of the public in Willcox, Arizona.

On January 17, Maggie Dwire gave a presentation to the New Mexico Mountain Club in New Mexico to 65 people.

On January 27, the Adaptive Management Work Group (AMWG) held a meeting at the Apache Gold Resort and Casino on the San Carlos Apache Reservation to discuss end-of-year population results; time line and progress to date for the 2007 Annual Work Plan; possible translocations and new releases; outreach priorities; and progress on the 5-Year Recommendations. Approximately 15 members of the public attended.

On January 31, Shawna Nelson gave four presentations to 76 seventh grade ecology students at Round Valley Middle School in Eagar, Arizona.

PROJECT PERSONNEL

On January 16, Ellen Heilhecker started her position as the NMDGF Wolf Biologist.

On January 3, Jen Timmer began as a USFWS volunteer for the project.

On January 3, Mark Winteroud began as a USFWS volunteer for the project.

On January 5, Andy Bennett began as a USFWS volunteer for the project.

REWARDS OFFERED

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is offering a reward of up to \$10,000 and the Arizona Game and Fish Department Operation Game Thief is offering a reward of up to \$1,000 for information leading to the conviction of

the individual(s) responsible for the shooting deaths of Mexican wolves. A variety of public interest groups are offering an additional \$35,000, for a total reward amount of up to \$46,000, depending on the information provided.

Individuals with information they believe may be helpful are urged to call one of the following agencies: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service special agents in Mesa, AZ, at (480) 967-7900, in Alpine, AZ, at (928) 339-4232, or in Albuquerque, NM, at (505) 346-7828; the White Mountain Apache Tribe at (928) 338-1023 or (928) 338-4385; Arizona Game and Fish Department Operation Game Thief at 1-800-352-0700; or New Mexico Department of Game and Fish Operation Game Thief at 1-800-432-4263. Killing a Mexican wolf is a violation of the Federal Endangered Species Act, and can result in criminal penalties of up to \$50,000 and/or not more than one year in jail, and/or a civil penalty of up to \$25,000.