

Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project Monthly Update

May 1 – 31, 2006

This 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). 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 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Web site at <http://mexicanwolf.fws.gov>. Past updates may also 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-APHIS Wildlife Services (USDA-WS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT). Other entities cooperate through the Adaptive Management Work Group that meets quarterly in Arizona and/or New Mexico, including the San Carlos Apache Tribe (SCAT), the Turner Endangered Species Fund (TESF) and Defenders of Wildlife.

Due to current denning behavior and the sensitivity of den location information, the latest wolf distribution map will provide wolf pack home range information rather than the most recent three months of wolf aerial locations. To view this map, 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 the history of all known Mexican wolves. 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 reasonably resident within the same home range, they will be referenced as a pack.

CURRENT POPULATION STATUS

As of the end of May, the collared population consisted of 19* wolves with functional collars dispersed among nine packs, including a single wolf.

* See the Hon-Dah and San Mateo Packs and M864 below for more detailed information.

SEASONAL NEWS

Mexican wolf pups are generally born mid-April to mid-May. The IFT is actively monitoring denning females in order to document wild-born pups. Based on location information, the IFT has documented denning behavior in seven packs.

IN ARIZONA:

On May 19, project personnel confirmed three wolves in the northwestern portion of the ASNF in Arizona that may represent a new pack. The IFT has placed traps in the area to capture, identify and place radio collars on the members of this pack.

Bluestem Pack (collared AF521, AM507, M990 and m991)

The IFT located the alpha pair, AF521 and AM507, with M990 and m991 throughout May within the pack's traditional home range in the eastern portion of the Fort Apache Indian Reservation (FAIR) and west-central portion of the ASNF.

Hawks Nest Pack (collared AF486 and AM619)

This pack continued to use its traditional home range northeast of the Big Lake area on the ASNF. The IFT located AF486 and AM619 together throughout May, however on May 30, project personnel located the pair seven miles apart. Visual observations continue to confirm only the presence of the alpha pair.

Hon-Dah Pack, located on the FAIR

Implementation of the USFWS permanent removal order for the Hon-Dah Pack, issued on April 19 at the request of the WMAT Tribal Council, continued this month. On May 19, IFT personnel removed six of seven pups from a den site on the FAIR. The USFWS attempted to cross foster the pups with a surrogate adult pair that had two pups of their own; however, the alpha male of the captive pack rejected the Hon-Dah pups and killed them. The IFT assumes that a seventh pup, not captured with the others, is dead, since the alpha female was removed when the pups were still dependant, and, therefore, could not have survived on its own.

On the evening of May 21, IFT personnel captured the Hon-Dah Pack alpha female. They later assigned it studbook number AF1027. The IFT transported AF1027 to the wolf project field office in Alpine, Arizona, that evening; however, it was found dead early the next morning. A necropsy is pending to determine the cause of death.

As efforts to trap and remove AM578 since April 19 had been unsuccessful, IFT personnel initiated lethal control efforts on May 22. On May 24, an IFT member lethally removed AM578. One yearling from the Hon-Dah pack remains in the wild; however, the control effort to remove the pack is now considered to be complete.

Rim Pack (collared AF858 and AM992)

Throughout May, the IFT located the Rim Pack within their traditional home range in the central portion of the ASNF.

San Mateo Pack (collared AF903, m927 and AM796, with a non-functional collar)

During May, the San Mateo Pack continued to utilize areas east of Escudilla Mountain near the Arizona/New Mexico border. On May 6, project personnel captured yearling m927, released as a 10-week old pup with the pack on June 16, 2005, and fitted it with a Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) collar. Based on GPS locations, the IFT located m927 with AF903 throughout May.

IN NEW MEXICO:

Aspen Pack (collared AF667 and uncollared AM512)

Throughout May, the IFT located the Aspen Pack in the eastern portion of the Gila Wilderness.

Luna Pack (collared AM583 and m925 and uncollared AF562)

The alpha pair, AF562 and AM583, as well as yearling m925, remained within their traditional home range area in the central portion of the GNF.

Middle Fork Pack (collared F861 and M871)

Throughout May, the IFT located these two wolves together along the northwestern periphery of the Aspen Pack's core-use area in the central portion of the Gila Wilderness.

Nantac Pack (collared AF873 and AM993)

The pack remained in the general vicinity of its translocation site for approximately two weeks, and then moved several miles to the north before returning south into the Aldo Leopold Wilderness (see "Incidents" below).

Saddle Pack (collared AF797 and uncollared AM732)

During May, the Saddle Pack continued to use traditional Saddle Pack home range areas in the southern portion of the GNF. The IFT located m1007 with Saddle Pack AF797 throughout May.

SINGLE WOLVES

Collared M864, New Mexico

Throughout most of May, the IFT located M864 near the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area (BRWRA) boundary. On May 28, IFT personnel lethally removed M864 for involvement in three depredation incidents (see “Incidents” below).

Collared m1007, New Mexico

During May, the IFT located m1007 in the Saddle Pack territory in the eastern portion of the BRWRA. On May 1 and 8, the IFT documented m1007 with the Saddle Pack alpha female.

INCIDENTS

On May 6, IFT personnel discovered a dead bull in the area where the Nantac Pack was located the previous day. The rancher in the area revealed that the bull had died of an illness; however, the wolves had scavenged on the carcass.

On May 24, WS IFT personnel investigated a report of two collared wolves, likely the Nantac Pack, in the vicinity of a dead calf. It was determined to be a probable wolf kill.

On May 23, WS IFT personnel investigated a dead cow in Catron County. The investigation revealed no wolf involvement and that the cow likely died from old age or illness. The WS IFT found no evidence of wolves in the area, and determined that coyotes had fed on the carcass.

On May 24, WS IFT personnel confirmed that M864 killed a cow in Catron County. This was the third depredation incident for M864; therefore, the USFWS issued a permanent removal order the following day. On May 28, IFT personnel lethally removed M864, consistent with the permanent removal order.

CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Nothing new to report.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

On May 11, Shawn Farry provided a presentation to approximately 50 Grand Canyon National Park Service employees and volunteers at the Grand Canyon.

On May 12, Dan Groebner provided wolf natural history information to 50 Show Low first grade students at the Show Low Historical Museum.

On May 13, Shawna Nelson worked a wolf information booth at the Payson Wildlife Fair. She contacted approximately 1,500 people during this event.

On May 16 and 17, Shawna Nelson participated in the Southwest Wolf Information Network (SWIN) in Albuquerque, NM. The purpose of the network, comprised of stakeholder organizations and government agencies, is to develop and provide the public with wolf information that is accurate, balanced and respectful.

PROJECT PERSONNEL

On May 15, USFWS volunteer Marc Criffield left the project to begin a temporary position with the NMDGF as a wolf technician for the Mexican Wolf Reintroduction Project.

On May 12, Colleen Buchanan, USFWS Assistant Recovery Coordinator, resigned after eight years of dedicated service. Thank you, Colleen, for all of your hard work.

On May 23, Jerod Merkle began as a USFWS volunteer for the project. Last May, Jerod was involved in the project analyzing Mexican wolf scat as a University of Arizona intern with the Undergraduate Research Program.

On May 30, Brynn Nelson and Nicole Heywood began working with the project as USFWS volunteers. They will be assisting the IFT with wolf monitoring and predation research.

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 gray 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.