

Mexican Wolf Reintroduction Project Monthly Update

July 1 – 30, 2005

This is a summary of Mexican wolf reintroduction project activities in Arizona on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests (ASNF) and 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-WOLF (9653), or by visiting the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service web site at <http://mexicanwolf.fws.gov>. Past updates may also be viewed on this web site or interested parties may sign up to receive the update electronically by visiting <http://azgfd.gov>. This update is public property and can be used for any purpose. The reintroduction project is a multi-agency cooperative effort among the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD), New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF), USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services (USDA-WS), USDA Forest Service (USFS), the White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT) on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation (FAIR), the San Carlos Apache Tribe (SCAT) on the San Carlos Apache Reservation (SCAR), and other supporting organizations including the Turner Endangered Species Fund (TESF) and Defenders of Wildlife (DOW).

Please report any wolf sightings or suspected livestock depredations to: (928) 339-4329 or toll free at 1-888-459-WOLF (9653). To report incidents of take or harassment of wolves, please call the Arizona Game and Fish Department'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 sub-adults, younger than 18 months or pups. The capital letter "A" preceding the letter and number indicate alpha wolves.

Definitions: For the purpose of this update, a "wolf pack" is defined as two or more wolves that maintain an established territory and are proven breeders. In the event that one of the two alpha wolves dies, the remaining wolf, regardless of pack size, retains the pack name. A "group" of wolves is defined as two or more wolves that travel together on a consistent basis, but are not proven breeders. The Interagency Field Team (IFT) recognizes that uncollared wolves may form a group or a pack. If they are confirmed through trapping, sightings or other field methods, they will be included in the appropriate category.

CURRENT POPULATION STATUS

As of the end of July, the collared population consisted of 22 wolves in nine packs and five lone wolves. Estimates of uncollared wolves are best made when wolves are most visible, and when populations fluctuate the least. The annual mid-winter estimate of uncollared wolves for 2005 will be provided in the January 2006 monthly update. The number of breeding packs is a better measure of population growth and stability than absolute population size.

In Arizona: Bluestem Pack (AF521 and AM507), Hawks Nest Pack (AF486) (radio collar is not functioning), Rim Pack (AF858), San Mateo Pack (AF903, AM796, and pups m927, m928 and f929) and lone wolves f872, f873 and Cienega female (AF487), which is no longer identified as a pack. Hon-Dah Pack (AM578) and lone wolves F613 and M795 were located on the FAIR.

In New Mexico: Aspen Pack (AF667, AM512, m871, and pups m973, m974 and f975), Luna Pack (AF562 and AM583), Ring Pack (AF799), Saddle Pack (AF797, and collared pups f861, f862, m863 and m864).

Observation reports of wolves from the public are important, and should be reported immediately as many of the wolves are currently dispersing. All wolf-sighting reports are recorded and evaluated. Please call the toll free number listed above to report a wolf sighting as soon as possible after the sighting. Thank you for your help.

MONITORING

Field efforts continue to focus on placing radio collars on free-ranging wolves, monitoring wolf activity, reproduction and recruitment, as well as on confirming other uncollared wolves in the wild.

In Arizona: On July 6, IFT personnel initiated trapping activities in the northeastern portion of the recovery area to capture and place a radio collar on wolves belonging to what may be a new pack. Currently, no collared wolves are known to occupy this area. The IFT coordinated with the permittees and the Alpine Ranger District to delay movement of cattle directly into the area where the uncollared wolves were observed. On July 8, ASNF personnel issued a temporary closure for the area occupied by the wolves, which remained in effect until noon on July 16. The order allowed for day-use recreation, however, overnight camping was not permitted due to activities associated with trapping and monitoring. Because of the lack of any recent wolf sign in the area, the IFT suspended trapping activities on July 24, and normal cattle rotations have been resumed. Should the IFT observe any new sign of this pack, they will immediately resume trapping.

On July 26, IFT personnel set traps in the traditional Hawks Nest Pack territory to capture and place radio collars on any wolves in the area.

After almost two weeks of effort, the IFT ceased trapping activities for any uncollared wolves in the traditional Cienega Pack territory due to lack of wolf sign. The purpose of the trap line was to capture and place a radio collar on any wolves still using the area.

On July 22, in response to a public observation of two to three wolves in the traditional home range of Rim Pack AF858, project personnel set traps to capture and place collars on any uncollared animals in the area. They pulled the traps after six days due to lack of sign in the area.

The newly translocated San Mateo Pack moved a few miles away from their release site in the ASNF.

The IFT located yearling f873 on the SCAR, as well as on the FAIR this month. They located yearling f872 in the northwest portion of the recovery area.

The IFT located the Bluestem, Cienega, Hon-Dah and Rim Packs, along with lone female 613 and lone male 795, in their traditional home ranges on either the ASNF or the FAIR.

In New Mexico: By analyzing blood samples, the USFWS Laboratory in Ashland, Oregon, confirmed that the wolf captured June 18 in the GNF, as a result of the USFWS control action issued for the Francisco Pack, is Francisco Pack AM904.

IFT personnel have set traps for the Luna Pack in attempt to capture and place a Global Positioning Satellite collar on a member of the pack as part of a Master's student's project looking at predation and depredation patterns.

On July 21, IFT personnel observed three pups with the Luna Pack. Later, on July 30, they observed four pups with the pack.

On July 31, IFT personnel observed two pups with the Saddle Pack.

The newly translocated Aspen Pack remained in the area of their release site in the Gila Wilderness.

The IFT located the Luna, Ring and Saddle Packs in their traditional home ranges within the GNF.

INCIDENTS

On July 2, WS personnel confirmed that yearling f872 was responsible for a domestic sheep depredation found earlier by IFT personnel during routine monitoring on the ASNF. This is the second confirmed depredation for f872. IFT personnel hazed the yearling from the area, and are monitoring this wolf's movements on a daily basis. On July 4, the IFT located f872 over seven miles from the depredation site. On July 5, IFT personnel located the wolf in the vicinity of a cow carcass. WS investigated the carcass, and determined it not to have been the result of a wolf depredation.

On July 25, with approval of the Adaptive Management Oversight Committee (AMOC), the IFT pulled traps set for Ring Pack female 799, 37 days after the last known depredation. IFT personnel were unsuccessful in darting the female on the previous Saturday, and did not conduct further darting attempts because of logistical constraints. They will monitor the wolf and continue to provide supplemental food until August 25, as described in the most recent IFT recommendation. They will also continue to search for new depredations in the area, and will reinstate trapping if additional depredations occur.

CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

On the morning of July 21, Francisco Pack AF511 overheated during a routine capture and check-up. Despite immediate veterinary care and follow-up treatment, it died sometime later. Female 511 was at the Sevilleta Wolf Management Facility near Socorro, New Mexico, with its mate, M904, its four pups and offspring yearling male, M919. None of the other wolves experienced any complications, and their health appears to be good. USFWS personnel expect the two males to step into the role of caregiver for the four pups.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

On July 1, Shawna Nelson gave a wolf presentation in Alpine to 17 high school students and instructors from Cottonwood Gulch, Wilderness Expedition of New Mexico.

On July 7 and 19, Shawna Nelson gave several wolf presentations in Alpine to 66 high school students and staff from the Timber Trails Children's Project of Phoenix.

On July 26, Dan Groebner provided a wolf project update to 11 people at a Pinetop-Lakeside Parks and Recreation summer program.

On July 27, Shawna Nelson participated in a "History in the Park 2005" program in Show Low that emphasized the history of the area with hands-on activities for 32 young children.

On July 27, AGFD Region I personnel Bruce Sitko and Dan Groebner met with Phoenix-based Information and Education Division personnel Karen Schedler and Eric Proctor to review and fine-tune the draft web-based wolf curriculum that the Environmental Education staff has designed, which teachers and students will be able to freely access. The curriculum meets and meshes with a variety of state education standards.

PROJECT PERSONNEL

Shannon Grubbs, a USFWS volunteer, left the Project July 31 to begin a Master's project on urban coyotes with the University of Arizona.

Jonas Hustito, an intern with the USFWS, left the Project July 25 to return to the New Mexico Zuni Fish and Wildlife Program.

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. An additional \$35,000 is being offered by a variety of public interest groups for a total amount of up to \$46,000, depending on the information provided.

Anyone 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, or Springerville, AZ at (928) 333-5245, or 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 hotline at 1-800-352-0700; or New Mexico Department of Game and Fish Operation Game Thief hotline at 1-800-432-4263.

Killing a Mexican gray wolf is a violation of the federal Endangered Species Act, and can invoke criminal penalties of up to \$50,000 and not more than one year in jail and/or a civil penalty of up to \$25,000.