

Mexican Wolf Reintroduction Project Monthly Update

August 1 – 31, 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 wolves without radio telemetry collars 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 August, the collared population consisted of 22 wolves in nine packs, with four lone wolves. Of these 22 wolves, the IFT maintained contact with 20 wolves through the end of August. They lost contact with two wolves, f862 and M795, however, per protocol, they will not be designated "fate unknown" until three months has elapsed without contact. Estimates of uncollared wolves are best made when wolves are most visible, and when populations fluctuate the least. The final population estimate of wolves for 2005 will be provided in the January 2006 monthly update. The IFT has documented at least seven packs with pups in 2005. They also documented reproduction by a newly discovered uncollared pack in late June.

The current, mid-year population estimate is 51-63 wolves in the wild. Pack estimates are provided below.

In Arizona: Bluestem Pack (AF521, AM507, four to six uncollared wolves and three pups), Hawks Nest Pack (AF486 having non-functional collar, but visually confirmed several times in August, AM619 and no confirmed pups), Rim Pack (AF858, two uncollared wolves and at least one pup), San Mateo Pack (AF903, AM796, and uncollared pups m927, m928 and f929), sub-adult f873 traveling with an uncollared wolf, and lone wolves Cienega F487 and M795. Based on an agreement with the FAIR, information such as population estimates for Hon-Dah Pack (AM587) and F613 is not made public.

In New Mexico: Aspen Pack (AF667, AM512, sub-adult m871, and uncollared pups m973, m974 and f975), Luna Pack (AF562, AM583 and four pups), Ring Pack (AF799 and at least two pups), and Saddle Pack (AF797, sub-adults f861, f862, m863, m864 and at least two pups).

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.

With fall hunting season getting underway, hunters can be instrumental in helping manage wolf populations. Hunters, please help the IFT manage wolves by reporting wolf observations to your local game and fish department. 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 August 1, IFT personnel captured and re-collared Hawks Nest AM619 in traditional Hawks Nest territory. They had lost contact with AM619 in October 2004. The IFT maintained contact with the pack via AF486 until May 2005, at which time the collar of AF486 failed. These collars likely failed because their batteries had greatly exceeded their expected life. On August 14, IFT personnel observed Hawks Nest AM619 with a wolf with a non-functional collar that matched the color of the one on AF486.

The newly translocated San Mateo Pack remained a few miles away from their release site in the ASNF. IFT personnel observed all three pups with the pack on August 2.

On August 13, IFT personnel observed Bluestem AF521 with three pups and two additional uncollared wolves, other than AM507. The minimum count for the pack at this time is seven, including AM507. At the time of the observation, the IFT also heard as many as four additional wolves howling in the vicinity of the Bluestem Pack, indicating a maximum pack count of 11.

On August 13, one Rim Pack pup responded during a howling survey, although more pups may have been present.

The IFT last located lone wolf M795 on August 1. The radio collar battery has likely failed, as it had a life expectancy of 19 months, yet had been functioning for the last 34 months.

Sub-adult f873 remained on the SCAR this month. The IFT notified tribal personnel of its status on a weekly basis.

Cienega F487 continued to range widely during August, traveling more than 40 miles and moving through territories occupied by the Rim, Hawks Nest, San Mateo and Iris Packs.

The IFT initiated a trapline for what may be members of the Iris Pack near the location of recent sign discovered on the FAIR. Confirmation of the Iris female has been more difficult since the only collared wolf in the pack, AM798, died in May 2005.

The IFT located the Bluestem, Hawks Nest, Hon-Dah and Rim Packs, along with lone wolves F613, M795 and Cienega F487, in their traditional home ranges on either the ASNF or the FAIR.

In New Mexico:

On August 1, IFT personnel observed two pups with the Saddle Pack. Saddle Pack sub-adult f862 has not been located since July 18, despite search efforts.

During August, IFT personnel set traps within the Luna Pack home range to capture and place a Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) collar on a member of the Luna Pack as part of a Master's student project. They suspended trapping suspended after approximately three weeks; no wolves were captured.

The Aspen Pack moved several miles from its release site, but remained in the Gila Wilderness.

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

INCIDENTS

On August 22, IFT and USFWS law enforcement personnel investigated a report in New Mexico from a landowner of a potential wolf carcass found in a metal water tank. He also reported finding a smaller canid carcass outside the tank. The IFT determined that the carcass inside the tank was that of a decomposed dog with a shock collar. They also determined that the smaller carcass was a coyote.

On August 28, IFT personnel found lone female 872 dead at a site in Arizona south of State Highway 260 and east of State Highway 273. USFWS law enforcement is investigating the cause of death. On the same day, WS IFT personnel investigated two domestic sheep carcasses about a quarter mile away from where 872 was found dead. They determined one sheep to be a confirmed wolf kill, and the other sheep to have died after being struck by lightning.

CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Nothing new to report.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

On August 5, Shawna Nelson provided a wolf project update to 45 campers at Hoyer Campground near Greer, AZ.

On August 13, Dan Groebner provided a project update to 21 campers at the Fool Hollow Campground, near Show Low, AZ.

On August 23, Dan Groebner and Shawna Nelson conducted howling surveys for uncollared wolves with the assistance of AGFD Nongame Branch personnel who volunteered their time after attending a Nongame Branch meeting at the Sipe White Mountain Wildlife Area. Only coyotes and spotted owls responded during the survey on Escudilla Mountain.

Members of the six cooperating agencies in the Mexican Wolf Reintroduction Project attended the Mexican Wolf Directors Summit held at Hannagan Meadow Lodge on August 25 and 26. Participants included Directors from the AGFD, NMDGF, Arizona and New Mexico Wildlife Services, and Regional Offices of the USDA-USFS, USFWS, and USDA-WS. The following day, agency personnel, directors and IFT personnel traveled to the Blue River and met with local residents to hear firsthand testimony on how the Mexican Wolf Reintroduction Project has affected their local community.

On August 27, Dan Groebner and Shawna Nelson conducted a wolf survey workshop for 12 volunteers that was organized by members of the Phoenix Chapter of the Sierra Club. They followed the workshop with field surveys to locate uncollared wolves in new areas. Participants did not document any sign of wolves, but more extensive surveys are planned.

The AGFD's new Alpine administrative office modular arrived on site this month. It will be ready for occupancy in September.

PROJECT PERSONNEL

Jerod Merkle, a University of Arizona intern, left the Project August 16. Thank you, Jerod, for all of your hard work helping with the Project.

The NMDGF closed applications for their new Field Team Leader position and will begin the selection process. The duty post will be Silver City, New Mexico. This position is in addition to the existing NMDGF wolf biologist.

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.