

Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project Monthly Update

August 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), 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 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 private individuals, organizations and tribes.

To view the wolf distribution map, which contains the most recent 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 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 August, the collared population consisted of 23* wolves with functional radio collars dispersed among nine packs and four single wolves.

* See single m973, Arizona, below for more detailed information.

SEASONAL NEWS

The IFT has confirmed wild born pups in the San Mateo, Rim, Luna and Saddle packs and suspect pups in the Bluestem, Aspen and Middle Fork packs. In addition, project personnel continue to observe Meridian pup f1028 with the newly released Meridian pack.

IN ARIZONA:

Bluestem Pack (collared AF521, M990 and m991)

Throughout August, the IFT located AF521, along with M990 and m991, within the pack’s traditional home range. While AF521 remained rather sedentary in the eastern portion of the FAIR, project personnel located M990 and m991 separately on several occasions in the west-central portion of the ASNF. Based upon the movements of AF521 during the denning season, the IFT suspects the pack has pups, but they have yet to be confirmed.

Hawks Nest Pack (collared AF486 and AM619)

This pack continued to use its traditional home range east of the Big Lake area on the ASNF. During early August, AF486's GPS collar gave a low battery warning, indicating possible failure within 60 days. The IFT initiated trapping efforts to replace the collar, but has so far been unsuccessful.

Meridian Pack (collared AM806, AF838 and uncollared f1028)

IFT personnel continued to intensively monitor the Meridian pack as they acclimate to the wild. During August, the pack remained within six miles of the release site. The IFT suspended supplemental feeding of the pack during the first week in August, approximately one month after release, due to lack of utilization of the food. Thus far, the IFT has investigated carcasses of several elk calves and one adult bull elk likely killed by the pack. The IFT has and will continue to haze the animals should the pack approach too close to residences or exhibit other undesirable behavior such as limited flight response.

Rim Pack (collared AF858 and AM992)

Throughout August, the IFT located the Rim pack within its traditional home range in the central portion of the ASNF. On August 22, IFT personnel observed the alpha pair and three pups, increasing the confirmed number of Rim pups from two to three.

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

During August, the San Mateo pack continued to utilize areas east of Escudilla Mountain near the Arizona/New Mexico border. On August 27, project personnel observed two pups and an adult uncollared wolf, possibly a sibling of m927. Thus far, the maximum number of pups seen with this pack is two.

m973 (collared)

On August 4, after receiving observation reports from the public and AGFD personnel, the IFT trapped m973 in the northwest portion of the BRWRA in Arizona. As a member of the Aspen pack, the IFT had removed m973 from Arizona as a dependent pup on May 4, 2005. On July 13, 2005, IFT personnel translocated m973 with the Aspen pack to McKenna Park in the Gila Wilderness of New Mexico. Yearling m973 was good condition, weighing 57 pounds. Project personnel fitted it with a radio collar and released it on site. The distance from the translocation site in New Mexico to the area where they captured m973 was over 80 miles.

IN NEW MEXICO:**Aspen Pack (collared AF667 and uncollared AM512)**

Throughout August, the IFT located the Aspen pack in the eastern portion of the Gila Wilderness. While locations throughout the denning season indicated reproduction, project personnel have yet to observe pups.

Luna Pack (collared AM583, 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. On August 6, IFT personnel observed the three documented members of the Luna pack.

Middle Fork Pack (collared AF861 and AM871)

Throughout August, the IFT located AF861 and AM871 together in the central portion of the Gila Wilderness. On August 14, during an aerial telemetry flight, IFT personnel observed AF861 and AM871. While location data indicated reproduction in the Middle Fork pack, project personnel have yet to observe pups with this pack.

Saddle Pack (collared AF797, AM732 and m1007)

During August, the Saddle pack continued to use its traditional home range in the southern portion of the GNF. On August 28, during an aerial telemetry flight, IFT personnel observed six pups, increasing the maximum known number of pups from five to six. A second genetic test confirmed that m1007 is an offspring of the Luna pack, despite being a current member of the Saddle pack.

M859 (collared – formerly considered member of Granite Pack)

During the first and last week of August, project personnel located M859 along the northeast border of the GNF. During mid-August, they located M859 just north and outside the BRWRA border. On the August 24 aerial telemetry flight, IFT personnel observed M859, and confirmed it to be traveling alone.

f923 (collared – formerly considered member of Granite Pack)

During the first two weeks of August, project personnel located f923 in the GNF, northeast of Mogollon. Yearling f923 then moved approximately 14 miles north toward Reserve before moving over 18 miles southeast to the western edge of the Luna pack territory.

f924 (collared – formerly considered member of Granite Pack)

Throughout the first three weeks of August, f924 remained in the northwestern portion of the BRWRA. On August 24, project personnel located f924 near a dead cow. The following day, IFT personnel confirmed that a wolf killed the cow (see “Incidents” below). On August 31, f924 moved more than 30 miles to the southeast where IFT personnel located it less than one-half mile from the Aspen pack.

INCIDENTS

On August 8, IFT personnel investigated a cow carcass in Catron County and confirmed, based on location information, that M859 was responsible for the cow’s death. This was M859’s second depredation incident.

On August 16, IFT personnel investigated a cow carcass in Catron County and determined the cause of death to be from a vehicle collision.

On August 17, IFT personnel investigated a dead calf in Catron County. The investigation confirmed that a wolf had killed the calf. Project personnel also found an injured calf in the area. The wounds on the calf were several months old, and IFT personnel determined that it may have been a wolf-inflicted injury. There were no known collared wolves in the area of these investigations.

On August 17, IFT personnel investigated an injured horse in Catron County, and determined that the injury was possibly caused by a wolf.

On August 20, IFT personnel discovered a cow carcass in Apache County that was then investigated by IFT personnel. The investigation revealed that the cow died of natural causes.

On August 21, IFT personnel investigated a cow carcass in Catron County. The investigation revealed that the cow died of natural causes.

On August 25, IFT investigated a cow carcass in Catron County. The investigation found bite marks on the tail and signs the cow had been chased, possibly leading to its death. IFT personnel located f924 was located in the area, and confirmed that it was involved in the incident.

CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Results of a second genetic test confirmed that m1008, currently in captivity, is a 2005 pup from the Saddle pack.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

On August 4-6, Arizona Game and Fish Department personnel in the Pinetop regional office and Education Branch conducted a Mexican Wolf Natural History Workshop for 23 educators at the Department’s Sipe White Mountain Wildlife Area. The multi-day program consisted of presentations on wolf natural history and behavior, a field trip to wolf habitat to examine a wolf-killed elk carcass and locate nearby wolves via telemetry equipment, a hands-on session of educational wolf activities and curriculum ideas to take back to the classroom, a make-and-take session, and frank, open discussions on the pros and cons of the Mexican wolf reintroduction project in Arizona and New Mexico. Arizona rancher Dennis Stacy addressed the group for two hours on his experiences and viewpoints of the wolf project.

On August 5, Shawna Nelson provided a wolf project presentation to 62 campers at Fool Hollow State Park Campground near Show Low, Arizona.

On August 17 and 18, the IFT attended their annual immobilization drug training course in Alpine, Arizona.

On August 19, Dan Groebner provided a wolf project presentation to 106 people from the general public as part of the AGFD Summer Wildlife Speaker Series in Pinetop, Arizona.

On August 28, Andrea Lorek Strauss, from the International Wolf Center in Ely, Minnesota, provided outreach training for agency personnel involved in the wolf project.

On August 29 and 30, the Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project Adaptive Management Oversight Committee held a Mexican Wolf Management Workshop at the Hon-Dah Resort Conference Center in Pinetop, Arizona. Approximately 128 agency and non-agency personnel attended the workshop.

PROJECT PERSONNEL

On August 17, Jared Merkel left the project as a USFWS volunteer.

On August 31, Jen Manas left the project as a USFWS volunteer to begin work on a Weddell seal project in Antarctica.

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.