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NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release, Nov.19, 2008

New wolf pack roaming eastern Arizona

PINETOP, Ariz. – A new pair of Mexican wolves is now roaming the White Mountains of eastern Arizona as part of the reintroduction of this endangered species to the region. Last week, wildlife biologists placed the pair in a temporary holding pen for acclimation to their new home range near Middle Mountain on the Apache National Forest in northern Greenlee County. The pair, called the Moonshine Pack, consists of a male and female wolf that formed a pair bond while together in captivity.

Arizona Game and Fish Department officials confirm the pair chewed their way out of the nylon mesh, low-impact acclimation pen within 12 hours of being placed there on Nov. 17. Chris Bagnoli, the department's wolf project field team leader, reports the animals are now free-ranging and appear to be doing well.

"The objective of this release is to augment the breeding wild wolf population and also to increase the genetic diversity of the current population," says Bagnoli. "The Moonshine Pack joins 12 other packs now living in the wild in Arizona and New Mexico. We hope this pack will contribute to the breeding population as soon as next spring."

The release site, about 10 miles southwest of Alpine, Ariz., has a signed, public closure surrounding it, ordered by the USDA Forest Service, to protect the wolves from disturbance. The actual closure area is less than one square mile in size. The closure will remain in effect while the wolves adjust to the area and will be lifted by Nov. 27.

"This release is one aspect of the overall activities involved in the Mexican Wolf Reintroduction Project," adds Bagnoli. "Project personnel also conduct wolf population monitoring, public outreach and education, and coordination with other cooperating agencies. We have worked to develop cooperative projects and agreements with affected stakeholders in the area to proactively manage any potential wolf-related depredations. We are optimistic that we can work together with residents and private property owners on the landscape to achieve mutual goals related to the reintroduction project."

The department has been actively involved in Mexican wolf recovery efforts since the mid-1980s. In 1998, in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 11 wolves were released into the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area in eastern Arizona. Additional releases have occurred in subsequent years.

The reintroduction of the Mexican wolf is a cooperative, multi-agency effort of the Arizona Game and Fish Department, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, White Mountain Apache Tribe, USDA Forest Service and USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services.

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