



# United States Department of the Interior




FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
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In Reply Refer To:  
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June 19, 2009

## Memorandum

To: Coordinator, Mexican Wolf Recovery Program

From: Regional Director, Region 2 

Subject: Decision on Depredation by Mexican Wolf AM1114 of the San Mateo Pack

Under the final 10(j) rule (50 CFR part 17) of January 12, 1998, and the FEIS of November 1996, a confirmed livestock depredation incident on or about June 14, 2009, by male Mexican wolf AM1114, triggers this decision regarding whether this wolf should remain in the wild or be removed from the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area (BRWRA).

On June 17, 2009, the Interagency Field Team (IFT) forwarded several recommendations (document attached) to the Adaptive Management Oversight Committee (AMOC). In a conference call on June 17, 2009, AMOC considered all the information that led the IFT to determine a confirmed wolf kill had occurred on or about June 14, 2009, in Canyon del Buey New Mexico. The depredation incident was assigned to AM1114 (his fourth assigned depredation to date) and his mate AF903 (her second depredation incident to date). Lead Agency representatives on AMOC made four recommendations (document attached) regarding AM1114 to their Lead Agency Directors. The recommendations are summarized below.

1. Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) and the White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT) recommend the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) immediately issue a permanent Removal Order for AM1114 that authorizes use of the most efficient means available at the first opportunity after the IFT has determined that AM1114 is not essential to survival of any currently dependent pups in the San Mateo Pack. The Removal Order should stipulate that removal shall occur no later than October 31, 2009. AGFD additionally recommended immediate removal if another confirmed depredation is assigned to AM1114 before October 31, 2009.

2. U.S.D.A. Forest Service (USFS) recommends that the USFWS immediately issue a Removal Order (authorizing only use of nonlethal means) for AM1114, with said Removal Order to be implemented by the IFT at a time that is best suited to survival of any pups that are currently dependent on AM1114 and AF903.
3. U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services (USDA WS) recommends that USFWS immediately issue a Removal Order for AM1114, authorizing use of the most efficient available means, with said Removal Order to be implemented by the IFT at a time that is best suited to survival of any pups that are currently dependent on AM1114 and AF903.
4. New Mexico Game and Fish Department (NMGFD) recommends the IFT seek accommodation with the affected permittee, with AM1114 not be removed in the case where no subsequent confirmed depredations occurs for 365 days. In the opinion of the NMGFD, a rancher rejected efforts to apply proactive measures on public land, constituting lost opportunities to work with the affected public to potentially prevent depredations. The fact that this pair of wolves produced pups provides an opportunity to significantly contribute to population objectives, if the pups survive. NMGFD thus recommended exhausting proactive alternatives for the rancher, implementing removal only as a last resort after pups are no longer dependent.

Note: USFWS abstained from making recommendations at the AMOC and IFT level, on advice from counsel pursuant to ongoing litigation.

I deeply appreciate the hard work that has gone into the IFT's, AMOC's and AMOC Director's recommendations. The thorough nature of the depredation assessment is to be commended. The information provided in the assessment was complete in nature and discussed pertinent information, both biological and circumstantial, that factored in my decision. I make my decision in full consideration of the following:

1. A primary concern in this incident is the overall status of the wolf population in the 10(j) area. Because of a significant number of recent natural and unlawful mortalities, in addition to legal removal actions in recent years, the Mexican wolf 10(j) population has not shown significant increases towards the overall population goals. The population has remained relatively "flat," oscillating between 40 and 60 wolves.
2. AM1114 is currently supporting offspring; 4 pups have been documented in association with AM1114 and AF903. Disruption of pack dynamics, particularly as pups are being reared, could potentially jeopardize pup survival.
3. There is a desire to retain wild born wolves in the wild population. AM1114 is a wild born wolf of unknown genetic origins. The assignment of this depredation incident to this male constitutes a fourth depredation in a 365 day period.

4. Application of proactive management tools may assist in preventing future depredations. Certain proactive management tools (e.g. Range Rider, supplemental hay, etc.) were offered to the allotment permit holder affected by the June 14<sup>th</sup> depredation, but were rejected by the permittee despite being successfully implemented on an adjacent allotment.
5. This wolf pair has demonstrated periods of time with no confirmed livestock depredations. This male was within 2 weeks of having some of the depredation incidents removed.

Therefore, it is my decision that AM1114 will remain in the BRWRA at this time. The current status of the wolf population continues to be of great concern because of the relatively low population size. In light of this fact, a decision to remove this wolf from the landscape at this particular time could be detrimental to any potential population gains. The circumstances of this depredation incident are complicated by the fact that this male is helping to raise pups which, if successful, will contribute to overall population growth. Additionally, the permittee rejected proactive measures by the IFT that could have reduced the potential for the loss of livestock. I am mindful of the economic impact on livestock growers. Instances such as these continue to demonstrate the need for a Livestock Interdiction Program which will help to alleviate impacts to ranchers and preclude the need to remove wolves when depredation incidents occur.

We are committed to working with our cooperators, agency partners and the affected permittee to exhaustively implement proactive management tools that serve to reduce or eliminate future depredations by AM1114 and the other members of the San Mateo Pack. I also request that the IFT continue to monitor this pack and their activities and employ every possible management option in an effort to prevent any further depredations incidents by this pack.

Attachments

## MEXICAN WOLF BLUE RANGE REINTRODUCTION PROJECT<sup>1</sup>

Adaptive Management Oversight Committee  
Management Recommendation: AM1114  
Final: June 17, 2009

### AMOC RECOMMENDATION:

Representatives from all six Lead Agencies discussed the Project's Interagency Field Team (IFT) recommendations below in a conference call on June 17, 2009. None of the other signatory Cooperators in this Project participated in the conference call.

After considering all the information that led the IFT to determine that a confirmed wolf kill had occurred on or about June 14, 2009 in Canyon del Buey NM and to assign the depredation incident to AM1114 (which as of this date carries four depredation incidents) and to its mate AF903 (which as of this date carries two depredation incidents), the Lead Agency representatives made the following recommendations:

1. AGFD and WMAT recommend that USFWS immediately issue a permanent Removal Order for AM1114 that authorizes use of the most efficient means available at the first opportunity after the IFT has determined that AM1114 is not essential to survival of any currently dependent pups in the San Mateo Pack. The Removal Order should stipulate that removal shall occur no later than October 31, 2009, and shall be implemented regardless of the fact that (per SOP 13.0) three of the four depredation incidents currently assigned to AM1114 will drop away by that time because they will have occurred more than 365 calendar days prior to September 12, 2009. This recommendation is based on consideration of the following: (a) although the June 15, 2009 incident is AM1114's fourth depredation incident within 365 days, AM1114 and AF903 have at least four dependent pups; (b) delayed permanent removal of AM1114 until after the critical time for pup survival would give its offspring a better chance of survival -- pups will be larger and more self-sufficient in late September to early October and that is also the time that Mexican wolves feed mainly on scavenged gut piles, thus, presence of AM1114 will be less crucial to pup survival; and (c) the Project SOP 13.0 Clarification Memo approved on May 28, 2009 states that "The Lead Agency Directors hereby reaffirm that AMOC is both authorized and expected to be flexible in applying SOP 13.0." This implies (and Footnote 2 in SOP 13.0 affirms) that extenuating circumstances such as certainty of existence of dependent pups shall be taken into account with regard to implementing SOP 13.0, including issuance of Removal Orders.

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<sup>1</sup>The Reintroduction Project is a state- and tribally-led collaborative effort among six Lead Agencies and five Signatory Cooperators. Lead Agencies are: Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD); New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF), USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services (WS), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT). Signatory Cooperators are: Graham, Greenlee, and Navajo counties, Arizona; New Mexico Department of Agriculture; and Otero and Sierra counties, New Mexico.

Note AGFD also recommends that USFWS authorize immediate implementation of the Removal Order (by the most efficient available means) if another confirmed depredation incident is assigned to AM1114 between June 17, 2009 and October 31, 2009.

2. USFS recommends that USFWS immediately issue a Removal Order (authorizing only use of nonlethal means) for AM1114, said Removal Order to be implemented by the IFT at a time that is best suited to survival of any pups that are currently dependent on AM1114 and AF903.
3. USDA WS recommends that USFWS immediately issue a Removal Order (authorizing use of the most efficient available means) for AM1114, said Removal Order to be implemented by the IFT at a time that is best suited to survival of any pups that are currently dependent on AM1114 and AF903.
4. NMDGF acknowledges that the depredation investigated on 15 June was caused by one or more wolf. The 22mm bite spread measurement introduces a confusing element that cannot be easily explained. The assertion that a wolf pup was involved is not convincing on its face and raises unanswerable questions about what happened. Rejected efforts to apply proactive measures, on public land, constitute lost opportunities to work with affected public and potentially prevent depredations. The fact that this pair of wolves produced 6 pups provides an opportunity to significantly contribute to the espoused population objectives if the pups survive. Finally, if there are no additional depredations associated with this individual, there could be considerable public opposition to a delayed removal. For these reasons, the NMDGD recommends that the IFT seek accommodation with the affected permittee and M1114 not be removed if there are no subsequent confirmed depredations for 365 days.
5. USFWS abstains from making a recommendation at the AMOC level, on advice from counsel pursuant to ongoing litigation.

## IFT RECOMMENDATION:

1. AGFD, USFS, and USDA-WS recommend immediate permanent removal of AM1114 by the most efficient means. AF903 and any offspring should be supplementally fed as long as necessary to reduce the impact of loss of the alpha male during the time critical for pup survival. Several factors led to this recommendation: (a) this is the fourth depredation incident within 365 days on the San Mateo pack member AM1114, (b) the previous failure to remove AM1114 resulted in loss of confidence in the Mexican Wolf project by certain stakeholders. A successful permanent removal may help to build confidence with certain affected local publics, (c) the history of AF903 includes a previous removal of an adult male (AM796) and subsequently AF903's depredation incidences dropped, suggesting the potential for AF903 to remain in the wild and not cause future depredations, (d) The Final Management Decision update: Decision of Lead Agency Director's memo dated October 27, 2008 states "If AM1114 is confirmed to have committed an additional livestock depredation prior to the end of the 45-day period or prior to June 27, 2009 (when two AM1114 depredations will have expired due to the 365-day limitation under SOP 13.0): all six IFT lead representatives recommend immediate removal of AM1114 via lethal control." Based on this, AM1114 should be removed immediately by the most efficient means, and (e) supplemental feeding of remaining San Mateo pack members would ideally balance the loss of AM1114 with regard to pup survival.
2. NMDGF recommends permanent removal of AM1114 by the most efficient means in the time period of late September to early October when the AM1114's presence in the pack is less critical for pup survival. AGFD, USDA-FS, and WMAT support this recommendation only as a second-choice alternative to the majority recommendation. Several factors led to the minority IFT recommendation: (a) while the June 15, 2009 incident is AM1114's fourth depredation incident within 365 days, AM1114 is currently supporting offspring. Delayed permanent removal of AM1114 until after the critical time for pup survival would give offspring a better chance of survival. Not only will pups be larger and more self-sufficient in late September and early October, but it is also the time that wolves feed mainly on scavenged gut piles; thus, the presence of AM1114 after such time is less critical to pup survival, (d) certain proactive management tools (Range Rider) offered to the permittee and implemented on an adjacent allotment had been rejected by the allotment permit holder affected by the June 15 depredation incident, (e) The SOP 13.0 Clarification Memo approved on May 28, 2009 states "The Lead Agency Directors hereby reaffirm that AMOC is both authorized and expected to be flexible in applying SOP 13.0." This implies that extenuating circumstances such as the presence of offspring shall be taken into account with regard to removal orders.
3. WMAT recommends the translocation of the entire San Mateo pack, including AM1114, AF903 and any offspring, to the Gila Wilderness. (1) This recommendation is based on WMAT experience successfully trapping and removing the Han-Dah Pack in 2006. (2) If left intact, this pack could potentially contribute to the Mexican Wolf population as a breeding pair in 2009.

4. USFWS abstained from issuing a recommendation due to current litigation based on the advice of the agency solicitor.

#### BACKGROUND

On June 17, 2009 the IFT provided information to AMOC on a June 15, 2009 Mexican wolf depredation incident in Canyon del Buey, New Mexico. The information is contained in the following documents, which are archived in the IFT office in Alpine AZ:

1. The IFT's management recommendation of June 17, 2009 regarding the June 15, 2009 depredation incident.
2. The NMDGF IFT Leader's checklist on the June 15, 2009 depredation incident.
3. The October 27, 2008 Project Management Decision update regarding the (then) third and fourth depredation incidents assigned to AM1114 within the past 365 calendar days.
4. The September 12, 2008 Project Management Decision regarding the (then) third and fourth depredation incidents assigned to AM1114 within the past 365 calendar days.

In summary, AM1114 has been assigned a total five depredation incidents to date, as follows: March 29, 2008; June 26, 2008; September 3, 2008; September 8, 2008; and June 15, 2009. Per Project Standard Operating Procedure 13.0 (Control of Mexican Wolves), the March 29, 2008 incident is no longer counted against this wolf, because the incident occurred more than 365 calendar days ago. However, AM1114 was also implicated in a probable wolf depredation on July 13, 2008 and was in the area when non-fatal, wolf-caused livestock injuries occurred on July 30, August 4, and August 15, 2008.

Document MW AMOC Management Recommendation - AM1114.20090617.Final.doc

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