

MEXICAN WOLF ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT WORK GROUP<sup>1</sup>  
SUMMARY NOTES FOR MEETING ON MAY 27, 2009  
Note: This is a Public Record (available at <http://azgfd.gov/wolf>)

Location: Arizona Game and Fish Department Pinetop Regional Office, 2878 East White Mountain Boulevard, Pinetop, AZ 85935  
Time: AZ time: 4:00 pm – 8:00 pm (Note: we will adjourn early if business is done)  
Host: Arizona Game and Fish Department  
Participants: Public meeting, open to all

AGENDA

1. Welcome, introductions, ground rules, and agenda review

Chair Terry B. Johnson (AGFD) called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm. Participants were asked to turn off cell phones, use active listening skills, not engage in side-bar conversations, and to address questions and comments to the Chair or another agency representative (not to other members of the audience). Each person in the room identified himself or herself and stated their organizational affiliation (if any).

2. Miscellaneous Interagency Field Team updates

The IFT presented an update on field activities since the last (October 2008) AMWG meeting. A draft copy of the summary was available to meeting participants tonight and a final version will be posted to the Project Web site (<http://azgfd.gov/wolf>).

- Field Team staffing updates. The Interagency Field Team (IFT) provided a summary of staffing changes since the October 2008 AMWG meeting: Paula Capece - NMDGF Field Team Leader (joined Project in October), James Waddell - NMDGF Technician (left Project in October), Cheyenne Burnett – USFWS Volunteer (left Project in November), Beth Wojcik-NMDGF Technician (left Project in April), Allison Greenleaf – USFWS Volunteer (left Project in February), Ben Cook and Carrie Cook - USFWS Volunteers (left Project in May), Holly Lance and Rebecca Carter – USFWS Volunteers (joined Project in May), Rachael Williams – AGFD Summer Intern.
- Annual Report for 2008. AMOC announced that the Annual Report was completed recently; copies were available at this meeting and can be downloaded from the Project Web site (<http://azgfd.gov/wolf>).

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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.

- Status of the wild population. The IFT summarized the results of the 2008 end-of-year count (EOYC), which was conducted in January 2009 in accordance with Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) 25.0.
  - 38 wolves observed during survey
  - Six wolves captured (one new collar; two collars replaced, three for translocations)
  - Population estimate  $\geq 52$  wolves of which 45 were wild born wolves.
  - 10 packs (eight of which consist of at least one wild-born member)
  - Two breeding pairs\*\*
  - $\geq 18$  pups born,  $\geq 11$  survived through December 31<sup>st</sup>
  - 1 pair formed on their own in the wild in 2008
  - Two packs produced second generation wild-born pups. As many as ten could do so in 2008.

The IFT noted that livestock operators and other local residents contributed more information to this year's EOYC than in previous years. The IFT will continue to increase its emphasis on making use of such local knowledge.

The IFT said that field observations indicate as many as eight packs might be denning this year: Bluestem (AZ), Hawks Nest (AZ), Rim (AZ), Bacho (FAIR in AZ), Paradise (FAIR in AZ), Dark Canyon (NM), Middle Fork (NM), and San Mateo (NM). Although pups will emerge through the summer, a new estimate of the population will not be made until the 2009 EOYC, in January 2010.

- Recent mortalities. In mid-November 2008, M922, a newly released single male wolf, was discovered dead in New Mexico. In mid-December 2008, MP1160 (pup of the year from the Dark Canyon Pack) was found dead in New Mexico. In mid-January 2009, adult female F836 was found dead on FAIR in AZ. In late February 2009, F1053, a newly-released single female wolf, was found dead in New Mexico. All four of these cases are under investigation.
- Recent depredation and nuisance responses. The IFT reviewed the depredation and nuisance response information that is included in the update for this meeting. Thirteen depredation or nuisance reports were investigated between October 30, 2008 and May 19, 2009. Two dead calves (one in AZ and one in NM) were confirmed as wolf depredations and one dead calf (in NM) was found to be a probable wolf depredation. See the IFT summary document for details.
- Proactive measures to reduce risk of livestock depredation. Paula Capece (NM), Krista Beazley (WMAT), and Chris Bagnoli (AZ) presented information on proactive measures the IFT is taking in cooperation with various livestock operators to reduce the risk of wolf depredation on livestock. Considerable progress has been made in this area in all three jurisdictions. Projects include electronic and other fencing, fladry, range riders, calving pastures, and supplemental feeding. Radio receivers are now being loaned to livestock operators in NM as well as in AZ.

- Initial releases and translocations in June-December 2009

John Oakleaf (USFWS) provided an update on the only initial release or translocation planned for the near term: initial release of an adult male, adult female, and their six pups-of-the-year in mid-July 2009 at Engineer Springs, AZ. The release will not occur, at least not in 2009. The male wolf that was scheduled for this release recently died in captivity, as a result of cancer. The six pups died shortly thereafter. The cause of death of the pups is unknown but a necropsy is underway. The results will be reported to the public as soon as they are available. The pack was being held at the USFWS Sevilleta Mexicana Wolf Management Facility, in New Mexico. The female will remain at Sevilleta and be re-paired for possible release in 2010.

- Outreach activities. The IFT reviewed the outreach activities that were included in the update for this meeting. Paula Capece (NMDGF) noted that her agency is placing particular emphasis on school presentations. AMOC then asked for public comment about how to improve Project outreach so the input could be considered in a Directors Project meeting on May 28 and an AMOC-IFT discussion on May 29. Various people commented about the need for more effective outreach.

One person said that Project presentations should be balanced. They should provide objective information about wolves, the status of reintroduction and recovery efforts, and the impacts on people and their livelihoods (i.e. livestock operations). She said NM ranchers feel betrayed regarding the decision not to remove San Mateo AM1114 last fall, after it had been assigned more than three depredation incidents in the past year. She also noted that AZ ranchers have a good rapport with AMOC and the IFT, but the Project needs to develop and maintain more trust with people on the ground.

Another person remarked that the critical status of the Mexican wolf must be relayed more in Project outreach materials. "There is a lot of anti-wolf sentiment out there and education on wolf conservation is the key to overcoming this sentiment." It was also noted that for education to occur people must want to be educated.

One person noted that the reduction in AMWG meetings over the past year is not conducive to increasing outreach or public participation.

One individual noted that wolves are complex and so are the issues surrounding wolf management. He thinks outreach would benefit if there were a "one stop" information shopping Web site to cover all management issues, legal issues, public meeting times and locations, and a calendar of wolf-related actions, activities, etc. For example, the date and location for this AMWG meeting and information on the recent comment period for the USFWS draft conservation assessment (see below) were not posted on the Project Web site. The affected public needs timely, accurate information from a single Web site. People do not have the time to visit the multitude of wolf-related Web sites that exist.

AMOC noted that the self-subscription *Endangered Species Updates* (see the Notes, below) is an important mechanism for outreach about AMOC and AMWG meetings.

- Other IFT issues and field activities. None.
3. Break
  4. Miscellaneous AMOC updates
    - Posting of AMOC and AMWG Summary Notes. The Summary Notes for all previous AMOC and AMWG meetings are available on the Project Web site. The notes for this meeting should be posted within 30 days.
    - Proposed Mexican wolf education center in Silver City NM. On behalf of the Southwest Environmental Center and other cooperators, Nancy Kaminski gave an excellent PowerPoint presentation on a proposed Gila Mexican Wolf Center in Silver City NM. AMOC requested the presentation to help identify how it might relate to the Reintroduction Project's outreach and education efforts. The primary focus of the GMWC would be to provide information to the public (including scientific outreach to public schools) about the Mexican wolf and about other elements of the Gila Region's unique natural and cultural heritage. It could also serve as a clearinghouse of information about regional ecotourism opportunities and providers. As proposed, the GMWC would be run by paid staff as well as volunteers. A specific site has not been chosen for the facility, but the concept is for a 5000-20,000 square foot location in or near the clustered incorporated areas of Grant County, in the vicinity of Silver City NM. The project proponents are seeking a private-state partnership for establishing and operating the facility but the composition and nature of the partnership remain to be determined. The private side would likely entail a nonprofit nongovernmental organization with a board of directors, broadly representing the public. The primary models for this enterprise are the International Wolf Center in Ely, Minnesota and wolf-based ecotourism focused on the Yellowstone National Park area. Two significant and perhaps not unrelated differences between the proposed GMWC and the Ely facility are: the Southwest does not have an L. David Mech as a centerpiece, and the GMWC is not (at this time) being conceived as a research facility. Total start-up costs for the GMWC are estimated at \$500,000 to \$6 million, with annual operating costs estimated at \$500,000 to \$1 million. Full development of the facility would likely occur in annual phases over a period of four years (2009-2012).
    - Update on consideration of constructing a temporary holding pen. USFS conducted NEPA scoping for a temporary holding pen this past February. The pen would be used to hold wolves for 30 days or less when transport to a USFWS management facility in NM is impractical or inappropriate. Examples of such situations include holding a wolf for immediate translocation, and holding a wolf for veterinary treatment before the animal is re-released. AGFD and the USFS are now exploring the possibility of changing the site location from USFS lands to AGFD's Sipe White Mountain Wildlife Management Area, south of Springerville. There is no timeline for a final decision.

- Status of SOP clarifications and revisions. AMOC will discuss the draft Clarification Memos for SOPs 11.0 (depredation investigations) and 13.0 (control) with the Lead Agency Directors and other cooperating agencies on May 28. The Directors may or may not make a decision regarding approval of the draft memos. Over the next year, AMOC will also update several of the Project's SOPs, focusing mainly on those that have outdated information on Project contacts.
- Status of renewal of the 2003 Project MOU. AMOC will discuss renewal of the 2003 MOU with the Directors on May 28. The cooperators agreed last October to continue operating under the 2003 MOU while engaged in discussions about whether and how the MOU should be revised for renewal.
- Update on NEPA process for reconsidering the Project's 10(j) rule. Bud Fazio (USFWS) said that his agency is continuing to the possibility of making two changes in the 10(j) rule: modification of the definition of breeding pair, and allowing initial releases in the Secondary recovery Zone. USFWS announced last September and October that it was developing an Environmental Assessment for that purpose, but a decision has not been made on whether or when the document will be released for public comment. Fazio said funding is not yet available to continue work on an EIS for considering broader changes in the 10(j). USFWS estimates that the EIS process would take about five years after funding becomes available. Regional Director Tuggle is hopeful that gray wolf delistings in the northern Rockies and the western Great Lakes might make federal funding more available to wolf recovery efforts, including a 10(j) EIS, in the Southwest. However, ongoing litigation could affect all of this.

Fazio also noted that litigation is still clouding the issue of developing a revised Recovery Plan for the Mexican wolf. Hopefully, the 1982 Recovery Plan could be revised while a 10(j) EIS is being developed, so each process could inform the other.

- Discussion of annual population objectives for the Project. AMOC noted the Project's population objectives are stated in its Annual Work Plan, which (because of Fiscal Year issues) is developed before results from the next EOYC are available. AMOC is considering separating the population objectives from the work plan so the EOYC information can be integrated better. AMOC then asked for comment on the Project's population management objectives.

One person asked what, given cancellation of the proposed initial release at Engineer Springs, else might be done to increase BRWRA population growth. There are only a few options: release more wolves (did not happen in 2008 or thus far in 2009); increase pup and/or adult wolf survival; reduce illegal killing of wolves (thus far, no evidence of success in this area); remove fewer wolves in response to boundary, nuisance, and/or depredation problems (these numbers decreased significantly in 2008 and thus far in 2009); and/or increase the size of the Mexican wolf recovery area (10j and EIS constraints).

AMOC noted that in October 2008 the Directors approved a more aggressive approach to initial releases and translocations. This issue will be discussed with the Directors again on May 28; plans for the rest of 2009 and 2010 will be revisited. However, initial releases are constrained by availability of unoccupied sites in AZ and translocations are constrained by availability of wild-experienced wolves.

Whether adult or pup mortality due to natural causes can be reduced is arguable.

Changes in the size of the recovery area would require modification of the nonessential experimental population area and that would require an Environmental Impact Statement, which would require more funding than has ever been appropriated to USFWS.

Increased social tolerance through prevention and mitigation of depredation impacts might enable population growth (through reduced removals), thus the cooperators have increased use of proactive measures over the past three years (although funding is a major limitation and some permittees refuse to participate in such measures).

In response to a question regarding whether funding cuts are expected in the Project, AMOC affirmed that despite the dire economic situation throughout the country all Lead Agencies report that their Project funds will not be cut in the coming year.

One person commented that the cooperating agencies should be looking at stepping up law enforcement activities to prevent more unlawful killings and “disappearances” of wolves and to apprehend violators. More post-release monitoring should occur, as should post-release law enforcement attention. Rewards should also be increased. AMOC noted that USFWS has convened an interagency law enforcement task force to look at those and law enforcement actions that might promote population growth.

Specifically regarding population objectives, individuals commented that: more emphasis should be placed on achieving a specified level of pup survival; a more realistic objective should be set for increasing the number of breeding pairs; understanding should be increased on how population management affects population objectives; AMOC should consider a sliding scale or multiplier to tie annual population objectives to the effects of illegal take on population growth – next year’s goals should be revised upward as illegal take occurs; the Project should have a population baseline that is tied to the number of breeding pairs at mid-year, when the number is higher than it is at the end of the year, and management actions after mid-year should be tied to sustaining that mid-year number; population goals should always be biologically attainable, with incremental actions to achieve the goals (i.e. more aggressive [pro-wolf] actions at lower population levels); and, if goals are set that are biologically unattainable, failure is guaranteed, when in reality some Project goals have been achieved and some level of success has already been demonstrated.

- Dates and locations for 2009 AMWG meetings. Although AMOC meetings almost monthly via conference call, the next AMWG (public) meeting is scheduled for 4 pm to 8 pm on December 9, 2009, in Truth or Consequences NM. Details on the draft agenda for that meeting, and any changes in date(s) or location(s), will be provided in *Endangered Species Updates* this fall.

5. Other business.

- Otero County NM's request for signatory status under the Project's 2003 MOU was considered. One individual in the audience asked whether an agency that operates under a resolution opposing Mexican wolf recovery and reintroduction should be eligible for such status. Another individual questioned whether a county outside the BRWRA should be eligible for such status. AMOC Chair Johnson affirmed that Otero County met eligibility requirements through its written commitment to abide by the terms and conditions of the MOU. A motion was made (NMDGF) and seconded (USDA-WS) to accept Otero County as a signatory cooperator. The motion passed by unanimous vote by all signatory cooperators present in the meeting.
- Cathy Taylor (USFS) asked whether facilitators from outside the agencies or at least from outside AMOC should be used at times in AMWG meetings. Participants offered the following comments: AMWG meetings are well facilitated already; save your money; and, any funding that is available for facilitators should be invested in on-the-ground wolf conservation measures.

6. Adjournment. The meeting was adjourned at 7:45 pm.

Notes: (1) Information on the Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project is available online at: <http://azgfd.gov/wolf> and <http://mexicanwolf.fws.gov>. (2) News about the Reintroduction Project and Adaptive Management Work Group meetings is disseminated through a self-subscription newsletter, the *Endangered Species Updates*. A subscription form is available at: <http://azgfd.gov/signup>. (3) Send email pertaining to Reintroduction Project issues to [mexwolf@azgfd.gov](mailto:mexwolf@azgfd.gov). This is a passive email account; messages received will be read, and used as appropriate within the Reintroduction Project, but individual responses will not be sent.