

MEXICAN WOLF BLUE RANGE REINTRODUCTION PROJECT¹
Interagency Field Team Management Recommendation
Regarding AM1114 of the San Mateo Pack
Final (Revised): June 17, 2009

BACKGROUND:

Previous Management Decisions Regarding AM1114

On September 12 2008, the USFWS Region 2 Director issued a Management Decision to immediately capture and translocate AM1114 into the Gila Wilderness, partially in hope of AM1114 pairing with Laredo F1028. The IFT attempted to implement this Management Decision, but project personnel were not able to capture AM1114 during the next 45 days.

On October 28 2008, the USFWS Region 2 Director issued a Management Decision to continue efforts to ground-trap or dart and translocate AM1114 for 14 days (October 28 through November 10). This document also stated that if subsequent depredations occur in New Mexico between October 27, 2008 and June 27, 2009 and are definitively assigned to AM1114, the USFWS Regional Director will recommend immediate issuance of a Removal Order (authorizing use of all available means), pending discussion with the NMDGF Director [Note: if a subsequent AM1114 depredation occurs in Arizona the USFWS Regional Director will discuss the Removal Order with the AGFD or WMAT Director, as appropriate to the incident location].

Assignment of the Latest Depredation Incident

The latest depredation incident took place on public land. The investigation occurred on June 15, 2009. The depredation of an approximately 6 week old, legally present cow calf was estimated to have occurred 24 to 36 hours prior to the carcass investigation, approximately June 13, 2009 (see Appendix 1 regarding legal presence of cattle).

AGFD, NMDGF, USDA-FS, USDA-WS, USFWS, and WMAT IFT members agreed, based on the best available evidence, both AM1114 and AF903 should be assigned the depredation incident. This brings AM1114 to four (4) depredations within a 365 day period and AF903 to two (2) depredations within a 365 day period. The IFT assigned the depredation incident to both wolves based on the cumulative evidence of: (a) multiple attack points on both the hind legs and near the tail of the calf, (b) several varying sized bite marks with corresponding hemorrhage (bite marks throughout hind end on both sides of the calf. Measurements: 43.51 mm, 36.26 mm, 43.02 mm, 22.05 mm), and (c) the presence of 22.05 mm bite marks and light hemorrhaging associated with small sharp teeth. This evidence suggests that a pup was at the site prior to the death of the animal. The IFT does not believe that the seven week old pups were actively involved in killing

¹The 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.

of the calf, but rather biting as the calf was already on the ground close to death. Cumulatively, this evidence suggests that a group of wolves, rather than a single animal, were in the area attacking the calf.

The area of the attack was a large open meadow that was not conducive to tracking due to a grass covered substrate. The incident investigator did find two separate, adult-sized wolf tracks. A fresh wolf scat was found at the kill site, and two older (two weeks to one month old) were found on the road approximately 200 yards from the site. In addition, there was a 20-yard, meandering blood trail at the site of the attack. The investigation did not reveal pup tracks or pup scat at the kill site. This is not surprising given the difficult tracking conditions in the area.

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. 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.

History of the San Mateo Pack (currently AM1114, AF903)

2009 (AM1114, AF903)

- On January 9, a Range Rider began work on the East Sand Flats allotment to prevent wolf-livestock conflicts associated with the San Mateo pack. The Canyon del Buey permittee chose not to participate in the program and informed the IFT to instruct the range rider to keep a respectful distance from his cattle.
- On April 20, a different Range Rider began work on the East Sand Flats allotment (replacing the former Range Rider) and continues to present. The Canyon del Buey permittee remains uninterested in the rider program.
- On May 12, the IFT investigated a permittee depredation report on the East Sand Flat allotment, New Mexico within the territory of the San Mateo pack. The investigation determined that a cow calf had been killed approximately 2 days prior. This depredation was confirmed to be wolf-related by WS. In a split-decision, the majority IFT decision was to assign the depredation to single wolf F1106 based on bite spreads and telemetry data. This decision was later upheld by AMOC on May 14.
- On May 19, the IFT investigated a permittee depredation report on the Canyon del Buey allotment, New Mexico within the territory of the San Mateo pack. The WS investigation considered the cow calf a “probable wolf depredation.” The Canyon del Buey permittee was issued a new telemetry receiver.
- On June 1, the IFT observed four live pups that were approximately 5 weeks old.
- On June 15, the IFT investigates a permittee depredation report on the Canyon del Buey allotment, New Mexico within the territory of the San Mateo pack. The WS investigation confirmed the cow calf was a wolf-related depredation. The IFT unanimously decides to assign the depredation to both AM1114 and AF903.

2008 (AM1114, AF903)

- On January 20, the IFT captured and collared an adult male wolf associated with AM903 and assigned it studbook number AM1114.
- On March 29, the IFT investigated a freshly killed calf and confirmed that wolves were responsible for the mortality. This was the first depredation incident for AM1114 and the second for AF903 in a 365-day period.
- On April 9, due to expiration of the depredation incident on April 9, 2007, AF903 dropped from two depredation incidents to one depredation incident in a 365-day period.
- In April and May, the IFT documented possible denning behavior in this pack, based on location data.
- On June 26, the IFT discovered a dead cow on private land near the San Mateo Pack. The IFT confirmed the dead cow as a wolf kill. This was the second depredation incident for AM1114 and AF903 in a 365-day period.
- On July 13, a 2-week old dead calf was discovered on East Sand Flats allotment, New Mexico. Telemetry indicated that only AM1114 was in the area. The IFT determined this to be a probable wolf depredation.
- On July 30, an injured calf was discovered on the East Sand Flats allotment, New Mexico. The IFT confirmed the injuries as wolf caused. The calf remained alive following the injuries, therefore no depredation incident was assigned.
- On August 4, an injured calf was discovered on the East Sand Flats allotment, New Mexico. AM1114 was in the area. The calf remained alive following the injuries, therefore no depredation incident was assigned.
- On August 15, an injured calf was discovered on the East Sand Flats allotment, New Mexico. The injuries were to the same calf that was injured on July 30. AM1114 was in the area where the injuries occurred. The calf remained alive following the injuries, therefore no depredation incident was assigned.
- On September 8, the IFT received and investigated a permittee depredation report for the Canyon Del Buey Allotment, New Mexico. The investigation determined that a cow calf had been killed on September 3. USDA-WS confirmed the depredation incident as a kill by a single wolf. All six Lead Agency representatives on the IFT agreed the incident should be assigned to AM1114, based on bite marks.
- On September 8, the IFT received and investigated a permittee depredation report for the East Sands Flat Allotment (NW of Indio Canyon Tank), New Mexico. The investigation determined that a cow calf had been killed; the carcass was discovered and reported by

the permittee about 12 hours prior to the IFT investigation. USDA-WS confirmed the depredation incident as a kill by a single wolf. All six Lead Agency representatives on the IFT agreed the incident should be assigned to AM1114, based on bite marks.

2007 (AM796, AF903, 2 uncollared pups)

- During January, the San Mateo Pack continued to use areas east of Escudilla Mountain in the Apache National Forest, New Mexico.
- On January 31, the IFT investigated a calf carcass in the San Mateo Pack territory in New Mexico. Subsequent evaluations determined it to be a confirmed wolf kill. This was the third depredation incident in a 365-day period for AM796.
- On February 5, USFWS issued a permanent removal order for AM796 due to its involvement in three depredation incidents within a 365-day period. The removal order only applied to AM796, as examination of the canine bite measurements in two previous confirmed cattle depredation incidents and one horse injury were consistent with AM796.
- On February 20, the IFT lethally removed AM796 in an area east of Escudilla Mountain in New Mexico's Gila National Forest.
- During March, the San Mateo Pack continued to use areas east of Escudilla Mountain in the Apache National Forest in New Mexico.
- On April 9, the IFT investigated a freshly killed calf while monitoring AF903 and confirmed that AF903 was responsible for the mortality. This was the second depredation incident in a 365-day period for AF903.
- In June and July, the IFT documented possible denning behavior in the San Mateo Pack, based on location data.
- In August, the IFT no longer suspected the pack had pups, based on movements and observations of AF903 alone.
- From September through December, AF903 traveled widely throughout the central and west central portion of the Gila National Forest, including movements outside the BRWRA.

2006 (AM796, AF903, m927, 2 uncollared pups)

- Early 2006, the pack was located in areas near the Arizona/New Mexico border.
- On February 23, the IFT observed two wolves; one was believed to be AM796. The IFT unsuccessfully tried to dart AM796 on several occasions to replace its failed radio-collar.

- On March 15, the IFT observed the San Mateo Pack near a dead calf. Subsequent investigation confirmed a wolf depredation. This was the first confirmed depredation incident for AM796 and AF903 in a 365 day period.
- On May 6, m927 was captured and fitted with a GPS collar.
- During July, AF903 exhibited denning behavior, but the IFT could not confirm pups.
- On August 27, two pups were observed with an uncollared adult wolf.
- On the September 11 telemetry flight, the IFT observed four to five wolves; at least one was a pup.
- On September 23, the IFT investigated a dead cow and calf in the San Mateo Pack's territory. Wolves had not killed the cow but the calf was a confirmed wolf depredation. The pack consisted of AM796, AF903, and m927. This was the first depredation incident for m927, and the second for AM796 and AF903 in a 365-day period.
- On September 26, the IFT investigated an injured horse in Apache County, Arizona and confirmed that wolves caused the non-fatal injuries. Due to the location of the incident, it was attributed to the San Mateo Pack.
- On November 10, m927 was found dead. Necropsy determined the cause of death was asphyxiation on vomit after attack by other wolves, likely the Bluestem Pack, based on telemetry locations.
- As of December, the San Mateo pack consisted of four animals, including AM796, AF903, and two uncollared pups-of-the-year. Therefore, the San Mateo Pack was confirmed as a "breeding pair," per the definition in the Final Rule.
- During 2006, the San Mateo Pack established a territory ranging from the east side of the Escudilla Mountain in Arizona to Black Peak in New Mexico.
- No removal or translocation involving the San Mateo Pack occurred in 2006.

2005 (AM796, AF903, mp927, mp928, fp929)

- On March 30 and April 2, AM796 and AF903, respectively, were trapped for persisting outside the recovery boundary. Both were transferred to the Sevilleta Wolf Management Facility in New Mexico.
- On April 6, AF903 whelped four pups in captivity; three pups survived.
- On June 13, the San Mateo Pack (AM796, AF903, mp 927, mp928, and fp929) was translocated to the ASNF, near Home Creek, Arizona. Radio collars were placed on both adults prior to translocation. All five wolves self-released that evening.

- In August, contact was lost with AM796's GPS collar.
- In November, the San Mateo Pack began to move, settling east of Escudilla Mountain, Arizona by the end of the year.
- In December, the pack was confirmed to consist of four animals, including AF903, two uncollared pups of the year, and a visually-confirmed AM796. The pack was confirmed as a "breeding pair" per the definition in the Final Rule.
- There were no confirmed mortalities in or depredations by the San Mateo pack in 2005.

2004 (AM796 and AF903)

- By January, AM796 had dispersed to the San Mateo Mountains on the Cibola National Forest in New Mexico.
- During April, the IFT observed AM796 with an uncollared pregnant wolf, which was later assigned studbook number AF903. Genetic testing identified the female as possible offspring of the Gapiwi pair. Both wolves were outside the recovery area in the San Mateo Mountains.
- On May 1, the IFT investigated a depredated newborn calf carcass near the San Mateo Mountains. The kill was determined to be a confirmed wolf depredation by AM796 and uncollared female AF903.
- The pair was monitored extensively throughout the summer to confirm presence of a pup(s); however, no pup was confirmed.
- On August 11 and 22, AF903 and AM796 were captured, respectively, because they were outside the recovery area. They were transferred to captivity.
- On September 30, AM796 and AF903 self-released from a soft mesh translocation pen at McKenna Park New Mexico, in the Gila Wilderness. Approximately 20 days later, the pair returned to the San Mateo Mountains.
- In early December, contact with AM796 was lost when the newly affixed GPS collar prematurely dropped off.

Appendix 1. USFS confirmation of lawfully present livestock associated with each of the depredation incidents assigned to San Mateo AM1114. Note: *Italicized information has been added to clarify the emails received from USFS Staff.*

(1) September 11, 2008 09:57

John [Oakleaf],

This letter is to confirm that the Canyon Del Buey and the East Sandflat allotments are in, and continue to be in good standing with the National Forest, and the livestock in question were legally permitted on National Forest System Lands at the time the depredations occurred on August 8 *[sic; they occurred on September 3 and 8]*, 2008.

Stan Towner
Range Mgt Specialist
Quemado Ranger District
(505)773-4678

(2) June 26, 2008 depredation incident occurred on private land, thus cattle were considered legally present without an associated email from USFS.

(3) June 17, 2009 09:23

Paula [Capece], cattle belonging to Miguel Aragon were legally present on the Canyon del Buey allotment during the estimated time of the depredation (June 13 -14, 2009).

Janice S. Stevenson
District Ranger
Quemado Ranger District
Gila National Forest - R3

phone = (575) 773-4678
e-mail = jsstevenson@fs.fed.us
fax = (505) 773-4114