

Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project

Chronology of the Mexican Wolf Aspen Pack

Note - This document was reviewed and edited by the parties involved for accuracy and content.

The Aspen pack of Mexican wolves has been in the news quite a bit since its release because of depredation and/or nuisance behavior in Arizona and more recently in New Mexico. However, much of the information that persons without direct knowledge of key events and facts have disseminated about this pack, especially through the Internet, has been inaccurate. In January 2007, the Adaptive Management Oversight Committee (AMOC) asked the Interagency Field Team (IFT) to develop an accurate chronology of important events in this pack's history. The IFT's chronology follows below and is up-to-date through March 31, 2007.

Please note that the private individuals involved in the more recent Aspen pack incidents, involving horses in New Mexico, reviewed and edited the information below for accuracy. Their assistance in providing accurate information, and their assistance in helping the IFT respond to the incidents appropriately, is greatly appreciated.

Pack background summarized from IFT 2004 Annual Report

Aspen pack alpha male (AM) 512 and alpha female (AF) 667 bred in captivity and subsequently gave birth to three pups, male (m) 871, female (f) 872 and female 873, on April 15 at the Ladder Ranch Wolf Management Facility in New Mexico.

On July 28, AM512, AF667 and the three pups were released from a mesh acclimation pen southeast of Hannagan Meadow in the Blue Range Primitive Area in Arizona. Within a month after release, AF667, AM512 and f872 began using the west side of the Blue River drainage between the Red Hill road and KP Creek.

On September 12, the IFT received a report from a resident on the Blue River corridor of two wolves harassing a calf in a corral. The IFT investigated and determined that AF667 and AM512 were in the area. The IFT began intensively monitoring the Aspen pack, which lasted through the end of the year. On September 13, m871 slipped its radio telemetry collar, which was later recovered near the release site in the vicinity of Hannagan Meadow.

By October, f873 became functionally independent from the alpha pair, establishing a pattern of use in the Rose Peak area. During this time, the IFT did not know whether missing m871, if alive, was traveling with the alpha pair and f872, was with its littermate f873, or was independent and on its own. On October 28, the Aspen pack likely interacted with a dog in the vicinity of a residence on the Blue River corridor, resulting in superficial injuries to the dog. On November 4, AM512 and f872 were involved in a non-injury interaction with two domestic dogs enclosed in a chain link fence along the Blue River corridor. The resident fired a gun into the air, after which the wolves left the area. On November 30, a Blue River resident reported another non-injury incident involving a wolf and dogs at their residence. While the wolf

involved could not be determined, AM512, AF667 and f872 were known to have been in the area.

From October through the end of the year, f873 continued to be located separate from the rest of the pack in the vicinity south of the Blue Lookout area and west of Rose Peak. The IFT later confirmed that an uncollared individual seen with f873 on December 5 was m871.

The Aspen pack's nuisance behavior in the Blue River corridor from September through December resulted in the IFT initiating trapping for them on December 9. On December 22, the IFT captured f872 at the mouth of Saddle Canyon, and transferred it to the Ladder Ranch Wolf Management Facility in New Mexico. This 8-month-old pup was in good physical condition, weighing 60 pounds at the time of capture. Despite the pack's use of the Blue River drainage and documented interactions, the IFT had no confirmed livestock injuries or depredations associated with the Aspen pack during 2004.

Information summarized from the IFT 2005 Annual Report

In January, the Aspen pack consisted of only the alpha pair, AM512 and AF667.

On January 25, the IFT captured m871, separate from the alpha pair, confirming its existence. The IFT took it into captivity as a result of one depredation incident involving two confirmed livestock injuries and one confirmed kill of domestic livestock in Arizona. On January 26, the IFT captured f873 in the same area and took it into captivity for its involvement in the depredation incident with m871. From February through March, no documented incidents occurred.

On April 4, 2005, the IFT initiated trapping for AF667 and AM512 after confirmation on April 3 of non-fatal injuries to a domestic dog and two calves on private property. On April 9, the IFT successfully captured AM512 and transported it to the Sevilleta Wolf Management Facility (Sevilleta) in New Mexico. On May 4, the IFT captured AF667 and three dependent pups, m973, m974 and f975, and placed them with AM512 and yearling m871 at Sevilleta. On June 14, the IFT translocated AM512, AF667, yearling M871 and the three pups to McKenna Park in the Gila Wilderness in New Mexico where the pack chewed through the mesh release pen the same day.

On August 24, AM512, AF667 and m871 were likely involved in the death of a herding dog lost in the Gila National Forest near the Gila Cliff Dwellings. The last documentation of any of the translocated pups occurred in August with an observation of one pup. There was no subsequent indication of their survival. Through the remainder of the year, AM512, AF667 and m871 remained together, establishing a territory primarily within the Gila Wilderness with no documented incidents.

An end-of-year helicopter population survey documented only AM512, AF667 and m871, with no evidence of surviving pups. As a result, despite being translocated with three pups, the IFT

did not consider the Aspen pack to be a “Breeding Pair” in 2005, per the definition in the Final Rule.

Information summarized from 2006 IFT notes and reports

In February, Aspen pack m871 joined with f861, previously of the Saddle pack, forming the Middle Fork Pack.

The Aspen pack established a territory located primarily within the Gila Wilderness area. The pack denned in the Gila Wilderness and raised at least four pups within this territory, with no documented incidents occurring during this time period.

Although the Aspen pack already had two functioning radio collars, during the week of September 9-15, the IFT caught three pups, assigned them studbook numbers m1038, m1039 and f1040, and fitted them with radio collars. The IFT observed a fourth pup, but was unable to capture it. In late September, the Aspen pack began using areas on the northern edge of the Gila Wilderness.

On November 9, the IFT documented the Aspen pack in nuisance activities that involved an injury to a dog on private property. A young girl, accompanied by her dog, was gathering a horse when a wolf attacked the dog. The girl was within 20 yards of the attack. Three other people were approximately 140 yards away at the time. A single, large uncollared wolf, likely AM512, was involved in the interaction. The IFT worked with the resident to mitigate the situation.

On November 26, the IFT received a report from a resident, approximately eight miles south of the November 9 incident, that an uncollared wolf pinned down a dog in the presence of a woman near her residence. The dog was uninjured. The IFT did not investigate the report due to a three-day delay in reporting the incident to the IFT and snow that accumulated since the incident. This wolf involved was consistent with the physical description AM512. The IFT also received reports of lost dogs in the area that they did not investigate due to lapse in reporting time or lack of evidence.

Information summarized from 2007 IFT notes and reports

On January 9, the IFT received a call from the same resident where the November 9 dog incident occurred. A neighbor checking on the horses at their ranch in their absence discovered a dead horse. The IFT investigated that same day and confirmed that wolves killed the horse.

On January 17, the resident was leaving the ranch where the January 9 horse incident occurred and observed their horses running on the road approximately four miles from their house. The horses were uninjured. The resident did not see wolves chasing the horses; however, they had observed fresh wolf tracks in the area earlier that day.

The IFT conducted a helicopter end-of-year population count and capture operation from January 14 through January 23. The IFT attempted to capture AM512 during this time, but was unsuccessful. However, on January 23, the IFT did capture the only uncollared wolf observed with the wolves wearing radio collars, a 53-pound female pup, and fitted it with a radio collar. Following the unsuccessful capture of AM512, the IFT initiated intensive hazing at the residence that lasted through mid-February.

From January 20 to February 17, the IFT remained in the area of the incidents to monitor the wolves. On one occasion, the IFT received telemetry signals from wolves within one mile of the area, but the animals principally remained within the Gila Wilderness. The IFT set up two Radio Activated Guard (RAG) boxes in the area. The boxes are scare devices that emit loud noise and set off a strobe light when a wolf wearing a radio collar is near to frighten it from the area. On one occasion, a pup with a radio collar tripped a RAG box and left the area. On January 24, tracks of a single wolf were observed near a residence. On January 26, residents observed a single, uncollared wolf, likely AM512, at approximately 300-400 yards moving away from them. No further interactions have occurred.

On February 14, the Aspen pack moved north, and single M863 joined the pack. The IFT monitored this group daily during March. Two RAG boxes remained at the residence of the January 9 incident throughout the month of March and were not activated during this time.

The principle resident involved in these incidents reported that they were pleased with the management response from the IFT.