

Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project Monthly Update

March 1 – 31, 2007

The following is a summary of Mexican wolf reintroduction project activities in Arizona on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests (ASNF) and in New Mexico on the Gila National Forest (GNF), collectively known as the Blue Range Wolf Reintroduction Area (BRWRA). Additional information can be obtained by calling (928) 339-4329 or toll free at 1-888-459-9653, or by visiting the Arizona Game and Fish Department Web site at <http://www.azgfd.gov/wolf> or by visiting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Web site at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/mexicanwolf>. Past updates may be viewed on either Web site, or interested parties may sign up to receive this update electronically by visiting <http://www.azgfd.gov/signup>. This update is a public document and information in it can be used for any purpose. The reintroduction project is a multi-agency cooperative effort among the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD), New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF), USDA Forest Service (USFS), USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services (USDA APHIS WS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT) located on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation (FAIR). Other entities cooperate through the Adaptive Management Work Group (AMWG) that meets quarterly in Arizona and/or New Mexico, including private individuals, organizations and tribes.

To view the weekly wolf telemetry flight location information or the 3-month wolf distribution map, please visit <http://www.azgfd.gov/wolf>. On the home page, click on the link for “weekly telemetry flight location information and 3-month wolf distribution map” under “Learn More” on the right side of the page. Once on the “Interagency Field Team” sub-page, again go to the “Learn More” column on the right and scroll to the specific location information you seek. To be consistent in disseminating Mexican wolf location information, the weekly telemetry flight locations are now available on an additional link and under “Distribution,” as per Standard Operating Procedure 26.0, *Location Dissemination Guidelines*.

Please report any wolf sightings or suspected livestock depredations to: (928) 339-4329 or toll free at 1-888-459-9653. To report incidents of take or harassment of wolves, please call AGFD’s 24-hour dispatch (Operation Game Thief) at 1-800-352-0700.

Numbering System: Mexican wolves are given an identification number recorded in an official studbook that tracks their history. Capital letters (M = Male, F = Female) preceding the number indicate adult animals 24 months or older. Lower case letters (m = male, f = female) indicate wolves younger than 18 months or pups. The capital letter “A” preceding the letter and number indicate alpha wolves.

Definitions: For the purposes of the Monthly Update, a “wolf pack” is defined as two or more wolves that maintain an established home range. The Interagency Field Team (IFT) recognizes that wolves without radio telemetry collars sometimes form packs. If the IFT confirms that wolves are associating with each other and are resident within the same home range, they will be referenced as a pack.

CURRENT POPULATION STATUS

At the end of March, the collared population consisted of 30 wolves with functional radio collars dispersed among nine packs and six single wolves. This number is different from last month because the IFT lethally removed Saddle pack M1007. Former single wolf M863 is now associating with the Aspen pack, and M1043, formerly of the Rim pack, is now considered a single wolf. Other uncollared wolves are known to be associating with wolves having radio collars, as well as being separate from known packs.

The IFT completed its 2006 end-of-year survey in January. During the survey, the IFT observed 31 collared wolves and 18 uncollared wolves associated with collared wolves, for a total of 49 wolves observed. The IFT used tracks, scat and other sign to identify 10 additional wolves, bringing the minimum end-of-year wolf population estimate to 59. However, wolf populations are dynamic, and these numbers may change on a daily basis. The IFT will provide a mid-year population estimate in the July 2007 monthly update.

SEASONAL NEWS

Mexican wolf pups are generally born mid-April to mid-May. In the upcoming months, the IFT will be actively monitoring wolves to determine if females are denning in order to document wild-born pups.

The IFT conducted 24 daily telemetry flights in March to document characteristics of wolf prey that they located near wolves with radio collars. The IFT identified 21 sites having evidence of prey remains for follow-up investigation. Of these sites, they found ten prey animals that they classified as confirmed or probable wolf kills. The IFT determined that wolves may possibly have killed three other prey animals, but not enough remained of the carcasses to determine the cause of death. They believe four prey animals died from other causes and wolves subsequently scavenged on them. The IFT was unable to find prey remains at four other investigation sites. Packs included in this year's effort were the Hawks Nest and Paradise packs in Arizona and the Aspen, Saddle and San Mateo packs in New Mexico.

IN ARIZONA:

Bluestem Pack (collared AM806, AF521, m1041 and f1042)

During March, members of the Bluestem pack made movements from the central portion of their traditional home range on the ASNF to the western portion of the GNF. Male 1041 and f1042 began making dispersal movements, and the IFT located them separate from the pack. The IFT located m1041 in the northwestern portion of the BRWRA in the GNF and f1042 in the San Mateo pack territory.

Hawks Nest Pack (collared AM619 and AF486 with a non-functional collar)

The IFT located AM619 in its traditional home range north and northeast of the Big Lake area on the ASNF. On the March 16 and 23 telemetry flights, the IFT observed AM619 with another wolf, assumed to be AF486.

Rim Pack (collared AM991 and AF858)

Throughout March, the IFT located the pack within their traditional home range in the central portion of the ASNF and the eastern portion of the FAIR.

M990 (collared)

During March, the IFT located M990 on the FAIR.

f1028 (collared)

Throughout March, the IFT located f1028 in the central portion of the ASNF. On March 21, the IFT hazed f1028 from a residential area after a report of lost chickens and a duck. See "Incidents" below for more information.

m1043 (collared)

During March, the IFT located m1043, formerly of the Rim pack, on the SCAR.

ON THE FAIR:

Paradise Pack (collared M1044, M1045 and M795)

Throughout March, the IFT located the pack in the northwest corner of the BRWRA on the ASNF and on the FAIR.

IN NEW MEXICO:

Aspen Pack (collared AF667, M863, m1038, m1039, f1040 and f1046)

Throughout March, the Aspen pack continued to use areas north of the Aldo Leopold Wilderness. Male 1039 and F1046 began making dispersal movements, and the IFT located them separate from the pack northwest of the wilderness area. On the March 18 telemetry flight, the IFT observed five wolves in the pack. The IFT has not been able confirm AM512's existence, and it is assumed dead or no longer associated with the pack.

Luna Pack (collared AM583, f1047 and uncollared AF562)

During March, the Luna pack remained near the northern boundary of the Gila Wilderness.

Middle Fork Pack (collared AM871 and AF861)

Throughout March, the IFT located the pair together in the northern portion of the Gila Wilderness.

Saddle Pack (collared AM732, AF797 and f1016)

The pack remained in the GNF and in the northern portion of the Gila Wilderness. On March 16, the IFT lethally removed m1007 for three confirmed depredation incidents involving three cows in New Mexico.

San Mateo Pack (collared AF903)

During March, the pack continued to use areas east of Escudilla Mountain in the Apache National Forest in New Mexico.

F923 (collared)

During March, F923 continued to make wide-ranging movements. The IFT located F923 in Arizona during the first part of March, then later, more than 15 east of the New Mexico border in the western portion of the GNF.

M925 (collared) – Formerly of the Luna pack

M925 made wide-ranging movements during March. The IFT first located M925 in the San Mateo pack territory, and then it traveled to the northern border of the BRWRA in the GNF. On the March 19 telemetry flight, the IFT located M925 in the northwest portion of the BRWRA in the GNF.

M992 (collared) – Formerly of the Rim pack

The IFT located M992 in the northern portion of the Gila Wilderness and in the west-central portion of the GNF.

INCIDENTS

On March 1, the IFT received a call concerning a dead calf in Catron County, New Mexico, and that the reporting party observed three canids feeding on it. The IFT investigated the site and determined that coyotes killed the calf.

On March 1, the IFT received a call concerning a dead cow in Catron County. The IFT investigation determined the kill to be a possible wolf depredation based on wolf tracks in the area.

On March 5, members of the WMAT observed a canid with an orange collar attacking a cow on the FAIR. The IFT was unable to locate any collared wolves in the area, but did observe a large dog with an orange collar and determined that the incident involved this dog.

On March 13, the IFT received a report of “five collared wolves” in Sierra County, New Mexico, attacking a bull and not retreating from a ranch worker. The IFT investigated and based on descriptions of the animals, concluded that they were domestic dogs.

On March 13, during the winter monitoring telemetry flight effort, the IFT observed M903 near a cow in Catron County. The IFT, USFS personnel and the ranch manager searched the area, but were unable to locate any carcasses. The IFT hazed M903 from the area.

On March 16, the IFT received a call concerning a dead cow near Highway 12 in Catron County. A rancher in the area reported that the cow belonged to him and had died from unknown causes. It was not wolf-related.

On March 19, the IFT received a call about a “wolf with a black collar” attempting to get into a pen with a calf in Sierra County on March 17. The animal has not been back since, and the reporting party did not request the IFT to investigate due to the delay in reporting and weather.

On March 19, the IFT observed a dead cow in Apache County, Arizona, during the daily March monitoring effort. They also located the Paradise pack in the vicinity. The IFT investigation was unable to determine the cow’s cause of death due to the state of decomposition, but the investigation revealed it was not wolf-related.

On March 21, a resident living north of Alpine reported observing a wolf on their property with a domestic duck in its mouth. He reported also missing several chickens. The IFT investigated and confirmed that a wolf killed the duck. They also located f1028 in the area. The IFT hazed the wolf from the area and are monitoring it daily.

On March 23, the IFT received a report of an injured dog in Catron County. The IFT investigation confirmed that a wolf bit the dog, based on the bite mark pattern.

On March 29, the IFT discovered a livestock leg bone and vertebrae in Catron County. On April 1, the IFT, the Catron County investigator and a ranch hand searched the area, but were unable to find any remains. The IFT classified this livestock mortality as an unknown cause of death.

On March 29, the IFT investigated the remains of a dead calf in Catron County. The IFT investigation determined it was a possible wolf kill.

On March 30, the IFT received a call from a rancher in Catron County who found an injured calf, a dead calf, a dead cow and four tight-bagged cows. On March 31, the IFT investigated, but was not able to examine the injured calf. They determined that a coyote killed the dead calf. They also confirmed that an unknown, uncollared wolf killed the dead cow.

CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Nothing to report.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

On February 28, Mark Winteroud, a USFWS volunteer, provided a presentation to 24 third-grade students at Pinon Elementary and later to 15 Boy Scouts in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

On March 12, Dan Groebner provided a presentation to 14 students at Sequoia Village School in Linden, Arizona.

On March 17, Saleen Richter, in cooperation with the USFWS and the Living Desert Zoo and State Gardens, provided a presentation and telemetry demonstration to 20 participants at the Mexican Gray Wolf Teachers Workshop in Carlsbad, New Mexico.

The 19th Annual North American Wolf Conference will be held April 24-26 at the Little American Hotel in Flagstaff, Arizona. The conference serves as a bridge to bring together leading wolf biologists, conservationists, livestock owners, depredation specialists, educators, and state, tribal and federal wolf managers to share wolf-related information, including ecological and genetic research, non-lethal techniques to reduce livestock conflicts, and economic and environmental impacts of wolf restoration. Visit <http://www.defenders.org/wolf/conference/> for more details.

PROJECT PERSONNEL

Shannon Barber-Meyer has accepted the AGFD Interagency Field Team Leader position. Shannon completed her Ph.D. in Yellowstone National Park looking at the effects of wolf predation on elk calf survival. She will begin work in Alpine on April 30.

Mark Winteroud, a USFWS volunteer, left the Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project on March 31.

REWARDS OFFERED

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is offering a reward of up to \$10,000 and the Arizona Game and Fish Department Operation Game Thief is offering a reward of up to \$1,000 for information leading to the conviction of the individual(s) responsible for the shooting deaths of Mexican wolves. A variety of non-governmental organizations have pledged an additional \$35,000, for a total reward amount of up to \$46,000, depending on the information provided.

Individuals with information they believe may be helpful are urged to call one of the following agencies: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service special agents in Mesa, AZ, at (480) 967-7900, in Alpine, AZ, at (928) 339-4232, or in

Albuquerque, NM, at (505) 346-7828; the White Mountain Apache Tribe at (928) 338-1023 or (928) 338-4385; Arizona Game and Fish Department Operation Game Thief at 1-800-352-0700; or New Mexico Department of Game and Fish Operation Game Thief at 1-800-432-4263. Killing a Mexican wolf is a violation of the Federal Endangered Species Act, and can result in criminal penalties of up to \$50,000 and/or not more than one year in jail, and/or a civil penalty of up to \$25,000.