

Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project Monthly Update

May 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 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, go to the “Wolf Location Information” heading on the right side of the page near the top and scroll to the specific location information you seek.

Please report any wolf sightings or suspected livestock depredations to: (928) 339-4329 or toll free at 888-459-9653. To report incidents of take or harassment of wolves, please call AGFD’s 24-hour dispatch (Operation Game Thief) at 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 may also 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 May, the collared population consisted of 27 wolves with functional radio collars dispersed among 10 packs and seven single wolves. This number is different from last month because: 1) the IFT captured Saddle pack AM732 and AF797 per the USFWS Permanent Removal Order; 2) f1016, formerly of the Saddle pack, is now considered a single wolf; 3) f1048, formerly a single wolf, is now considered part of the Rim pack; 4) the IFT discovered the remains of m1041 in Arizona; 5) m1038, m1039 and f1040, formerly of the Aspen pack, are now considered single wolves; and 6) the IFT discovered the remains of M925 in New Mexico (see “Information Sought” below for more information). Other uncollared wolves are known to be associating with wolves having radio collars, as well as being separate from known packs.

At the end of 2006, there were 59 wolves throughout the BRWRA in New Mexico and Arizona. Of those, 46 were born in the wild.

INFORMATION SOUGHT IN SUSPICIOUS WOLF DEATH

On May 9, USFS staff found canine remains in the GNF of New Mexico. The IFT sent the remains to the USFWS National Forensics Laboratory in Ashland, Oregon, for examination. The preliminary results in this investigation indicate the carcass was of M925 and that the wolf died from a gunshot wound. The carcass was found

approximately 20 miles east of Reserve, New Mexico. M925 was a two-year-old male from the Luna Pack and frequented the Collins Park area in New Mexico.

The USFWS would like to hear from any individuals who may have seen suspicious activities in this area. Please see “Rewards Offered” for contact information.

SEASONAL NEWS

Mexican wolf pups are generally born mid-April to mid-May. In the upcoming months, the IFT will be monitoring wolves to determine if females are denning in order to document wild-born pups. Based on location information, the IFT documented denning behavior in the Bluestem, Paradise and Rim packs in Arizona and in the Aspen, Durango, Middle Fork and Saddle packs in New Mexico.

IN ARIZONA:

Bluestem Pack (collared AM806, AF521 and f1042)

During May, the IFT located AM806 and f1042 together on both the ASNF and on the FAIR. The IFT located AF521 separately on the FAIR.

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

Throughout May, the IFT located AM619 in its traditional home range in the northern portion of the ASNF.

Rim Pack (collared AF858 and f1048)

Throughout May, the IFT located the pack within its traditional home range in the central portion of the ASNF. Although the IFT previously located f1048 separate from the Rim pack in April, it is now considered part of the Rim pack.

f1028 (collared)

Throughout May, the IFT located f1028 in the northern portion of the ASNF, just south of the Hawks Nest pack home range. On May 23 and 28, the IFT observed f1028 with a rear leg injury near Alpine, Arizona. The IFT began conducting an intensive monitoring effort to potentially capture f1028 to assess the injury, as well as to haze the wolf away from potential residential conflict areas.

m1041 (collared)

On May 11, the IFT received a report of an injured wolf. The IFT confirmed the wolf to be m1041 with an apparent leg injury. On May 16 and May 23, the IFT observed m1041. On May 29, the IFT discovered the remains of m1041 south of Alpine. USFWS law enforcement is investigating the cause of death.

F923 (collared)

During May, the IFT continued attempts to remove F923 from the SCAR per the tribe’s request. On May 22, the IFT was unable to locate F923 on the SCAR, despite intensive search efforts. On May 23, the IFT received a report of a collared wolf in the east-central portion of the BRWRA in Arizona, and the IFT confirmed it to be F923. The IFT was unable to locate it in the area the following day. On May 29, the IFT located F923 near the west-central boundary of the GNF.

ON THE FAIR:

Bacho Pack (collared M990)

During May, the IFT located M990 on the FAIR.

Paradise Pack (collared M1044, M1045 and M795)

Throughout May, the IFT located the pack in the northwest corner of the BRWRA on the ASNF and on the FAIR. On May 22, an uncollared member of the Paradise pack was involved in a depredation incident. See “Incidents” below for more information.

IN NEW MEXICO:

Aspen Pack (collared AF667, M863 and f1046)

Throughout May, the Aspen pack continued to use areas north of the Aldo Leopold Wilderness, as well as the eastern portion of the Gila Wilderness.

Durango Pack (collared AM973 and AF924)

On May 1, during the aerial telemetry flight, the IFT located the pair over 30 miles northeast of their translocation site in an area from where AF924 had previously been removed. The IFT located the pair in this area throughout the month.

Luna Pack (collared AM583, f1047 and uncollared AF562)

During May, the IFT located the Luna pack in the central portion of the GNF and north of the Gila Wilderness.

Middle Fork Pack (collared AM871 and AF861)

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

Saddle Pack (collared AM732, AF797 and f1016)

On May 26, the IFT captured AM732 and removed it to permanent captivity. On May 31, the IFT captured AF797 and seven pups and placed them in captivity with AM732 at the Sevilleta Wolf Management Facility in New Mexico. The IFT was unable to locate f1016 during May despite search efforts. Saddle f1016 is now considered a single wolf.

San Mateo Pack (collared AF903)

During May, the IFT located AF903 east of Escudilla Mountain in the Apache National Forest (ANF) in New Mexico. On May 21, the IFT located AF903 in Arizona in the north-central portion of the BRWRA, but it had returned to the ANF by the end of the month.

M925 (collared)

On May 9, the IFT discovered the remains of M925. This wolf had been missing, despite search efforts, since April 12. USFWS law enforcement is investigating the cause of death.

M992 (collared)

The IFT located M992 in the west-central portion of the GNF. On May 16, M992 was involved in a second depredation incident. See May 16 "Incidents" below for more information.

m1038, m1039, f1040 (all collared)

The IFT located m1038, m1039 and f1040 separate from the Aspen pack, but within the traditional Aspen home range. On May 29, the IFT located m1038 in the northern portion of the GNF, over 50 miles north of m1039 and f1040.

INCIDENTS

On May 1, the IFT received a report from a rancher in Catron County, New Mexico, of a dead cow with three wolves on the carcass, along with a dead calf nearby. The IFT investigation on May 2 determined that the cow was a wolf-caused depredation by unknown wolves and that the calf died of unknown causes. The closest wolves to the area with radio collars were seven miles away, the Saddle pack, and 10 miles away, the Durango pack. The reporting range rider also indicated that he had seen a pack of six wolves. The number of wolves in the area and the locations were not indicative of known wolf packs. The IFT set foothold traps in the area in an effort to capture and place radio collars on any uncollared wolves that may have been involved in the depredations. The IFT was unable to trap any wolves in the effort.

On May 2, the IFT investigated a minor, wolf-caused dog injury in Apache County, Arizona. The owners have experienced previous interactions between their dogs and wolves. The IFT is working with the owner to erect a dog pen to mitigate potential future interactions.

On May 4, the IFT received a report from the Catron County Wolf Investigator of a dead cow in Catron County.

The IFT investigation determined the cause of death to be unknown.

On May 7, the IFT investigated a report of an injured horse and a calf with a tail missing in Catron County. The IFT investigation was unable to determine the cause of the missing tail of the calf and found no evidence of wolf involvement with the horse.

On May 7, the IFT investigated a report of a dead calf in Catron County. The carcass was approximately ¼-mile from the confirmed cow depredation on May 2. The IFT investigation revealed that wolves killed the calf. There were no collared wolves in the area and no collared wolves had been located in the area over the previous week. The IFT set foothold traps in the area in an effort to capture and place radio collars on any uncollared wolves that may have been involved in the depredations. The IFT was unable to trap any wolves in the effort.

On May 11, the IFT investigated a report of a dead calf in Catron County. The IFT investigation revealed that a coyote killed the calf.

On May 14, during the aerial telemetry flight, the IFT observed a dead cow in Catron County. A discussion with the permittee revealed that the cow had drowned.

On May 16, the IFT investigated a report of a dead cow in Catron County. The IFT investigation confirmed that a wolf killed the cow. The IFT located M992 in the area at the time of the depredation incident. This is the second depredation incident for M992.

On May 17, the IFT received a report of a wolf feeding on a sheep carcass in Apache County in the area of the Paradise pack. The IFT investigated and found two dead rams. The IFT determined that both rams had died of natural causes.

On May 22, the IFT confirmed a wolf depredation of a sheep in Apache County in the Paradise pack home range that occurred on May 20, but was not reported until May 21. A ranch hand observed an uncollared wolf in the area at the time of the depredation. The IFT took proactive measures by placing fladry around the sheep pen and monitoring the area.

On May 24, the IFT received a call from the Catron County Wolf Investigator that two children, walking home from a bus stop, reported seeing a wolf. There were no radio collared wolves in the area at the time. The IFT investigated and found large canine tracks in the area. The IFT has searched the area three additional times and found no further canine sign.

On May 24, a rancher in Catron County contacted the Catron County Wolf Investigator to report an injured cow. The IFT investigation on May 25 revealed that the injuries were not wolf-related.

On May 24, the IFT investigated a dead cow in Catron County. The investigation determined that the cow died of unknown causes.

CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

On May 26, members of the IFT captured and permanently removed Saddle pack AM732 to captivity at the Wolf Management Facility at the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico. On May 31, the IFT captured AF797 and its seven pups and placed them with AM732. All nine wolves appear to be doing well. The pups are eligible for future translocations.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

On May 25, the IFT, in coordination with the USFS, enacted a temporary closure of approximately five square miles in the ASNF to minimize wolf contact with dogs and people. The closure is near Sheep and Beehive Springs, north of Highway 260 and south of Greens Peak, and is scheduled to remain in effect until June 25 or until rescinded. Members of the IFT and employees of the AGFD and the USFS made approximately 150 contacts with campers in the area during the latter part of May.

PROJECT PERSONNEL

Laura Kelly, a technician for the Arizona Game and Fish Department, left the project on May 11. Thank you, Laura, for all of your hard work!

Saleen Richter, Field Team Leader for the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, left the project on May 18. Thank you, Saleen, for all of your hard work and congratulations!

Andy Bennett, a USFWS volunteer, left the project in May. Thank you, Andy, for all of your hard work!

Angela Dassow began a temporary assignment June 6 to assist the NMDGF wolf biologist until August 13.

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.