

# Mexican Wolf Reintroduction Project Monthly Update

## September 1 – 30, 2005

This is a summary of Mexican wolf reintroduction project activities in Arizona on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests (ASNF) and New Mexico on the Gila National Forest (GNF). Additional information can be obtained by calling (928) 339-4329, or toll free at 1-888-459-WOLF (9653), or by visiting the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service web site at <http://mexicanwolf.fws.gov>. Past updates may also be viewed on this web site or interested parties may sign up to receive the update electronically by visiting <http://azgfd.gov>. This update is public property and can be used for any purpose. The reintroduction project is a multi-agency cooperative effort among the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD), New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF), USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services (USDA-WS), USDA Forest Service (USFS), the White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT) on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation (FAIR), the San Carlos Apache Tribe (SCAT) on the San Carlos Apache Reservation (SCAR), and other supporting organizations including the Turner Endangered Species Fund (TESF) and Defenders of Wildlife (DOW).

**Please report any wolf sightings or suspected livestock depredations to:** (928) 339-4329 or toll free at 1-888-459-WOLF (9653). To report incidents of take or harassment of wolves, please call the Arizona Game and Fish Department'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 the history of all known Mexican wolves. Capital letters (M = Male, F = Female) preceding the number indicate adult animals 18 months or older. Lower case letters (m = male, f = female) indicate sub-adults, younger than 18 months or pups. The capital letter "A" preceding the letter and number indicate alpha wolves.

**Definitions:** For the purpose of this update, a "wolf pack" is defined as two or more wolves that maintain an established territory and are proven breeders. In the event that one of the two alpha wolves dies, the remaining wolf, regardless of pack size, retains the pack name. A "group" of wolves is defined as two or more wolves that travel together on a consistent basis, but are not proven breeders. The Interagency Field Team (IFT) recognizes that wolves without radio telemetry collars may form a group or a pack. If they are confirmed through trapping, sightings or other field methods, they will be included in the appropriate category.

### CURRENT POPULATION STATUS

As of the end of September, the IFT maintained contact with 19 collared wolves in nine packs, including four lone wolves. They lost contact with three wolves, f862, M795 and San Mateo AM796, however, per protocol the wolves will not be designated "fate unknown" until three months has elapsed without contact. The IFT believes contact was lost with M795 and AM796 due to collar failures. Estimates of uncollared wolves are best made when wolves are most visible, and when populations fluctuate the least. The final population estimate of wolves for 2005 will be provided in the January 2006 monthly update.

**In Arizona:** Bluestem Pack (AF521 and AM507), Hawks Nest Pack (AF486, having non-functional collar, but visually confirmed several times in August, and AM619), Rim Pack (AF858), San Mateo Pack (AF903, AM796, having non-functional collar, but believed to still be with the pack, and uncollared pups m927, m928 and f929), sub-adult f873, and lone wolves Cienega F487 and M795. Hon-Dah Pack (AM578) and F613 are located on the FAIR.

**In New Mexico:** Aspen Pack (AF667, AM512, sub-adult m871, and uncollared pups m973, m974 and f975), Luna Pack (AF562 and AM583), Ring Pack (AF799), Saddle Pack (AF797, and sub-adults f861 and f862). There has been no contact with m863 and m864, and they are not believed to be with the pack.

*Observation reports of wolves from the public are important, and should be reported immediately as many of the wolves are currently dispersing. All wolf-sighting reports are recorded and evaluated. Please call the toll free number listed above to report a wolf sighting as soon as possible after the sighting.*

*With fall hunting season getting underway, hunters can be instrumental in helping monitor wolf populations.*

*Hunters, please help the IFT monitor wolves by reporting wolf observations to your local game and fish department. Thank you for your help.*

## **MONITORING**

The IFT continues to focus on placing radio collars on free-ranging wolves and monitoring wolf activity, reproduction and recruitment, as well as on confirming other uncollared wolves in the wild.

### **In Arizona:**

The San Mateo Pack, translocated from New Mexico to Arizona in July 2005, remained a few miles away from their release site in the ASNF. On the September 19 and 26 aerial telemetry flights, the IFT did not pick up the radio signal for AM796, despite a significant search effort. However, on September 26, the IFT obtained visuals on two wolves, one of which, based on telemetry signals, was AF903. The observers could not determine whether the second wolf was AM796 or a pup of the year. Based on past locations and behavior, the IFT believes it likely that AM796 remains with AF903 and that the Global Positioning System (GPS) collar on AM796 has likely failed.

Sub-adult f873 moved onto the SCAR in late June, 2005, and remained there throughout September. The IFT has notified tribal personnel of f873's location following each telemetry flight.

Rim AF858 traveled more than 18 miles north of the female's traditional territory during mid-September, after being very sedentary throughout the spring and summer. Its excursion lasted only a week, and by the end of the month, AF858 had returned south to the center of its traditional range.

Cienega F487 returned to what historically was the Cienega Pack territory after ranging widely in late August and early September. Cienega F487 was formerly the Cienega Pack alpha female and will be 10 years old in May 2006. F487 began traveling alone and outside of the pack's historic range in early 2005. The IFT believes that F487 continued to travel alone during September.

The IFT maintained a trap line throughout September for the purpose of placing radio transmitters on uncollared wolves after locating fresh wolf sign in the historic Iris Pack territory. The IFT lost contact with the uncollared Iris alpha female after the only collared pack member, AM798, was shot in May 2005. The IFT ceased trapping efforts on the FAIR on September 13 due to a lack of fresh wolf sign and a request of WMAT officials to avoid possible conflicts with their annual trophy elk season. The IFT also discontinued trapping activities on the ASNF on September 21 due to the lack of wolf activity in the area. This trap line will be reinitiated if additional fresh wolf sign is located.

At the end of September, the IFT located the Bluestem, Hawks Nest, Hon-Dah and Rim Packs, along with F613 and Cienega F487, in their traditional home ranges on either the ASNF or the FAIR. They did not make contact with M795.

### **In New Mexico:**

The Aspen Pack spent most of September approximately 15 miles east of its release site in the Gila Wilderness. During the last week in September, the Aspen Pack moved an additional seven miles to the eastern edge of the Gila Wilderness; however, by month's end, the pack had returned west to where they had been in early September.

The IFT located the Luna, Ring and Saddle Packs in their traditional home ranges within the GNF.

## **INCIDENTS**

During an aerial telemetry flight on September 6, IFT personnel located the Luna Pack near a domestic calf carcass. IFT-WS personnel investigated and confirmed the carcass to be a wolf depredation. This is the Luna Pack's first confirmed depredation incident. The IFT removed the carcass after the investigation, and monitored the pack for any additional livestock depredation; however, they didn't find any.

On September 6, IFT-WS personnel investigated a ram sheep carcass in Apache County and determined it to be a probable coyote kill. They removed the carcass after the investigation.

On September 7, IFT personnel located the partial remains of a calf on the FAIR. IFT-WS personnel investigated; however, due to lack of remains, no determination could be made as to cause of death.

On September 26, IFT-WS personnel investigated two calf carcasses on the FAIR. They determined one calf to be a possible wolf kill and the second calf to be a probable wolf kill. The IFT has not documented collared wolves in the vicinity of the depredations. WS personnel will initiate trapping to collar wolves in the area, should they be present.

### **CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT**

On September 7 and 28, four Francisco Pack pups (m921, m922, f923 and f924) received a series of routine vaccinations. On September 28, the IFT moved the pack from the Sevilleta Wolf Management Facility to the Ladder Ranch Wolf Management Facility.

### **COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION**

On September 1, Shawna Nelson gave a wolf presentation to 30 people at the Alpine Community Center as part of the Alpine Ranger District's Forest Education Series.

On September 8, the IFT met in Alpine to discuss information dissemination within the IFT and to the public, task deadlines, current wolf activities, volunteer technician needs, database upgrade and new office plans.

On September 23, Dan Groebner gave a wolf project update to 30 students in the Blue Ridge Junior High School Science Club at the Arizona Game and Fish office in Pinetop.

On September 30, Shawn Farry provided a project update to 15 pilots and support personnel attending the annual meeting of the International Association of Natural Resource Pilots held in Phoenix.

### **PROJECT PERSONNEL**

Nothing new to report.

### **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 gray wolves. An additional \$35,000 is being offered by a variety of public interest groups for a total amount of up to \$46,000, depending on the information provided.

Anyone 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, or Springerville, AZ at (928) 333-5245, or 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 hotline at 1-800-352-0700; or New Mexico Department of Game and Fish Operation Game Thief hotline at 1-800-432-4263.

***Killing a Mexican gray wolf is a violation of the federal Endangered Species Act, and can invoke criminal penalties of up to \$50,000 and not more than one year in jail and/or a civil penalty of up to \$25,000.***