

Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project Monthly Update

September 1 – 30, 2006

This 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 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Web site at <http://mexicanwolf.fws.gov>. Past updates may also 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-APHIS Wildlife Services (USDA-WS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT). Other entities cooperate through the Adaptive Management Work Group that meets quarterly in Arizona and/or New Mexico, including private individuals, organizations and tribes.

To view the wolf distribution map, which contains the most recent three months of wolf aerial locations, please visit <http://www.azgfd.gov/wolf>. Under “Mexican Wolf Conservation and Management,” scroll down to the links under “Distribution.”

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 the 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 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 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 reasonably resident within the same home range, they will be referenced as a pack.

CURRENT POPULATION STATUS

As of the end of September, the collared population consisted of 26* wolves with functional radio collars dispersed among nine packs and four single wolves.

* See the Aspen pack, New Mexico, below for more detailed information.

SEASONAL NEWS

The IFT has confirmed wild born pups in the San Mateo, Rim, Aspen, Luna and Saddle packs, and suspect pups in the Bluestem and Middle Fork packs. In addition, the IFT continues to observe Meridian pup f1028 with the newly released Meridian pack.

IN ARIZONA:

Bluestem Pack (collared AF521, M990 and m991)

Throughout September, the IFT located AF521, along with M990 and m991, within the pack’s traditional home range on the FAIR and ASNF. On the September 11 aerial telemetry flight, the IFT located AF521 on the FAIR and they located M990 and m991 approximately five miles to the northeast on the ASNF. On the September 18 telemetry flight, the IFT located the three wolves together on the ASNF.

Hawks Nest Pack (collared AF486 and AM619)

This pack continued to use its traditional home range east of the Big Lake area on the ASNF. The IFT attempted several times to remotely drop and recover AF896's failing Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) collar, however, the collar has not responded to the drop-off signal.

Meridian Pack (collared AF838, AM806 and uncollared f1028)

The IFT continued to intensively monitor the Meridian pack wolves as they acclimate to the wild. Throughout September, the pack remained within six miles of its release site. The IFT will continue to haze the animals should the pack approach too close to residences or exhibit other undesirable behavior such as limited flight response. On September 19, the Meridian pack was involved in an interaction with two dogs (see "Incidents" below for more information). On September 21, the IFT observed AF838, AM806 and f1028 crossing Highway 191.

Rim Pack (collared AF858 and AM992)

Throughout September, the IFT located the Rim pack within its traditional home range in the central portion of the ASNF.

San Mateo Pack (collared AF903, m927 and AM796, with a non-functional collar)

During September, the San Mateo pack continued to use areas east of Escudilla Mountain near the Arizona/New Mexico border. On the September 11 telemetry flight, the IFT observed four to five wolves, with at least one determined to be a pup. On September 23, the IFT confirmed that the San Mateo pack was involved in a depredation incident (see "Incidents" below for more information). Also on September 23, the IFT observed AF903, AM796 and m927.

M973 (collared)

Throughout September, M973 remained in the northwest portion of the BRWRA in Arizona. The IFT continued to locate M973 in close proximity to the Greer, Arizona, area where the IFT captured and released it in August. The IFT is monitoring M973's behavior closely and continues to haze should it approach too close to residences in the area.

IN NEW MEXICO:**Aspen Pack (collared AF667, m1038, m1039, f1040 and uncollared AM512)**

Throughout September, the IFT located the Aspen pack in the eastern portion of the Gila Wilderness. On September 8, the IFT observed four pups and AF667. On September 10, the IFT captured and collared two male pups, m1038 and m1039. On September 14, the IFT captured and collared female pup f1040.

Luna Pack (collared AM583, m925 and uncollared AF562)

AM583 and yearling m925 remained within their traditional home range area in the central portion of the GNF.

Middle Fork Pack (collared AF861 and AM871)

Throughout September, the IFT located AF861 and AM871 together in the central portion of the Gila Wilderness. The IFT packed into the Gila Wilderness for a week to attempt to confirm pups with the Middle Fork pack, and if present, to trap and collar. However, they had no sightings or captures.

Saddle Pack (collared AF797, AM732 and m1007)

During September, the Saddle pack continued to use its traditional home range in the southern portion of the GNF. On the September 18 telemetry flight, the IFT located AM732 approximately five miles from AF797 and m1007.

M859 (collared)

The IFT located M859 outside the BRWRA on the September 5 telemetry flight, but they later located it within the BRWRA. M859 is traveling alone, despite the September 18 telemetry flight where the IFT briefly located f924 with M859.

f923 (collared)

During September, f923 remained near the western edge of the Luna pack territory.

f924 (collared)

On the September 11 telemetry flight, the IFT located f924 just outside the southern boundary of the GNF in the Pinos Altos Range. Between September 11 and 18, f924 traveled more than 50 miles north within the BRWRA. On September 18, it was briefly located with M859.

INCIDENTS

On September 3, the IFT discovered a dead bull in Catron County, New Mexico. The rancher reported the bull had died from natural causes.

On September 5, the IFT investigated a calf carcass in Catron County after receiving a report of two wolves near the carcass. The IFT investigation determined that a wolf was possibly the cause of death.

On September 5, the IFT received a report of an uncollared wolf chasing hobbled horses and mules after ceasing chase of elk in New Mexico. The horse and mules were later found sore, but uninjured. The area of the occurrence is within the Aspen pack territory.

On September 10, the IFT investigated a calf carcass in Apache County, Arizona, after receiving a report of a collared wolf feeding on the carcass. The IFT investigation was unable to reveal a cause of death due to the extent of decomposition.

On September 19, the IFT investigated a dead cow in Catron County. The IFT investigation determined that the cow had been struck by a vehicle, and its owner later shot it due to its injuries.

On September 19, the Meridian pack was involved in an interaction with two dogs on USFS land. A veterinarian examined the dogs and found the injuries to be non-life threatening.

On September 23, the IFT investigated a dead cow and calf in the San Mateo pack's territory. The IFT investigation revealed that wolves had not killed the cow; however, they confirmed that wolves killed the calf. This is the second confirmed depredation incident for the San Mateo pack; the first depredation incident occurred in March 2006.

On September 26, the IFT investigated an injured horse in Apache County. The IFT investigation confirmed that wolves caused the injuries. The horse is being treated for its injuries, which appear to be non-life threatening. Due to the location of the incident, it is attributed to the San Mateo pack.

CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

On September 7, project personnel captured seven 20-week old pups, stud book numbers 1031 through 1037, from the Ladder Ranch Wolf Management Facility, and gave them their last round of puppy vaccinations, in accordance with the Mexican Gray Wolf Husbandry Manual.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

On September 1, Shawna Nelson provided an informal presentation to 29 Arizona State University students and took 14 students on a howling survey west of Alpine, AZ.

On September 2, Janess Vartanian provided an update to 20 members of University of Arizona's Wildlife Society in Alpine, AZ.

On September 5 and 8, Shawna Nelson provided information on the wolf project and spoke to numerous ATV participants at the 2006 Outlaw Trail ATV Jamboree held in Springerville, AZ.

On September 16, Shawna Nelson, along with USFWS and Rio Grande Zoo personnel, conducted a Mexican Wolf Teacher's Workshop for 16 educators and zoo docents at the Albuquerque Biological Park in Albuquerque, NM.

On September 18, six members of the IFT attended an informational presentation on the Apache culture hosted by tribal member Ramon Riley at the WMAT Wildlife and Outdoor Recreation Division in Whiteriver, AZ.

On September 19, Shawna Nelson provided informal presentations and hands-on demonstrations on telemetry to 102 6th grade students from Round Valley Middle School at the Sipe White Mountain Wildlife Area.

On September 30, Melissa Woolf provided a presentation to approximately 30 visitors at the Wildlife West Nature Park in Edgewood, NM. Wildlife West is a participant in the Mexican Wolf Species Survival Plan program.

PROJECT PERSONNEL

On September 5, Santiago Gonzales officially began his position as the USFWS Assistant Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator. Santiago is stationed in Albuquerque, NM.

On September 7, Steve Dobrott, manager of the Ladder Ranch Wolf Management Facility, was presented with an award in recognition of his efforts and assistance in support of the recovery program. Thank you, Steve, for all your hard work.

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. A variety of public interest groups are offering 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.