



## Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project Monthly Update

December 1-31, 2009

The following is a summary of Mexican Wolf Reintroduction Project activities in Arizona on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests (ASNF) and Fort Apache Indian Reservation (FAIR) and in New Mexico on the Apache National Forest (ANF) and Gila National Forest (GNF). Non-tribal lands involved in this Project are collectively known as the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area (BRWRA). Additional Project 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). Other entities, including private individuals and nongovernmental organizations, cooperate through the Project's Adaptive Management Work Group (AMWG) that meets periodically in Arizona and New Mexico.

To view 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 the AGFD 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 24 months or pups. The capital letter "A" preceding the letter and number indicate alpha wolves.

**Definitions:** A "wolf pack" is defined as two or more wolves that maintain an established territory. In the event that one of the two alpha (dominant) wolves dies, the remaining alpha

wolf, regardless of pack size, retains the pack status. The packs referenced in this update contain at least one wolf with a radio telemetry collar attached to it. 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 December 2009, the collared population consisted of 28 wolves with functional radio collars dispersed among nine packs and two single wolves. Some other uncollared wolves are known to be associating with radio-collared wolves, and others are separate from known packs.

Seasonal note: Project personnel are preparing for the annual end-of-the-calendar-year population count and capture. This effort is scheduled for the third week of January 2010. The 2009 population estimate results will be released sometime in February. A helicopter and experienced pilot have been contracted for approximately one week to locate every radio-collared wolf in the Project area and visually count any other wolves associated with the radio-collared wolves. An AGFD pilot and fixed-wing plane will also assist in the effort. Uncollared and radio-collared wolves with collars older than two years may be captured if opportunities permit. Radio telemetry collar batteries normally last four years, and collar replacement is recommended in years three or four to maintain continuous monitoring capabilities. The year-end count and capture effort involves extensive pre-planning activities. They include private landowner contacts; agency coordination on survey flight protocols and locations; and presurvey observations of selected packs and individual wolves to assist in the prioritization of flight and capture activities. The IFT will be very busy in January!

#### **IN ARIZONA:**

##### **Bluestem Pack (collared AM806, AF1042 and mp1183)**

Throughout December, the IFT located AM806, AF1042 and mp1183 in their traditional territory in the central portion of the ASNF and on the FAIR.

##### **Hawks Nest Pack (collared AM1044, AF1110, M1155 and fp1188)**

During December, the IFT located the Hawks Nest Pack in its traditional winter territory in the north-central portion of the ASNF.

##### **Rim Pack (collared AF858, AM1107 and fp1187)**

Throughout December, the IFT located the Rim Pack within its traditional home range in the west-central portion of the ASNF.

##### **M619 (collared)**

In December, the IFT located M619 in the central portion of the ASNF.

#### **ON THE FAIR:**

**Paradise Pack (collared AM795 and AF1056)**

During December, the IFT located the Paradise Pack within its traditional winter territory on the northwestern portion of the ASNF.

**Bacho Pack**

The IFT located AM990, the last collared member of this pack, dead on the SCAR in November. The wolf's death is under investigation. There were other uncollared wolves known to be associating with this wolf last year; however, with the death of AM990, the IFT now considers this pack to be defunct.

**IN NEW MEXICO:**

**Dark Canyon (collared AM992 and AF923)**

Throughout December, the IFT located the Dark Canyon Pack within its traditional territory in the west-central portion of the GNF.

**Luna Pack (collared M1156 and F1115)**

Throughout December, the IFT located the Luna Pack within its traditional territory in the central portion of the GNF.

**Middle Fork Pack (collared AM871, AF861 and mp1185)**

In December, the IFT located the Middle Fork Pack within its traditional territory in the central portion of the GNF.

**San Mateo Pack (collared AF903 and AM1114)**

The IFT located the San Mateo Pack within its traditional territory in the north-central portion of the GNF during December.

**Fox Mountain Pack (collared AM1038, AF521, M1157, M1158 and M1161)**

In December, the IFT located the Fox Mountain Pack outside of its traditional territory in the northwestern portion of the GNF. This pack has now moved to the northeast portion of the GNF.

**F1106 (collared)**

During December, the IFT located F1106 in the north-central portion of the GNF. This is a single wolf, and its movements have varied widely throughout the month.

**MORTALITIES**

No known wolf mortalities were documented in December.

**INCIDENTS**

The IFT did not investigate any potential depredation incidents in December.

## **CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT**

On December 22, F749 was captured at the Sevilleta Wolf Management Facility and transferred to the Wolf Conservation Center in New York where it will be retired. The transfer was required by the Mexican Wolf Species Survival Plan (SSP) group, and the shipment of the wolf occurred aboard a flight donated to the SSP by a private pilot and a member of an organization called Lighthawk. Lighthawk is a volunteer-based aviation organization with over 100 volunteer pilots.

## **COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION**

Chris Bagnoli and Paula Capece contacted numerous private landowners in Arizona and New Mexico regarding permission to conduct helicopter-based wolf count and capture activities in January within and adjacent to the BRWRA. They also collected uncollared wolf sighting information from landowners during these conversations that may assist efforts to document the uncollared portion of the Mexican wolf population.

The IFT has been conducting opportunistic hunter contacts in New Mexico and Arizona during the current elk and deer hunt seasons.

## **PROJECT PERSONNEL**

No significant personnel activity occurred during the month of December.

## **REWARDS OFFERED**

The USFWS is offering a reward of up to \$10,000, the AGFD Operation Game Thief is offering a reward of up to \$1,000, and the NMDGF 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 and private individuals have pledged an additional \$40,000 for a total reward amount of up to \$52,000, depending on the information provided.

Individuals with information they believe may be helpful are urged to call one of the following agencies: USFWS special agents in Mesa, Arizona, at (480) 967-7900, in Alpine, Arizona, at (928) 339-4232, or in Albuquerque, New Mexico, at (505) 346-7828; the WMAT at (928) 338-1023 or (928) 338-4385; AGFD Operation Game Thief at (800) 352-0700; or NMDGF Operation Game Thief at (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.