



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM WEEKLY REPORT

To: Interested Parties

From: MFWP Wolf Program Coordinator, Carolyn Sime

Subject: Wolf Program Activities and Related Information, September 13 – September 26, 2008

Contributors to the Montana Wolf Weekly are Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Universities, USDA Wildlife Services (WS), the National Park Service (NPS; Glacier NP; Yellowstone National Park will be reported in the Wyoming Wolf Weekly), US Forest Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Blackfeet Nation.

Highlighted activities relate to: monitoring, wolf – livestock interactions, outreach and education, research, law enforcement, and other miscellaneous topics of public interest. The Weekly Report will be available on each Monday, covering the previous week. It and other wolf program information (including the 2007 annual report) can be found at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

Wolf Monitoring Activities

Mid-Year, Preliminary Wolf Counts: Each year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and cooperators provide a preliminary mid-year population estimate for wolves in the Northern Rockies. The mid-year estimate provides the first look at the minimum number of wolves (the total minimum number of individual wolves in all known packs and dispersers), packs, breeding pairs, confirmed livestock kills and wolf control from January 1 through mid-September. Counting conditions and data reliability improve from September through December, as snow cover enables better counts during flights and ground tracking which helps verify any new packs and confirms preliminary pack sizes. Also, public wolf reports increase during the fall months when hunters are afield and FWP can focus field work in areas of uncertainty. From September through December, field work will result in some new packs being verified and counted, determination that some suspected packs do not actually exist, improved / more accurate counts of known packs, and determination of final breeding pair status for all known packs. The number of livestock killed and wolves controlled will also change between September and December and is expected to increase slightly. Final minimum wolf population estimates and wolf-livestock conflicts for 2008 will be available in early 2009 when the 2008 Annual Report is completed.

In Montana, the minimum total number of wolves is lower in mid-2008 compared to mid-2007 (poor visibility and pack counting conditions so far this year is part of the reason which is typical of all years even while some new packs formed and were verified in 2008), but the number of packs and the number of breeding pairs are about the same compared to this same time last year. So far, cattle losses are about the same, but sheep losses are higher due, in part, to several incidents in SW Montana. The

number of wolves controlled is also greater in mid-2008 compared to mid-2007. FWP expects that final 2008 minimum estimates will be similar or slightly higher than final 2007 numbers. In the Northern Rockies according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and information provided by the other cooperators in the Northern Rockies, overall the wolf population in 2008 will likely be about the same at the end of the year 2008, while livestock depredations and lethal wolf control will be higher than that documented at the end of 2007.

The following table compares 2008 mid-year wolf and depredation estimates with the 2007 mid-year estimates:

State	Year	Wolves	Packs	Breeding pairs	Cattle killed	Sheep	Dogs	Other	Control
MT	2007	394	71	37	48	19	1	1	50
MT	2008	360	74	36	44	39	0	6	60
ID	2007	788	75	41	36	150	7	0	40
ID	2008	771	89	39	81	189	10	0	81
WY	2007	362	33	27	28	16	2	0	45
WY	2008	332	34	22	45	16	0	0	31
Total	2007	1545	179	105	111	185	10	1	134
	2008	1455	197	+97	169	242	10	6	172

Other= 6 llamas

Control= wolves lethally removed in agency authorized control actions, including legal defense of property by private citizens - does not include wolves killed in Wyoming's predatory animal area by hunters [9 wolves].

During the week of the September 8-12, Ross was working in the Madison Valley / Gravelly Mountain areas. Trapping efforts were concluded for a suspected new pack at the southeast end of the Madison Valley. Four male pups were captured and 2 of them were radio collared. This new pack is called the Toadflax pack.

Smucker and Harrison ran traps for the Divide Creek pack in the Bitterroot Valley the week of the 22nd. Nothing was caught and traps were pulled for the weekend due to heavy bow hunter use in the area. Bradley and Adkins found fresh sign from the East Fork Rock Creek pack near Georgetown Lake and ran traps for a couple nights. Traps were pulled on the 24th due to snow cover and also due to heavy hunter use in the area. We'll resume trapping in the area next week depending on weather/human use.

Lance and Asher were also in the field during the period scouting and investigating wolf reports and also surveying for trapping opportunities for known packs.

Volunteers Quinn Harrison and Blakeley Adkins finished up their season with FWP on Sept. 24th. A big thanks for all their hard work!

Flights: Asher flew in SW MT on 9-18. Laudon flew in NW MT on the 23rd and the 25th.

FWP encourages hunters, landowners, and other outdoor enthusiasts to report wolves through the online reporting button or to send in one of the pre-printed postcards available at all FWP offices,

many US Forest Service offices, and license providers throughout the state. Information provided by the public helps FWP more accurately monitor wolf numbers and distribution in Montana.

Wolf - Livestock Activities

On Sept. 18th a calf was reported injured on private land southwest of Philipsburg. The calf had to be put down the same day. Wildlife Services confirmed the damage was caused by wolves on the 19th. The Skalkaho pack was found close to the pasture where the attack occurred on the morning of the 19th and FWP authorized 2 wolves to be removed from the pack. WS removed 2 adult males on the 22nd. A second calf was found injured on the ranch shortly thereafter and also had to be put down because of its injuries. WS also attributed this attack to wolves but thought the damage had occurred 10 days to 2 weeks prior. On the 25th and 26th, members of the Skalkaho pack were found back on the ranch. Two wolves were seen chasing cattle the morning of the 25th. A third wolf was seen near the cattle and was harassed out of the area with gunfire. On the 26th, wolves were again seen harassing cattle but none were injured or killed. FWP is monitoring the situation closely and exploring options of how best to reduce future depredation risks.

A resident near St Regis reported on the 25th that their dog (a dalmation) had been killed and they thought it might have been killed by wolves. Bradley visited with them on the 26th. The dog had been disposed of and was unavailable for examination so could not be confirmed. Coyotes were reported to have been heard recently and regularly out in the pasture where the attack occurred so may have likely been the cause.

North of Reed Point, 2 more ewes were confirmed killed on the 12th. WS has been scouting the area and looking for wolves / wolf sign for trapping to place a collar. Traps had also been set and checked very regularly. The sheep owner had moved some sheep closer to home in the mean time. On the 24th, WS pulled traps and the remaining bands of sheep and 5 guard dogs were brought home. No wolf sign had been seen since the 11th and no further damage has been reported. The sheep owner, WS and FWP will keep in touch.

Outreach and Education Activities

Bradley attended the Blackfoot Challenge's Wildlife Committee meeting at Lubrecht Experimental Forest in the Blackfoot River drainage on the 24th and gave a short update on wolf issues and activity in the valley. About 10 people attended.

Research Activities

Nothing to report.

Law Enforcement and Related Activities

Nothing to report.

Other

On the 25th, the FWP Commission approved an addition to the Administrative Rules of Montana that will take effect when wolves are delisted from the federal Endangered Species Act. FWP had published the draft rule and solicited public comment during 3 formal public hearings and also by accepting written comment through postal mail and the FWP website earlier this summer. When effective upon delisting, wolves will be reclassified from a state endangered species to a state species in need of management. This classification (through the Montana Nongame and Endangered Species law) will provide yearlong legal protection for wolves within Montana, except during periods of

regulated, fair chase public harvest (as authorized by the FWP Commission) or to protect livestock if a wolf is seen actively killing or threatening to kill livestock (as allowed by Montana's defense of property law, which also requires reporting of any wolves taken to FWP). The rule also affirms Montana's commitment to manage for and maintain a recovered wolf population and will guide FWP decisions and implementation of nonlethal and lethal control when addressing wolf-livestock conflicts. The rule adoption notice has been filed with the Montana Secretary of State's Office. Upon final approval by the Secretary of State, it will be published on the FWP website and will be formally incorporated as a part of Montana's regulatory framework for wolf conservation and management, in conjunction with the state's wolf plan and other applicable laws and Commission regulations.

Wolf Litigation:

On Friday July 18, 2008, the U.S. Federal District Court in Missoula, Montana, issued a preliminary injunction that immediately reinstated temporary Endangered Species Act protections for gray wolves in the Northern Rockies. The Court found that: 1) Plaintiffs were likely to prevail on the merits of their claim that the NRM gray wolf had not met its recovery criteria due to a lack of genetic exchange between the Greater Yellowstone Area ("GYA") and the other northern Rocky Mountain populations; 2) Plaintiffs were likely to prevail on the merits of their claim that Wyoming's 2007 regulatory framework was an inadequate regulatory mechanism; and 3) immediate potential harm existed because of hunts planned for Fall 2008. The injunction ruling returned wolves across northern Montana to the federally "endangered" classification and wolves across southern Montana returned to the "experimental" classification – also known in Montana as "split status." Also as a result of the injunction, FWP decisions about wolf-livestock conflicts in the endangered area are guided by the 1999 Interim Control Plan. FWP decisions about wolf-livestock conflicts occurring in the experimental area are guided by the 2005 and 2008 nonessential experimental population 10j regulations. Those federal regulations also guide what private citizens can do to protect their livestock.

On September 22, 2008, the federal government filed a motion with the federal Court in Missoula requesting the Court permit the federal government to: 1. Voluntarily remand the rule – meaning, if allowed by the Court, the federal government would voluntarily withdraw the final rule and decision to delist wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountain Distinct Population Segment, thereby maintaining the current endangered / experimental classifications and the Court would not consider the merits of the lawsuit challenging the delisting decision; and 2. Voluntarily reconsider its delisting decision and all available information and make a new determination about the status of gray wolves in the northern Rockies and make a new delisting decision. The federal government stated its intent to conduct further rulemaking (consider any new information and possibly solicit public comment on any new information if it's warranted). All parties await a decision by the federal Court.

While the litigation process continues, the dual classification (endangered / experimental) remains in effect in Montana. FWP, through an interagency cooperative agreement, is still the lead agency for all wolf conservation and management (within the bounds of federal regulations) so long as adequate federal funding continues to be made available. FWP will continue to monitor wolves, do public outreach, and guide and direct research activities. No public hunting or trapping is allowed. USDA Wildlife Services is still the agency to investigate causes of injured or dead livestock and carry out FWP's decisions to address conflicts as guided by federal regulations. Montana will continue to stay involved in litigation and any future delisting developments and will continue to seek the most efficient, successful path to

delisting. FWP will also continue its collaborative work with Montana Tribes, other state and federal agencies, and the Montana Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program.

Check the wolf pages on the FWP website for important information and updates:
<http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

=====

To learn more about Montana's wolf population, the Montana program and to help FWP monitor wolves by reporting wolf sign, visit FWP at: www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf.

To anonymously report a dead or injured wolf or suspected illegal activity, call: 1-800-TIP-MONT.

To request an investigation of injured or dead livestock, call USDA Wildlife Services directly in western Montana / Helena area at 458-0106 or in eastern Montana / Columbus area at: 322-4303. Or call your nearest FWP representative to have your call referred to Wildlife Services.

If you have a confirmed or probable livestock loss due to wolves, USDA Wildlife Services will supply you with a copy of the Loss Reimbursement Application form. For more information, see <http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp>. Or, contact the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator George Edwards at the Montana Department of Livestock at 444-5609.