# MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM WEEKLY REPORT

To: Interested Parties

From: MFWP Wolf Program Coordinator, Carolyn Sime

Subject: Wolf Program Activities and Related Information, November 29 – December 5, 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: <a href="http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html">http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html</a>.

# **Wolf Monitoring Activities**

Wolf pack counting conditions are improving with snow cover and efforts to obtain improved counts are underway through flights and ground surveys. Wolf reports provided by the public have been a huge help this year so that staff can be more efficient with their field work.

*Flights:* Bradley flew on 12-5-08.

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 Nov. 26th WS looked at a cow that had been injured on private land east of Wisdom (Big Hole Valley) where cattle losses were confirmed previously and WS has been working on removing two wolves from an uncollared pack. WS confirmed that wolves were responsible for the injury, but the injury was not a fresh wound and the attack had most likely occurred 2-3 weeks prior to Nov. 26<sup>th</sup>. WS confirmation of the injured cow will make this animal eligible for reimbursement through the Montana Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program when funding becomes available again in January 2009.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup>, WS confirmed that a calf was killed on private land near Polaris at the south end of the Pioneer Mountains. FWP and WS have received intermittent reports of wolf activity and suspect there is a pack in the area. FWP authorized WS to remove one wolf and to opportunistically collar a wolf as weather conditions allow.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup>, WS confirmed that a calf was killed on private land in the Big Hole Valley north of Wisdom within the Pintler pack territory. WS was authorized to remove a wolf and a yearling female was killed on December 4. On the same ranch on December 7, WS confirmed second dead calf was killed by wolves. FWP authorized the removal of two additional wolves from this large pack. Control work is ongoing.

On the 5<sup>th</sup>, control work to remove the Hog Heaven pack concluded. A total of 19 wolves were killed over a 3-day period. Livestock losses occurred both on and off the Flathead Indian Reservation beginning in late August / early September 2008, and WS carried out subsequent lethal control work both on and off the reservation. FWP and the Tribe were sharing information throughout the summer and early fall and non-lethal options were considered. Monitoring of two collared animals and associated wolves through the summer indicated the pack was traveling in a large area between Browns Meadow / Kessler Flats west of Kalispell and areas to the southwest near Nairada. The pack's size was not fully known due to poor counting conditions during summer months. In October FWP counted 8-10+ from the ground, and additional incremental control occurred afterward. A 2-year old bull was confirmed killed on the November 18th, which was the 8<sup>th</sup> incident this year. FWP decided to remove the remaining pack and two wolves were killed on December 3. Eight wolves were killed on December 4. On December 5, however, WS sought and was granted authorization from FWP to remove nine wolves found with the one remaining collared animal. During the necropsy work, FWP discovered that two litters were born in this pack in 2008, which in part explains it large size. The large pack size, coupled with the double litter, and the potential drop in the local whitetail deer population may have contributed to the livestock conflicts. A total of 27 wolves were killed between September 25 and December 5.

## **Outreach and Education Activities**

It is getting to be the time of year when wolves disperse in search of mates just ahead of the breeding season. Wolves can act aggressively towards domestic dogs and kill dogs at any time of year, but that is especially the case during the wolf breeding season when wolves are inherently more aggressive towards each other and compete for breeding opportunities. During the months of December – February, FWP and WS notice an increase in wolf-dog encounters for domestic dog breeds. FWP reminds people that when wolves are in the area, please be aware that they may attack or injure dogs. It often helps to keep dogs in secure kennels or inside buildings at night and to not let them roam freely when humans are not around. When fresh wolf sign is found, place dogs on restraints and keep supervised. The 10j rule across the southern Montana Experimental Area allows individuals to harass or kill a wolf attacking or molesting their livestock and stock animals including pets. Across northern Montana in the Endangered Area, federal regulations do not allow the hazing, harassing or killing of wolves by private citizens. If you have concerns or problems with wolves close to your residence or your domestic livestock or pets, please inform the wolf specialist or FWP Office nearest you.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup>, Sime and FWP's Tim Feldner attended a meeting in Jordan (Garfield County) hosted by the Garfield County Commissioners and 2 Montana Legislators (Sen. Peterson and Rep.Kasten) regarding wolf x dog hybrids. FWP provided information about the current laws and regulations, answered questions, and listened to concerns. About 25 people attended.

On the 5<sup>th</sup>, Sime participated in a panel discussion about Wolf Management and Conservation in the United States at the annual Boone and Crockett meeting. Other presenters were Ed Bangs, Dr. Valerius Geist, Bob Model, Christina Eisenberg, and Dan Pletscher. Sime gave an overview about Montana's wolf program, including development of a hunting season. About 100 people attended.

Catching up: During his first few months on the job, Lance had been attending local rod and gun club and elk working group meetings through the fall months and providing updates about wolf packs in the local area, wolf management, delisting, etc. He attended Jefferson Valley Sportsmen Club in Whitehall on Nov. 5 and about 15 people attended. On October 22, he attended a meeting of the Anaconda Sportsmen and about 20 people attended. On October 21, he attended the Butte Skyline Club meeting and about 15 people attended. On September 15, he attended a meeting of the Upper Big Hole Elk Working Group and about 25 people attended.

# **Research Activities**

Nothing to report.

# **Law Enforcement and Related Activities**

Nothing to report.

# Other

# NEW -- Delisting Update:

The USFWS public comment period on its February 2007 proposal to delist the gray wolf in the northern Rocky Mountains closed on November 28. USFWS is reviewing public comment and any other new information. Information about the delisting proposal is available at the USFWS northern Rocky Mountains wolf website: <a href="http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov">http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov</a>.

# Current Management 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: <a href="http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html">http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html</a>.

## Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:

The MLLRMB funding to reimburse confirmed and probable livestock injured or killed by wolves has been depleted. Claim forms are still being accepted, however, and they will be paid as funding becomes available.

Initial start funds provided by Defenders of Wildlife (\$50,000) and through the 2007 Montana Legislature totaled \$80,000. Fundraising has been an ongoing effort, though largely unsuccessful thus

far. The Montana Cattlement's Association has made a contribution and so did the Greater Yellowstone Coalition. Sometime in January 2009 and upon receipt of a summary of program activities and expenditures, Defenders of Wildlife is expected to contribute the second half of a pledge to help get the state program underway.

The 2009 Montana Legislature is expected to take up the matter. And, the Congressional bill sponsored by Montana's Senator Tester to fund a grant program for reimbursement of wolf- losses and proactive projects was included in an Omnibus Public Lands Bill that contains more than 150 public lands, water and resources bills. The U.S. Congress is expected to take up the Omnibus bill in early 2009.

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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 <a href="http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp">http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp</a>. Or, contact the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator George Edwards at the Montana Department of Livestock at 444-5609.

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