



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, February 14-27, 2009

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

Staff are focused on preparing the annual report, though occasionally getting out for snow tracking ground surveys and flying as snow conditions permit.

Final 2008 minimum estimates of the number of wolf packs, total wolves, breeding pairs, the number of confirmed livestock killed by wolves, and wolves killed to address wolf-livestock conflicts will be available in early March 2009 when the 2008 Annual Report is completed and made available to the public. Until then, all media reports of wolves and/or livestock losses should be interpreted with a dose of caution, as numbers provided to the media have been preliminary estimates.

Flights: Bradley flew February 19-21 in western Montana. Ross flew in southwest Montana on the 27th.

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 the 10th Bradley hung fladry around a small horse pasture near Lozeau (Lower Clark Fork) where wolves had been reported on numerous occasions.

On the 14th, a puppy was reported killed by wolves east of Florence and was confirmed by WS several days later. Two gray wolves were seen shortly before the incident and were believed to be members of the Welcome Creek pack. The owners also have livestock and were starting to calve and had reported a lot of wolf activity in and around their property. On the 17th and 18th, Bradley with help from Kyle Miller and volunteer Zach Lockyer hung fladry around the calving pasture.

On the 17th, WS investigated a report of a dead calf south of Frenchtown. It was unconfirmed, meaning a wolf was not responsible.

On the 18th, WS investigated a report of two dead newborn calves north of Grass Range. It was unconfirmed.

On the 21st, WS and CSKT confirmed wolves had killed 6 llamas over 2 nights on a large animal rescue ranch near Niarada. Tracks from at least 2 wolves were found going in and out of the pasture holding the llamas. Approximately 750 llamas are kept on this property as well as other animals. A "Critter Getter" was supplied to the manager and he moved a truck with a transistor radio near where the wolves were entering the field. On the night of 2/21 wolves returned and killed 2 more llamas. CSKT put up approximately 3/4 mile of turbo-fladry on 2/23. No more llamas have been killed since the night of 2/21. This is a new pair of wolves located in the old Hog Heaven territory which was removed in fall of 2008. Efforts to collar and release a wolf are ongoing.

On the 21st, WS examined a dead calf that had been trampled by its mother when wolves entered a pasture west of Dupuyer. It died of its injuries. Tracks of 3 wolves were verified in the pasture, but wolves did not actually attack and injure / kill any livestock due to the defensive instincts displayed by the cattle. The Bennie pack was in the area. The producer moved cattle from this pasture into corrals and FWP / WS will monitor the situation.

On the 26th, WS confirmed 11 dead sheep and 5 wounded south of Two Dot (north end of the Crazy Mountains). Four wolves were seen in the area by the landowner. A second landowner reported cattle being run through a fence that neighbors the sheep producer, no cattle were injured. WS has been authorized to lethally remove one wolf and collar one wolf. The Lebo Peak pack is a newly formed pack in 2008 and does not have a radio collar. The sheep producer has been issued a SOS permit for one wolf on their private land. The same producer lost sheep last year to a single black wolf. Efforts to collar a wolf in this pack were unsuccessful in 2008.

Outreach and Education Activities

On the 23rd, Bradley talked about the FWP wolf program and wolf delisting issues to two wildlife biology classes (~30 students) at Sentinel High School in Missoula.

On the 24th, Sime attended and participated in a mock public meeting for an undergraduate Principles of Wildlife Management class at Montana State University taught by Dr. Robert Garrott. About 65 students are working on a case study developing one of several different possible interest group position statements (first exercise as a participant) and then developing a wolf management plan (second exercise, as the state wildlife agency managers). The students did a great job!!

On the 27th, Laudon gave a presentation to about 60 people at the Condon Community Center. The program is part of a series of educational talks put on by the Swan Ecosystem Center. He presented on FWPs wolf program, current wolf population, current administrative status, current status of whitetail deer in the region, and information on the Swan Valley packs.

The University of Montana's Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit announces the availability of a report summarizing the first 2.5 years of research to develop wolf population monitoring techniques. The report covers the years 2006-2008. The research is a cooperative effort between the University of Montana, The Nez Perce Tribe, University of Idaho, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Dave Ausband is the senior author and it soon will be available on line at: <http://www.umont.edu/mcwru/>. Look for it on under Faculty / Staff / Personnel, Dave Ausband.

FWP announces the availability of a paper that was published in a conference proceedings of the Wildlife Damage Management Working Group of The Wildlife Society. It is entitled "Gray Wolves and Livestock in Montana: A Recent History of Damage Management" by Sime et al. It presents a historical and contemporary look at wolf-livestock interactions and damage management from 1987-2006. It will be available at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/livestock.html>.

FWP also announces the availability of a final report that examines wolf-ungulate interactions and population trends with special emphasis on the Greater Yellowstone Area and Southwestern Montana. It also presents information about wolf-ungulate interactions in Montana from a statewide perspective. It is authored by Ken Hamlin (recently retired FWP Research Biologist) and FWP Researcher Julie Cunningham, with significant contributions from Montana State University professors Dr. Robert Garrott, Dr. Scott Creel, and their students. See: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/game.html>.

Research Activities

An 18 month old female wolf that was originally radio collared in SW Montana as a part of a research project with the University of Montana dispersed from her natal pack in September 2008. She has traveled from Montana, through parts of western Wyoming, SE Idaho, and NE Utah. Last week, locations from her GPS satellite collar indicated she was near Vail, Colorado, approximately 450 (straight-line) miles from her natal home range. It is a well documented fact that wolves can disperse extremely long distances, commonly over 500 miles and across huge expanses of habitat unsuitable for long term wolf pack persistence. These types of dispersal events are common. This incident only provides further evidence that genetic connectivity in the NRM wolf population is and will remain extremely high and is not a long term wolf conservation issue. Wolves in Colorado are listed under the ESA as endangered. Future locations of this wolf will be reported in the USFWS Weekly Report, posted on the USFWS website @ <http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov>.

Law Enforcement and Related Activities

Nothing to report.

Other

NEW -- Delisting Update:

On January 20th, as was somewhat expected, the new incoming administration put a "hold" on all new federal regulations that were not finalized and published in the Federal Register as of the 20th. The hold affects all federal agencies, all pending federal decisions, all subject areas. This was not a surprise as every new incoming administration for the last 20 years has done similar and put a "hold" on the previous administration's pending decisions. All new, incoming federal department / agency heads are directed to review rules not yet published and decide what should be done. Options are to approve them and move forward, modify them first and then publish them, or not publish them in order to take a different course of action.

Since the wolf delisting decision (rule) announced on January 14, 2008 was not yet published in the Federal Register, its publication will be delayed while it is being reviewed by new, incoming federal officials. The reviewers will examine the biological data and legal merits of the decision. It is not known how long the review process will take and when a decision will be made. Secretary of the Interior Salazar will make the decision. Additional information about delisting in the northern Rockies is available at the USFWS website:

<http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov>.

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:

<http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:

There are several openings on the Board that will be filled when Governor Schweitzer makes new appointments. The deadline for the nomination process through the FWP Commission closed on February 15. About 16 names were received. The FWP Commission will make its recommendations to Governor Schweitzer not long after its meeting on March 12.

One vacancy is to be filled through the Montana Board of Livestock. Contact George Edwards or Christian McKay for information about that process: 444-5609 or 444-9312, respectively.

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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 <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.