



# **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, March 7 – March 20, 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 2008 annual report) can be found at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

### **Wolf Monitoring Activities**

FWP announces the completion and availability of the Montana Gray Wolf Conservation and Management 2008 Annual Report. FWP's report, which is available online at [fwp.mt.gov](http://fwp.mt.gov), shows Montana's wolf population increased about 18 percent in 2008, compared to a 34 percent increase in 2007. The minimum Montana wolf population is estimated at 497 wolves, in 84 verified packs, and 34 breeding pairs. FWP's report is part of the annual federal recovery update required by USFWS. The end of 2008 count also estimates that 302 wolves inhabited Wyoming and 846 wolves inhabited Idaho. Annual reports from Idaho, Wyoming, and information about wolves in Yellowstone National Park and the northern Rockies as a whole are available online at: <http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov>.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup>, WS trapped and collared a wolf west of Hall, south of Drummond. Area landowners have been reporting wolf activity in the area where the Willow Creek was removed in fall 2008.

On the 5/6<sup>th</sup>, Laudon and Lance attended the annual bear-handling workshop as refresher training. Laudon presented FWP's wolf program trapping / safety protocols. FWP's wildlife veterinarian Jennifer Ramsey also attended. About 50 people participated, representing multiple state and federal agencies. Individuals who work in Canada also attended.

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.

Flights: None this week.

### **Wolf - Livestock Activities**

On 3/9, CSKT and MT WS confirmed the Salish pack had killed another calf near Niarada. This producer has lost 6 confirmed calves in approximately 10 days. Several cows have also aborted prematurely presumably due to stress, and several more have been trampled to death. Control to remove 2 wolves was ongoing with no success and plans were in place to remove 2 wolves aerially on 3/9. The Salish pack had been daybedding above this pasture and were avoiding capture equipment as well as non-lethal deterrents placed around the pasture and were entering this pasture daily. Two wolves were removed on 3/9. MT WS was unable to fly until the afternoon of 3/10 and the collared animal was alone. On 3/10 CSKT confirmed that up to 6 wolves had again entered the calving pasture and coursed it with no known losses. The collared animal was again alone and MT WS was unable to remove any animals. MT WS placed additional equipment around this pasture and efforts to remove the remainder of this pack are ongoing.

On 3/12, WS confirmed one guard dog as injured and one goat as injured by wolves on private land northeast of Helena. It is unknown whether the dog or the goat will survive. The wolves came pack on the evening of the 12<sup>th</sup>, but no injured or dead livestock were reported. On the 13<sup>th</sup>, the owner reported a dead goat and WS determined that the injured from the previous investigation (3/12) had died and it was confirmed as wolf. On the 14<sup>th</sup>, WS verified that there are at least 5 wolves in the Mitchell Mountain pack currently with the possibility of more. FWP has authorized removal of 2 wolves.

On 3/13 Bradley met with a landowner near Superior who has been regularly seeing wolves close to their house. They hung some fladry around their kennel to try to help protect their dogs.

On 3/13, WS collared an adult male and lethally removed a yearling female out of the Lebo Peak pack southwest of Two Dot (on private land). The SOS permit issued for one wolf is now void and the folks on the permit were notified.

On 3/16, WS investigated a dead calf on private land north of Avon. Tracking conditions were poor and WS could not tell why the calf died. The landowner reported seeing tracks of a couple wolves off and on through the winter. WS and FWP will check in with the landowner and may try and trap to place a collar if wolves are in the area. A new pair may be forming.

On 3/18, a ranch manager near Grant reported shooting a wolf that was harassing dogs on private property. The wolf has been picked up and the incident is still under investigation. There were no reports of dead or injured dogs for investigation.

On 3/19, north of Avon, WS confirmed a calf was killed on private property south of the location of the investigation on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Tracks of 4 wolves were present at the site. WS will try to put out a collar.

### **Outreach and Education Activities**

On 3/3 Bradley gave a presentation to ~15 seniors in a biology class at Darby High School.

On 3/10, Sime gave a talk at a Prickly Pear Sportsman Association meeting about wolves and the Montana wolf management program. She also provided an update on delisting. George Edwards also gave an update on the MLLRMP. About 25 people attended.

On 3/12 (day) Laudon gave a talk on the Fwp's wolf program, current status, and issues to a wildlife biology class at Flathead High school. About 24 in attendance. (a week ago, not sure if you got this one in yet)

On 3/12 (evening) Jim Williams and Laudon gave a talk to Flathead Wildlife, a local hunting and conservation group, that was also open to the general public. The talk was primarily on how FWP surveys various prey and predator species, and how we use that information to manage those species, and the current status of whitetail deer and what influences those populations.

On 3/14, Sime attended the annual meeting of the Montana Wild Sheep Foundation in Bozeman. She gave a talk about wolves and the Montana wolf management program. She also provided an update on delisting. About 30 people attended.

On 3/16, Bradley met with Missoula County Commissioners and gave an update on wolf status and management in Montana. About 10 people attended.

On 3/18, Laudon gave a talk on the FWP's wolf program, current status, and issues to a wildlife conservation and management class at Flathead Valley Community College. About 14 in attendance

On 3/18, Bradley gave an evening presentation at the Missoula Natural History Center. About 60 people attended.

On 3/18, Sime and Lance attended the Sunriver Working Group meeting in Conrad. They gave a talk about wolves, the Montana wolf management program and gave an update on delisting. Also attending and providing local updates were other FWP staff from Fairfield, Conrad, and Great Falls. About 65 people attended.

On 3/19, (day) Laudon gave a talk on the FWP's wolf program, current status, and issues to Plum Creek Timber Company's corporate headquarters. About 60+ in attendance.

On 3/19, (evening) Laudon gave a talk on the FWP's wolf program, current status, and issues to Libby area Society of American Foresters, that was also open to the general public. About 51 in attendance.

### **Research Activities**

In early winter 2008, a female wolf dispersed from SW Montana and traveled through Wyoming, SE Idaho, NE Utah, and Colorado. Recent location data indicate the wolf is traveling through south central Wyoming. Locations will be reported in the USFWS Weekly Report every 2 weeks and can be found on the USFWS website @<http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov>

### **Law Enforcement and Related Activities**

On the 17<sup>th</sup>, a wolf was found dead in Lolo Creek west of Missoula. The incident is under investigation.

On 3/12, FWP euthanized a mangy female wolf that was hanging around residents in Gardiner / Maiden Basin. It was in close proximity to residences and domestic animals. It had also killed some chickens. The animal was originally collared inside Yellowstone National Park and the carcass / collar were returned.

## **Other**

*NEW -- Delisting Update:* On March 6, 2009, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar affirmed the decision by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to remove gray wolves from the list of threatened and endangered species in the western Great Lakes and the Northern Rocky Mountain states of Idaho and Montana and parts of eastern Washington and Oregon and a small part of north central Utah. Wolves will remain a protected species under the Act in all of Wyoming because Wyoming state regulatory framework does not meet the adequate regulatory mechanism requirements of the ESA. The NRM & Western Great Lakes final delisting rules will be published in the next week or two and will become effective 30-days later. See the Department of Interior's press release and listen to a pod cast of the "pen and pad" press conference at: <http://www.fws.gov/>.

*History / Background leading up to the 3-6-09 Announcement:* On January 20<sup>th</sup>, 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 20<sup>th</sup>. 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 until Delisting Takes Effect:*

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 FWP Commission has already forwarded its list of nominees for the Governor's consideration. One vacancy is to be filled through the Montana Board of Livestock. Letters of interest

were sought by the Board through March 20. The Board is expected to finalize its list of nominees for the Governor's consideration in the near future.

The Wolf Livestock Mitigation Act contained within Senate Bill 22, the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, failed to pass the House. The bill had passed the Senate back in January and again recently. It may be headed back to the House.

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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](http://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.

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