



# Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

## MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM WEEKLY REPORT

To: Interested Parties

From: FWP Wolf Program Coordinator, Carolyn Sime (406-461-0587)

Subject: Wolf Program Activities and Related Information, May 9 – May 15, 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 wolf staff are getting field work underway now that the weather has improved.

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.

### **Wolf - Livestock Activities**

On 5/11, a ranch employee in the Cameron area of the Madison Valley reported to FWP of shooting at a pair of wolves seen chasing cattle on private land. The wolves were not injured and no injured or dead cattle were found.

On 5/11, control efforts for up to 3 wolves in the upper Rock Creek drainage concluded after 45 days elapsed. No wolves were killed. Two calves were confirmed killed on private land on March 23 and 27. WS had been authorized to set traps and kill up to 3 wolves around the calving pasture, but no wolves returned or were caught.

On 5/13, WS removed an adult male from the Trapper Peak pack on private land where a calf was confirmed killed on 5/4. Previously, a dead calf was also found and a single gray was seen at the site

on private land. There were too few calf remains to warrant an investigation of the first calf. Control efforts are over and there have been no further losses since 5/4.

On 5/13, WS confirmed that a yearling cow was killed on private land west of Jackson (Big Hole Valley). The Miner Lakes pack was found nearby during the investigation. At the end of 2008, the pack had 11 wolves and is suspected to be denning. WS was authorized to remove up to 3 wolves other than the breeding female. Traps were not set initially, however, because of bear activity on the carcass. One wolf was killed on 5/15. Efforts are ongoing.

On 5/14, WS confirmed a calf was injured by wolves on private land and is not expected to survive. The radio collared wolf from the Grasshopper pack was nearby and likely involved. This pack does not appear to be denning this year. After several incidents of confirmed livestock damage this year and two previous incremental lethal control removals, FWP has authorized WS to remove the remaining 3 members of this pack.

On 5/14, WS confirmed that a wolf or wolves had killed a calf on private land west of Augusta – a different ranch than where losses were confirmed most recently. A cow also sustained injuries likely from efforts to protect the calf (not due to a wolf attack directly). The Benchmark pack is responsible for this and losses on 2 other ranches since March. A kill permit was issued to the owner of the calf killed on the 14<sup>th</sup>. Efforts to remove 2 wolves (not the denning female) and collar 1 wolf are ongoing as the first incremental control efforts had not been completed. On 5/15, WS killed one wolf. Kill permit holders were notified that 1 wolf had been killed and permits were only valid for the removal of 1 wolf either by a permit holder or by WS. The situation is further complicated by the close proximity of deer / elk which have not moved up in elevation yet, livestock carcasses / carrion on the landscape after recent spring snow storms, and grizzly bear activity.

On 5/15, Dan Carney and a technician (both with the Blackfoot Nation Wildlife Program) investigated a dead calf north of Browning on the reservation where the Livermore pack had killed 4 yearlings in April. Tracks in the snow indicated that 1 wolf was involved. They backtracked the wolf about 2 miles and confirmed that a wolf collared after the previous depredation was likely responsible. After consulting with WS, the wolf was killed, leaving 1 collar remaining in the pack. The tribe retained the hide.

### **Outreach and Education Activities**

On 5/11, Sime and WS State Director Steuber attended a meeting of the Montana Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Board. They provided updates on their agency's respective role and responsibilities for wolf conservation and management. Sime also provided an update on delisting, litigation, and the 5/14 FWP Commission meeting in which FWP would propose tentative 2009 wolf hunting quotas. About 15 people + Board members attended. See below for additional information about the meeting.

On 5/12, Sime and Steuber provided similar updates to the Montana Board of Livestock. About 20 people were present.

On 5/13, Sime and FWP Specialist Lance attended a meeting of the Southwest Montana Stockmen's Association in Dillon. Sime provided a similar update and Lance answered questions about monitoring and local packs. About 45 people attended.

## Research Activities

Nothing to report.

## Law Enforcement and Related Activities

On 5/14, FWP retrieved the carcass of a yearling wolf that was struck and killed by a vehicle on Highway 12 in the Lolo Creek drainage west of Missoula. The wolf is likely a member of the Big Hole pack. This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> wolf that has been hit on Highway 12 this year.

## Other

### NEW -- Delisting Update:

On May 4, gray wolves in Montana were delisted. Conservation and management are guided by Montana laws, administrative rules (ARM 12.9.1301 – 12.9.1305), and the state's federally-approved plan. Wolves in Montana were automatically reclassified to a "species in need of management" statewide on May 4. The gray wolf is protected statewide, though individual wolves may be hazed, harassed, or killed if seen actively attacking, killing, or threatening to kill livestock. Incidents must be reported and each will be investigated. Wolves may also be killed to protect human life. See the FWP wolf web page for a Fact Sheet and answers to frequently asked questions about delisting. The FWP wolf web page also has information about state law and regulations and what livestock owners can do to protect livestock. See: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

Background: The Final Rule to Establish a Gray Wolf – Northern Rocky Mountain Distinct Population Segment and Remove it from the Federal List of Threatened and Endangered Species becomes effective May 4, 2009. It was published in the *Federal Register* Vol 74, No. 62 pages 15123-15188 on April 2, 2009. The rule, the literature cited, and Questions and Answers about it are posted on the USFWS website at <http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov>.

Many environmental groups have already stated their intent to challenge the federal decision in court, by sending the required "60-day Notice of Intent to Sue" letter to Interior Secretary Salazar. Legal challenges are also expected in Wyoming over USFWS rejection of the Wyoming wolf plan and regulatory framework. In all, 5 notices have been sent to the Department of Interior.

Montana 2009 Wolf Hunting Season: FWP and the FWP Commission continue efforts to develop and prepare for a potential 2009 season. The season structure previously adopted by the FWP Commission is still in place for a potential fall 2009 season. But FWP and the FWP Commission must still establish a quota (the total number of wolves that could be taken by hunters) for 2009. FWP and the Commission still intend to proceed cautiously and conservatively.

At the FWP Commission meeting on 5/14, FWP proposed a range of statewide and individual Wolf Management Unit tentative quotas for Commission consideration and public comment. FWP proposed a range of no hunting (quota of zero) to 207 total wolves and a North Fork Flathead Subunit subquota of 2 wolves. All options presented are predicted to maintain or increase the wolf population of about 500 wolves (the 2008 estimate) and would not risk a population decline to fewer than 15 breeding pairs statewide based on a harvest simulation modeling exercise and Montana wolf population data from 2007/2008. Other conservation considerations incorporated into the proposal and the season structure previously adopted by the commission, harvest reporting requirements, and "safety net" mechanisms to assure that implementation of a conservative hunting season would not jeopardize the population were also discussed.

The FWP Commission discussed the proposal and affirmed their commitment to implement fair chase hunting as a wildlife management tool for wolves in a professional manner. The Commission also affirmed their commitment to maintain a healthy recovered wolf population. The public was also provided an opportunity to comment. After public comment, the Commission approved a range of statewide and individual Wolf Management Unit quotas of 26, 75, and 165 for further public comment.

Public comment will be accepted through 5pm June 19. FWP expects to make a final quota recommendation for FWP Commission consideration and final action on July 9. To comment electronically, follow this link: <http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/default.html>. Scroll down under Public Comment for the "Proposed 2009 Wolf Quotas and Subquota" bullet and click on the link – then scroll down the Interested Person's letter for the wolf section and link at the bottom of the letter.

Written comment will also be accepted via postal mail and must be received by 5pm June 19: Drop comments off in person or mail to: FWP, Wildlife Division, Wolf Quota Comments, PO Box 200701, Helena, MT 59620. Written letters can be submitted in their original format electronically at the link above.

*Background:* Previously, the Commission adopted a regulatory framework and season structure for public harvest (e.g. management units, season dates, and other general regulations) of wolves in February 2008. For a potential fall 2008 season, FWP proposed a conservative quota of 75 wolves that was predicted to maintain or increase the population compared to 2007 levels. The federal court injunction precluded consideration or adoption of a final quota and a 2008 hunting season.

*Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:*

The Board met May 11. The Board reviewed and discussed funding, budgets, a few claims, and rules. Public comment was also received regarding the additional, less obvious costs associated with wolf depredations, including: husbandry changes, labor, livestock husbandry and performance complications from stress, etc. Two subcommittees were formed to work more intensively on funding and administrative rules. Sime volunteered to work on the funding subcommittee. Sime and WS State Director Steuber are also available to provide technical expertise for the rules committee and the full Board, as requested. The full agenda can be found at: <http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LLRMP/index.asp>. Minutes of the previous meeting were also approved. The program coordinator can be reached at 444-5609.

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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 at the statewide office: 657-6464. 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.