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, July 25 – July 31, 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

Bradley has been working in Granite County this week. 7/29, she caught and collared a yearling female in the Ram Mountain pack. Traps were pulled and she will be monitoring from the ground to try and determine if the pack denned and whether pups are present. Thanks to Kristina Davis (BLM) for helping with trap checks and the capture processing.

Laudon and Bahnson returned from a trapping effort in the Great Bear Wilderness (Middle Fork Flathead River) in an effort to place a GPS radio collar for the University of Montana research project on wolf monitoring techniques. They were running an 18-mile trapline – on foot and did a lot of trail running, but were unsuccessful at placing a radio collar in the Great Bear pack. The pack had moved to a different site about 6 miles away, though still in the vicinity of the trap line on a couple of days. Pups were confirmed from howling surveys. All the field work and reports to date suggest an average-sized pack of about 6 adults and possibly 5-6 pups.

Edgley surveyed the Swan valley. Boyd and Edgley plan to run a trapline for the Cilly Pack in the Swan.

<u>Flights:</u> Asher flew the Paradise Valley / east on 7/26. Bradley flew in the Bitterroot / Granite County / Blackfoot areas on 7/30.

Wolf - Livestock Activities

On 7/24, WS confirmed an adult cow was injured by wolves west of Kalispell, and the incident is believed to have occurred on Plum Creek Timber Company land in the Lost Trail area. The incident occurred in the Tallulah pack territory. The cow is not expected to survive. FWP authorized removal

of 2 wolves and one was killed on 7/28. Control efforts are ongoing for 1 additional wolf. Previously in this same area, on 7/4, WS confirmed that a calf had been killed by wolves and as authorized, WS removed one wolf on 7/21.

On 7/25, FWP received a report from the Blosberg area (McDonald Pass west of Helena) of adult cattle having broken through an internal single strand electric wire fence in a pasture on private land. This is unusual behavior for these cattle as they are well conditioned to this type of fencing. A black wolf had been photographed on 7/15 in the immediate area. Two cattle required some doctoring for injuries from the exterior perimeter barbed wire fence and are expected to recover. On 7/30, Asher and Lance met the owners in the field and also scouted the area on both sides of the Continental Divide.

On 7/25, WS confirmed 2 calves had been confirmed killed by wolves southeast of Wisdom in the McVey pack territory on private land. This is the third landowner to have lost cattle to this pack. Efforts to remove the remaining pack members are ongoing.

On 7/25, WS investigated a report of a calf being killed by wolves southwest of Augusta. The report was an unconfirmed wolf kill and the WS investigation concluded it was a grizzly kill.

On 7/29, WS got a call to investigate a suspected wolf-killed calf west of Dupuyer on private land where previous wolf losses have been confirmed. There were wolf tracks around the carcass. Arrangements were made for an investigation the following morning and the carcass was covered up. That night, a grizzly bear tore off the tarp and completely devoured the carcass so there was nothing to look at to determine if a wolf killed the calf thus an onsite visit was not warranted. WS recorded this as a possible / unknown wolf depredation.

On 7/30, WS confirmed a calf had been killed by wolves in the Upper Ruby on public land. It was found by the riders on 7-29 and covered up. The calf apparently was 1-2 miles away from where a calf was killed previously on 7/14. FWP authorized removal of 1 adult wolf.

On 7/30, IDFG contacted FWP to report that 13 buck sheep were confirmed killed just across the MT-ID border in ID on the sheep experiment station. This is the same area as previous sheep losses on 6/10 and 7/16, totaling six dead sheep. The Sage Creek pack is suspected to have a rendezvous site 1-3 miles away from the sheep pasture on the ID side of the border, but the pack dens in Montana and is considered a Montana pack. FWP has been coordinating with IDFG since June. There is also close coordination between IDFG, ID WS and MT WS. FWP and IDFG decided to authorize removal of up to three adult wolves, which is ongoing. Monitoring suggests that two adults and a litter of pups would remain when this lethal control effort concludes.

On 7/31, Asher and Lance installed electrified-fladry on two sheep night pens on private land south of Cascade. This system will be field checked again next week. A second hot wire was installed below the fladry line to help deter coyotes.

Correction: FWP previously reported that a MT-ID border pack east of I-15 was a border pack that was counted in the ID population. After 3 incidents in which at least 10 sheep were killed in the Middle Creek / Pleasant Valley areas on the ID side of the border, MT FWP and IDFG decided to authorize lethal removal of the rest of the pack. During the control efforts, it was learned that the pack had indeed denned on the MT side of the state border and will in fact be counted / reported as a Montana pack – and not an ID pack. All control efforts concluded by 7/23, with the removal of an adult male and 6 pups.

Outreach and Education

On 7/23, Ross gave a wolf update during the Madison Valley Living with Wildlife program. He covered human safety, state regulations / laws, etc. About 20 people attended.

Research Activities

On 7/22, Boyd, Bahnson and Edgley set traps in the Lydia pack northwest of Kalispell and got a GPS collar out for the University of Montana graduate study to develop more cost efficient ways of monitoring wolves in Montana. They collared an adult male.

Law Enforcement and Related Activities

On 7/31, FWP Warden Gosse investigated an incident in the Bear Creek area of the Madison Valley in which a wolf was shot near buildings / guard dogs on private land. The wolf was reportedly taunting guard dogs and had been seen repeatedly (and hazed away from) pastures, from near ranch buildings and the main house. The wolf had mange, which likely contributed to its loitering near buildings and close proximity – it was in poor condition. The investigation was completed and the death was determined to be lawful under Montana law and administrative rules.

Other

Northern Rockies Delisting Litigation

On 7/27, FWP mailed its motion and brief (the supporting document filed concurrent with the motion to intervene) to intervene in the delisting lawsuit in Missoula Federal Court. On 7/31, the Court granted Montana / FWP's request to intervene. Montana/FWP's participation in the lawsuit will support the federal delisting decision that took effect May 4, only from Montana's unique perspective and role. Among other aspects, Montana/FWP legal efforts will represent Montana's interest in conserving and managing resident wildlife (in this case, the recovered wolf population). The next step in the litigation is to finalize the timeline under which the case will proceed. The timeline, once established, will determine deadlines for filing information with the Court and possible hearing dates. At this time, no request for an injunction has been filed. Such a request could be filed at any time, however, and Montana / FWP would be notified if a request were to be filed.

Despite ongoing litigation and unless otherwise directed by the Federal Court, FWP is still the lead agency. FWP carries out wolf conservation and management (as a resident wildlife species classified as a species in need of management and thus mortality is regulated statewide), as outlined by Montana law, administrative rules, and the federally-approved state wolf plan. 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.

<u>Background:</u> On June 2, a coalition of 13 groups, represented by the law firm EarthJustice, challenged the USFWS delisting decision in Federal District Court in Missoula (9th Circuit). The complaint alleges the USFWS delisting decision was an arbitrary and capricious violation of the federal Endangered Species Act for a variety of reasons. The Greater Yellowstone Coalition also filed a lawsuit challenging the federal delisting decision. The groups will be represented by their own attorney's, respectively, but the cases were consolidated by the Court. Additionally, the State of Wyoming filed a lawsuit in the 10th Circuit (Cheyenne Wyoming) challenging USFWS's rejection of Wyoming's regulatory framework and state plan.

Montana 2009 Wolf Hunting Season:

FWP continues to prepare for a 2009 wolf season with the awareness that developments in the delisting litigation could prevent the season from occurring. FWP encourages the public to check the FWP Wolf Page and the FWP Hunting Page often for the latest news and updates. The FWP Commission approved final 2009 wolf hunting season quotas on July 8. The statewide quota is distributed across 3 Wolf Management Units (41 in northwest Montana, 22 in western Montana, and 12 in southwest Montana). In addition, FWP recommended and the Commission approved a subunit subquota of two wolves for the North Fork Flathead drainage on the west side of Glacier National Park which applies towards the total quota for WMU 1 of 41. The season structure previously adopted by the FWP Commission is still in place.

FWP is set to begin selling the 2009 wolf hunting licenses on August 31. Because the wolf hunting season is designed as a quota-based system, any interested hunter (resident or non-resident) can participate by purchasing a conservation license and a wolf hunting license through the online system, at any FWP office, or at other license providers. Wolf mortality will be closely monitored through a 12-hour, mandatory reporting requirement when a hunter is successful. A wolf management unit will close upon reaching the quota or the season closing dates, which ever is first. A hunter may hunt wolves in any of the three wolf management units (or the North Fork Subunit of WMU 1) and so long as the season is open – meaning the total quota has not been reached or up until the season closing date of November 29, 2009. A wolf management unit will be closed upon 24-hour notice when the quota has been reached. If the wolf quota in any particular wolf management unit has not been reached by the close of the general deer/elk season (Nov. 29), wolf hunting could resume beginning December 1 and extend through December 31 – but no more than 25% of the total quota for that individual wolf management unit may be lawfully harvested during the month of December. Hunters will be able to obtain quota and harvest closure information through a telephone hotline.

FWP has published the Final 2009 Wolf Hunting Regulations on the FWP website. Additional information about the wolf hunting season will be available in the next few weeks. In the meantime, the regulations can be found at http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/regulations.html.

Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:

Efforts by Senator Tester and others to create a Wolf-Livestock Demonstration Project (HR146 – wolf "reimbursement" bill) continue in Congress. HR2996 (the appropriation bill) was passed by the US House on June 26. It passed a key Senate Committee on July 7 and awaits action by the full Senate.

The program coordinator can be reached at 444-5609.

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 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.