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, September 19 - 25, 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

On 9/9, Laudon and Valan processed and released a wolf pup that was captured by FWP bear biologists in a bear culvert trap. FWP bear biologists are attempting to capture prime breeding age grizzly bear females from the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem to move to the Cabinet Yaak Ecosystem to augment that population. A wolf pup was captured incidentally as part of their effort in the Coal Creek drainage. Bear biologists have also captured video of wolves visiting the sight previous to this capture. It is not yet known if this pup is a member of the nearby Dutch pack or a new and previously unknown pack. While pups may be large enough to collar this time of year, this one was not and was released after collecting routine samples and measurements.

Laudon, Boyd, Bahnsen, Valen, and Edgley have been working in the Thompson Falls area to document wolf activity and capture and collar wolves in packs that are currently not collared. They have been successful documenting numbers, movements, and other valuable information in the Prospect Creek area, but so far are unable to capture any individuals. Traps were pulled temporarily on 9/19 so the team can take much needed and deserved time off.

Bradley and Loveless trapped and collared a 50 lb male pup in the Trapper Peak pack in the Bitterroot Valley on 9/25. Traps were pulled. Landowners have been routinely seeing at least 5 pups (4 black, 1 gray) in the area and the alpha female with a non-functioning GPS collar is thought to still remain. The collared alpha male was legally killed by a local citizen in late August when seen trying to attack a dog.

Loveless and Peter Brown (Blackfoot range rider) ran traps west of Placid Lake this past week for an unknown pack (possibly Belmont) after finding a concentration of sign in an area where there was a recent report from a bowhunter. Wolves are ranging widely this time of year and no new sign was

seen this week so traps were pulled on the 24th. Loveless spent time scouting the Blanchard/Belmont areas and Potomac areas and did not find much sign.

Flights: Laudon flew in northwest Montana on 9/8 and 9/9.

Wolf - Livestock Activities

Catching up: On 9/11, WS removed 2 of the three prescribed wolves from the Lydia pack in response to the earlier 2 confirmed depredation events. Previously during a routine monitoring flight, one of the collard Lydia pack members was observed on a domestic calf carcass. WS investigated the incident the next day and confirmed wolf as the cause of death.

On 9/21, WS confirmed that a lamb was killed by a wolf on private land near Lincoln. Two lambs were confirmed killed in this same spot on 9/3 and FWP authorized WS to collar and release a wolf at that time but no wolves were captured. FWP has now authorized WS to kill 1 wolf and a shoot-on-site permit has been issued to the sheepherder.

On 9/21, WS investigated a report of a wounded calf in the Ambrose Creek area in the Bitterroot valley and confirmed the injuries as wolf caused. The calf had been brought in and doctored by a vet on Friday the 18th and the injuries were estimated to be about a week old. The calf is expected to survive. The cattle have been moved to a different pasture and there are already 2 radio-collars in the closest pack (Welcome Creek) so no action is being taken at this time.

On 9/23, WS investigated a dead calf report north of Wisdom. It was unconfirmed.

The Sage Creek pack has had several incidents of confirmed cattle losses both in Montana and in Idaho. Incremental control in July and August by ID WS and MT WS and 6 adult wolves have been killed thus far and with this newly confirmed incident, MT WS has been authorized to remove the remaining pack members. FWP had authorized removal of the remaining wolves on August 19. No additional wolves have been killed and no further losses have been confirmed. The 45-day lethal control authorization expires on October 2.

Outreach and Education

Nothing to report at this time.

Research Activities

Nothing to report at this time.

Law Enforcement and Related Activities

Nothing to report at this time.

Other Updates

Northern Rockies Delisting Litigation

On 9/8, Judge Molloy (Missoula) denied the request for a preliminary injunction. The Judge determined that the plaintiffs did not show and prove irreparable harm if the hunting seasons in MT and ID were allowed to occur in fall of 2009. However, the Judge did determine that the Plaintiffs are likely to be able to show that they are likely to prevail during the main part of the delisting lawsuit. Among other things, the Judge stated concerns with leaving a portion of the Northern Rockies Distinct Population still listed (i.e. State of Wyoming). A scheduling order was issued by the Judge on 9/15.

Written briefings by all parties are to be completed by late January 2010. A hearing date for oral arguments has not been scheduled yet, but is expected to occur sometime thereafter.

Thus, barring a successful appeal to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals by the plaintiffs (has not occurred as of 9/18 and not likely to occur), the 2009 MT wolf hunting season will continue as outlined in the final 2009 regulations approved by the FWP Commission. Montana state laws, administrative rules, and the state plan will stay in effect.

Background: Delisting in the northern Rocky Mountains (except Wyoming) took effect 5/4/09. On 6/2, a coalition of 13 groups 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 attorneys, respectively, but the cases were consolidated by the Court. On 7/31, Montana / MFWP was granted intervenor status allowing full participation in the legal proceedings. Other intervenors supporting the federal government are: the State of Idaho / Idaho Fish and Game Department, Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife, Safari Club International, and Montana Farm Bureau Federation / Idaho Farm Bureau Federation / Mountain States Legal Foundation. On 8/20, a preliminary injunction request was filed, requesting that wolves be placed back on the Endangered Species list while the court decides the main case within the next year – thus preventing a fall hunting season in Montana and Idaho. On 8/28, all parties filed written documents in support / opposition to the injunction request to the Court by noon. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation was granted permission to file a "friend of the Court" brief in opposition to the preliminary injunction request and also did so on 8/28. The hearing on the preliminary injunction occurred on 8/31. The injunction request was denied on 9/8.

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. Written briefings and oral arguments are expected to be completed by late January 2010.

Montana 2009 Wolf Hunting Season:

FWP started selling wolf licenses on 8/31. As of 9/25 at about 4:30pm, FWP had sold a total of 10,011 total licenses (47 to nonresidents). The early season wilderness backcountry areas (Deer/Elk Hunting Districts 150, 151, 280, and 316 – the west side of the Bob Marshall / Scapegoat wilderness complex and the Absaroka-Beartooth wilderness area) opened on 9/15 for deer, elk, black bear, lion, and wolf. These are smaller geographical areas within the larger Wolf Management Units. Through 8:00pm today (9/25), five wolves have been harvested. Four wolves were harvested in WMU 3 (Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness area) and 1 wolf in WMU 1 (Middle Fork Flathead River / west side of the Bob Marshall Complex). Several of them have been examined by FWP personnel and hunters have been abiding by the laws and regulations approved by the Commission. Wolves harvested during the early backcountry seasons count toward the total quota for the entire WMU. For the most current harvest status information, call 1-800-385-7826.

Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:

The next Board meeting is scheduled for October 23 in Room 152, Montana Capital Building. Interested persons can listen on the Internet. The meeting time and agenda will be announced. 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.

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