



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, October 3 – October 9, 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 Blackfoot 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 10/6, a radio collared adult male wolf was killed in the Big Horn Mountains by WY WS as authorized by the USFWS in WY. The wolf had recently killed sheep in the immediate vicinity, along with another adult male. A collared animal had been reported in the area, but it had been positively identified. The wolf was originally collared in the Mill Creek pack on the east side of the Paradise Valley in October 2007 as a pup. It had been missing since July 2008. The dispersal route between the Paradise Valley and the Big Horn Mountains east of Cody is not known. Agency personnel regularly share information about missing collared wolves to document dispersal.

On 10/6, Loveless retrieved a collar that had been put on a pup in the Quartz Creek pack in the Lower Clark Fork. As suspected, the padding that was used to fit the collar had failed and the pup slipped the collar off over its head.

On 10/9, Loveless trapped and collared a yearling female wolf south of Haugan in the Lower Clark Fork. The wolf is likely a member of the Silver Lake pack. Traps were pulled. She also scouted the territory of the DeBorgia pack and found fresh sign in that area. However no trapping is being conducted over the weekend due to predicted cold temperatures.

Flights: Bradley completed monitoring flights for western Montana (FWP R2 area) on 9/19, 9/28, and 9/29. Asher flew in the Paradise Valley area and east on 10/3.

Wolf - Livestock Activities

Catching Up: Through mid-September, after WS worked with the Blackfoot Wildlife Program biologists to remove 2 members of the Livermore pack (east of St. Mary on the Blackfoot Reservation), additional livestock losses were ongoing. On 9/28, 9 wolves were killed. On 9/29, 3 were killed and

on 9/30, 3 more were killed. On all 3 days, the wolves were found among livestock where depredations were documented almost daily. During the year, a total of 23 wolves have been removed from that pack. There are at least 3 wolves remaining and one is radio collared.

On 10/5, WS looked at an injured calf and confirmed they were caused by a wolf or wolves on USFS lands in the Tamarack Creek area north of St. Regis. The injury had occurred likely a week or 10 days prior. The calf is expected to live. Cattle are currently being removed from this area and no lethal control has been authorized at this time.

On 10/6, WS looked at a dead cow on private land on the east side of the Madison Valley and called it a probable wolf kill. Ranch employees have been seeing wolves in the area but there are no working radio collars in this area. No lethal control has been authorized at this point.

On 10/6, WS investigated a report of 3 calves killed by wolves on private land north of Avon in the Threemile area. The calves were confirmed and were likely killed at different times - the oldest being about 3 weeks ago and the most recent 3-4 days ago. WS found a male wolf they collared this spring in the vicinity of the depredation as well as an uncollared wolf, likely a female. FWP had authorized removal of both wolves and a permit was issued to the landowner. On 10/9, WS found the collared wolf and 3 others on a freshly killed calf carcass and shot 2. The calf was killed on private land that belonged to a different producer. FWP then authorized the removal of the remaining 2 wolves.

On 10/7, a hound dog was confirmed killed by 1 or 2 wolves in Shwartz Creek area east of Missoula. The dog was being exercised for hunting season and was about 100 yards downhill from the vehicle and out of sight when the attack occurred. A training collar device helped the owner figure out that something had happened. The dog died later at a vet clinic.

Outreach and Education

Bradley attended local hunter education classes on 10/5 and 10/6 to present information about the wolf hunting season, wolf identification, etc. About 60 students attended.

Sime, Steuber, Bangs, and FWP's Ken McDonald presented information during a work session of the Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission on 10/7. Bangs provided a historical overview of wolf-livestock conflicts. Steuber presented information about the USDA Wildlife Services program that conducts coyote control, assists FWP with investigating suspected cases of injured or dead livestock due to species of wildlife regulated by FWP (black / grizzly bear, mountain lion, and wolf) through an FWP-WS interagency Memorandum of Agreement. Sime presented information specific to wolf-livestock conflicts. About 25-30 people attended.

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.

Montana 2009 Wolf Hunting Season:

FWP started selling wolf licenses on 8/31. As of 10/9 mid-afternoon, a total of 11,031 total licenses had been sold, 55 of which 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. 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.

Through Friday 10/9, a total of 11 wolves had been harvested in the early backcountry season. Nine wolves were harvested in WMU 3 (Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness area). Because the total quota throughout the entire WMU 3 is 12, FWP closed wolf hunting in WMU 3, effective one-half hour after sunset on Friday 10/9. The closure was initiated on October 8. No additional wolves were taken in WMU 3 and the total harvested there is still 9. Two wolves have been harvested in the WMU 1 backcountry (Middle Fork Flathead River / west side of the Bob Marshall complex) since September 15. The backcountry season there remains open.

On 10/13, the FWP Commission will have a conference call to discuss the status of the season in WMU 3. The Commission asked FWP to prepare a proposal that would maintain the overall quota of 75, but slightly reduce quotas in Montana's northern and southwestern WMU's in favor of a slightly increased quota in southern Montana. The public may listen via internet streaming on the FWP Commission web page (<http://fwp.mt.gov/doingBusiness/insideFwp/commission/meetings.html>) beginning at 3pm. The public may also listen by going to an FWP Regional Office (Regions 1-5) and sitting with local FWP staff during the conference call. It is scheduled to begin at 3pm. Substantive changes or formal Commission action require public notice and an opportunity for public comment before any final decisions could be made by the Commission.

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.

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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 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.