

## **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, February 27 – March 5, 2010

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 on the FWP website.

NOTE: FWP has recently redesigned and reorganized its Website. We appreciate your patience as we work out a few more bugs. The Wolf Program Home Page can be found at <http://fwp.mt.gov/wolf>. If you get an error page, go to the FWP Home page and look for Montana Wolves under Fish & Wildlife

### **Wolf Monitoring Activities**

Work continues on the annual report.

Lance checked out several reports of wolf sightings near horses, on kills, etc. All have been coyote.

On 3/8, while doing routine coyote work, WS opportunistically darted and collared an adult gray male wolf by helicopter southwest of Philipsburg. It is unknown at this point whether this is a single lone wolf or part of a new pack.

Hunters, other recreationists, and landowners can help FWP monitor the population by reporting wolf observations, tracks, or sign through the FWP online reporting button. You can also report wolves or wolf sign by contacting the closest wolf specialist or FWP office, or mailing a wolf observation card.

Flights: Lance did a routine monitoring flight on the E. Front on 3/2.

### **Wolf - Livestock Activities**

Given delisting and with increasing levels of wolf-related livestock losses as the wolf population has increased in number and distribution since 2005, FWP continues efforts to fully implement the state management plan. The plan outlines an adaptive management framework in which the size of wolf population directs more conservative or liberal management with respect to the use of lethal control to address wolf-livestock conflicts. On 3/1, FWP and WS completed efforts to revise the wolf-livestock response protocol at the initial phase when a loss is first confirmed to be wolf-related. This protocol will be assessed through time to determine its effect on agency response times, agency workload, efficiency and efficacy, livestock losses, and the wolf population.

In general, response protocols that are most likely to succeed in removing problem wolves from the population are those that are implemented closely in time and space to where the damage occurred. If problem wolves are successfully removed from the population, the damage should stop. The adaptive management framework of Montana's plan describes that more conservative approaches are used when the statewide population is less than 15 breeding pairs and more liberal approaches may be used when the statewide population exceeds 15 breeding pairs.

A combination of proactive tools to decrease the risk of livestock losses due to wolves, an aggressive initial lethal response to remove problem wolves, and follow up efforts to remove problem wolves more aggressively in areas with a history of livestock depredation should accomplish the following goals:

- fewer incidents of injured or dead livestock and other impacts due to wolves
- shorter initial response time by WS, streamlining the initial response when losses are confirmed, particularly in remote areas with poor or no cell phone coverage
- increased probability that lethal control removes the problem wolf/wolves by connecting initial lethal control efforts more closely in space and time to the depredation site
- decreased potential for subsequent livestock losses through more timely lethal control in the immediate area of the loss
- decreased number of claims submitted to the MLLRMB for death loss payments so that funds can also be made available for other program parameters, including proactive efforts by livestock owners to reduce risk of livestock losses in wolf country.

Consistent with the approach taken for mountain lions and black bears, FWP seeks to direct lethal removal at problem wolves causing the damage, offering the greatest chance that wolves that have learned to injure or kill livestock are removed from the population. Implementation of a more aggressive initial response increases the probability that problem wolves will be killed.

Initial Response for up to three days upon confirmation of wolf damage:

If the statewide breeding pair count exceeds 15 at the end of the previous year, FWP authorizes WS to take any wolves at or near the confirmed depredation site by calling / shooting without first obtaining FWP authorization.

- FWP authorization is for the same day of the investigation and extends to any / all wolves caught overnight in traps set at or near the depredation site, with the intention of removing wolves that come back to a carcass. If more than 1 wolf is caught, WS may opt to collar/release a wolf if there is not currently a radio in the pack. Otherwise, all captured wolves may be killed.
- Once the WS specialist leaves the depredation area after efforts to set traps or to call / shoot wolves at or near the depredation site, the initial response is completed when traps (if set) are checked and captured wolves are killed for up to three days from the date of the investigation. WS should notify FWP if traps are set.
- If 1 or more wolves are killed at the depredation site, WS lethal control efforts conclude, unless FWP requests additional lethal control as part of the follow up response.

If the statewide breeding pair count is less than 15, WS may set traps but no wolves can be killed without FWP authorization as part of the follow up response.

*Follow Up Response:* Based on WS information about the investigative results and outcomes of the initial response, FWP may elect to continue lethal control efforts, request efforts at collar/release, a combination of both, or request no immediate additional lethal response, as circumstances warrant.

Livestock owners who suspect a wolf-related loss should still contact USDA WS directly to request an investigation. If FWP is contacted first, we refer those calls to the local WS Specialist. Claims for reimbursement through Montana's program should still be sent directly to George Edwards with the Montana Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Board.

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On 3/4, a landowner in the Blackfoot Valley reported that wolves had harassed their bulls and pushed them through a fence. FWP volunteer Peter Brown responded and hung some fladry around the area. This occurred in the Ovando Mountain pack territory.

On 3/5, a female pup was lethally removed from the Silcox pack in response to 2/21 depredation. Control efforts are ongoing on and around the ranch property for an additional wolf.

### **Outreach and Education**

On 3/5 at a meeting of the Environmental Quality Council (an Interim Montana Legislative Committee having agency oversight responsibility over FWP and two other state agencies), FWP Director Maurier, FWP Commission Chairman Ream, Chief Legal Counsel Lane, Wildlife Bureau Chief McDonald, FWP Veterinarian Dr. Ramsey, Bradley, Research Section Chief Gude, Kujala, and Sime presented information about FWP's wolf program, status of the litigation, wolf monitoring efforts, federal funding, wolf – ungulate relationships, *Echinococcus granulosus* (a canid tapeworm recently reported as present in Montana / Idaho wolves; fact sheets available on the state fish and wildlife agency websites, respectively) radio collaring efforts, and a newly revised wolf-livestock initial response protocol developed in collaboration with USDA Wildlife Services. Members of the public attended in person and listen/viewed via the internet and many provided public comment. FWP appreciated the opportunity and interest of the Council and especially the assistance prior to and during the meeting from Ms. Stockwell of Legislative Services.

### **Research Activities**

Nothing new to report.

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

On 3/2, a Montana resident plead guilty in federal court to illegally shooting and killing a wolf in October 2008. He reported killing a wolf that was approaching him while hunting deer. An expert at the National Wildlife Forensics Lab in Ashland Oregon concluded that the bullet trajectory showed the wolf was actually shot in the back left side. At that time, the wolf was still federally listed under the Endangered Species Act and sentencing would occur within the federal framework.

### **Other Updates**

#### *Northern Rockies Delisting Litigation in Missoula Federal Court*

Montana's interests in support of delisting have been represented and brought forward through efforts by FWP in consultation with the Montana Attorney General's Office. FWP filed its last written brief on 1/28.

FWP argued that: 1. for a variety of reasons, it is lawful for USFWS to establish different levels of protection for a species, subspecies or Distinct Population Segment under the Endangered Species Act; 2. the facts show that Montana's existing regulatory mechanisms will keep wolf populations well

above the federal recovery criteria and encourage connectivity; 3. sufficient genetic exchange has taken place and will continue; and 4. Montana's hunting season is not a basis for relisting the gray wolf.

At this time, a hearing for oral arguments has not been scheduled. One could be scheduled at any time, but there is no requirement for an oral hearing.

Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:

The Board met on October 23. The agenda and minutes from previous meetings are available at [Montana Department of Livestock](#). The next full Board meeting will be April 9 in the Montana Capitol and Internet streaming is expected. The full agenda will be publicized as the meeting date approaches, but is expected to include funding and rulemaking. 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 online. Use the following shortcut link and be sure to update your bookmarks: <http://fwp.mt.gov/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 death 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.