

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 9 - October 15, 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 2009 annual report) can be found on the FWP website.

Wolf Monitoring Activities

Ground based trapping efforts (particularly on public lands) are beginning to wind down as hunting seasons start to avoid incidental capture of bird hunting dogs, other potential user conflicts, and colder nighttime temperatures and the potential for trap injuries. Aerial flights will occur at normal intervals, but also with a sensitivity to not disrupt big game or hunting activities. Other field work to scout, track or investigate public wolf reports continues through the end of the year.

On 10/14, a coyote trapper reported capturing a wolf in a trap in the Big Hole south of Wisdom. FWP was able to respond immediately and collared and released the wolf.

Hunters and private landowners are especially encouraged to report observations of wolves or wolf sign to FWP through the online feature at <http://fwp.mt.gov/wolf> (look for the green Report a Wolf box), by mailing a pre-printed post card available at license agents, or calling the nearest FWP office.

Flights: Bradley flew in the Bitterroot and Lower Clark Fork on 10/6 and 10/8.

Wolf - Livestock Activities

On 10/6, a wolf was reported in a horse pasture circling horses on private property in the Mill Gulch area northeast of Alder (east of Twin Bridges in southwest MT). On 10/7, FWP made an onsite visit.

On 10/7, WS confirmed 3 adult ewes as being killed by wolves and another ewe as injured. This was in the Rock Creek area on private land south of Dillon. The producer has a herder and guard dogs and is night penning the sheep. FWP initially requested WS place a collar in the group as none was placed after a previous confirmed loss on 6/13 of 5 ewes and 4 lambs in this same area and a new group was suspected at the time. But on 10/14, WS confirmed an adult ewe as being killed by wolves in the same area. WS determined that wolves had gotten into the sheep and the sheep scattered over a large area but no other losses were found. The sheep will be in this pasture until 12/1. FWP authorized WS to remove any or all wolves found in the pasture. On 10/15, WS found 4 wolves in the pasture and killed three of the four. All three were black the remaining wolf was gray. WS still has traps in the area and will run them for a few more days if a wolf is caught it will be collared.

On 10/9, WS confirmed a calf as killed by a wolf or wolves on public land near Pipestone east of Butte. No radio collar was heard in the area. WS will continue attempts to collar and release a wolf to determine current level of wolf activity.

On 10/10 during a routine monitoring flight, FWP located wolves next to a cow carcass on private land west of Hall. WS investigated on 10/11 and confirmed it as wolf predation. The wolves involved are a new pair of wolves that settled in the area last spring. They dened on private land at low elevation near livestock and have spent most of the summer in and around cattle. Two packs (Willow Creek and Bearmouth) have been removed from this area due to livestock depredations and this new pair have been using parts of both these packs' old territories. FWP signed up a volunteer range rider in the area to help increase monitoring of both cattle and wolves. The landowner who lost the cow reports several other calves missing from the same area. Due to the high density of livestock in the area, history of depredations, and high potential for further conflicts, FWP has authorized WS to remove the pair and their 3 pups. An adult wolf was killed on 10/15.

Outreach and Education

On 10/4 and 10/5, Bradley taught a wolf course as part of hunter education class in Missoula. About 50 students attended.

On 10/13, Sime, area biologist Craig Jourdonnais and FWP R2 wildlife program manager Mike Thompson attended a board meeting of the Ravalli County Fish and Wildlife Association to give an update on MT's efforts to regain state management since the wolf was relisted on 8/5. About 15 people attended.

On 10/14, Laudon attended the monthly meeting of the Flathead Wildlife Association and gave an update.

On 10/14, FWP representatives (including FWP's chief legal counsel Bob Lane) attended an informational session in Missoula hosted by the Five Valleys Chapter of Safari Club International. FWP provided an update on the Bitterroot 10j proposal and Montana's efforts to regain management authority. About 200 people attended.

On 10-14 to 10-16, FWP representatives attended the annual conference of the Society for Environmental Journalists. At an exhibitor table, FWP had a poster presentation on Montana's wolf program and the Crucial Areas Planning System (an online FWP mapping service aimed at future planning for a variety of development and conservation purposes so fish, wildlife, and recreational resources can be considered earlier. It is part of a larger conservation effort that recognizes the importance of landscape scale management of species and habitats by fish and wildlife agencies. See <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/conservationInAction/crucialAreas.html>.) CAPS is an important landscape conservation tool that can be used to consider crucial areas and connectivity needs of wolves and Montana's other fish and wildlife species.

Research Activities

Nothing to report at this time.

Law Enforcement and Related Activities

On 10/8, a ranch manager in the Big Hole southeast of Jackson reported shooting a wolf that was harassing cattle with another wolf. This same ranch had a confirmed calf injured earlier in the week. USFWS law enforcement investigated and determined the take to be a legal defense of livestock.

On 10/11, a landowner in Miller Creek, southeast of Missoula, saw 2 wolves attacking one of his sheep on private ground and shot one of the wolves. The sheep was injured and had to be euthanized. USFWS law enforcement investigated and determined the take to be a legal defense of livestock.

Other Updates

Bitterroot Wolf 10(j) Proposal

On 10/7, the FWP Commission approved FWP to seek public comment and obtain scientific peer review on a proposal to remove wolves in the West Fork of the Bitterroot due to unacceptable impacts of wolf predation on the elk herd (which is not meeting population objectives for calf recruitment or total elk numbers). The complete proposal can be found under “Opportunity for Public Comment” found on the Hunting page of the FWP website fwp.mt.gov.

Proposal details:

- Reduce wolf numbers in HD 250 (West Fork of Bitterroot) from the minimum of 24 counted in December 2009 to a year-end minimum of 12 wolves represented by 2 – 3 packs from 2010 through 2015; objective = 12 wolves in 2-3 packs in HD 250
- 100 “agents of the state” are drawn from a pool of applicants, not more than 10% nonresidents
- Hunting only from one half hour before sunrise to one half hour after sunset; no baiting or electronic calling/amplification; 12 hour reporting with 48-hour check-in
- Hunting license purchase required to keep pelt and skull
- Fall 2010/Winter 2011 season to start with USFWS approval not before Dec 15, 2010 and running until quota is met, not later than Feb 28, 2011;
- 5-year proposal to USFWS with annual FWP Commission process and rules; proposed management options available for annual definitions by FWP Commission include fair chase hunting or trapping by the public, control actions by agency personnel or designees, or any combination approved by the Commission

Public comments sought:

- Deadline for public comment is 5pm Wednesday November 10, 2010
- Written comments can be sent to: FWP – Wildlife Bureau, Attn: Public Comment, POB 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701.
- Electronic comments can be submitted by cutting and pasting the following link into your web browser line:<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/D3ZL3GL>

Pending public comment and peer reviews, FWP may advance a final proposal to the FWP Commission at the next meeting November 18 in Helena. If approved by the FWP Commission, FWP would submit a final 10(j) proposal to the USFWS for federal consideration and approval. FWP would seek expedited review. USFWS can approve the proposal or deny the proposal.

Northern Rockies Delisting Litigation

On 10/1, FWP filed its appeal with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, seeking to overturn the Missoula District Court ruling that returned the region’s wolf population to the federal endangered species list. The federal government and Idaho also filed appeals.

Background: On 8/6, federal Endangered Species Act protections were reinstated through a ruling from the federal court. The court ruled that the federal Endangered Species Act does not allow the federal government to subdivide a distinct population segment so that a species is listed in part of it and delisted in the other part. The ruling stated that the wolf must either be listed or delisted as one unit within the Northern Rockies region. Further, given that the current Wyoming wolf management plan and regulatory mechanisms are not approved by the federal government and are considered inadequate, federal protections must be reinstated throughout the region.

Wolves across northern Montana are now legally reclassified as federally endangered. Wolves across southern Montana are reclassified as experimental, non-essential. Different federal regulations apply to each area. See <http://fwp.mt.gov/wolf> for information about the federal regulations and other updates.

Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:

LLRMB will be holding a board meeting on October 18th in room 152 of the State Capitol. This meeting will be broadcast over the internet and TVMT. The agenda is available at the board's website <http://www.llrmb.mt.gov>.

LLRMB's meeting will be broadcast over the internet and TVMT. A link to the meeting will be posted the day of the meeting at www.llrmb.mt.gov.

For agendas and minutes of previous meetings, see the Board's website: www.llrmb.mt.gov. Look under Board and Meetings on the left navigation bar. Agendas and minutes from previous meetings are available at [Montana Department of Livestock](http://www.mt.gov/departmentoflivestock). 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.