United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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In Reply Refer To:
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MAR 11 2015

Memorandum

To: Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator, Southwest Region

Through: Assistant Regional Director, Ecological Services, Southwest Region

From: Regional Director, Southwest Region

Subject: Depredation Decision; Fox Mountain pack wolves (1384, 1396 and an uncollared pup) and/or Single M1161

Under the final 10(j) rule (50 CFR Part 17) of January 16, 2015 (Final Rule), the Service or designated agency may carry out intentional harassment, nonlethal control measures, translocation, placement in captivity, or lethal control of problem wolves. My decision is to remove by live-capture either mp1384, mp1396 or an uncollared pup from the Fox Mountain pack, and/or single wolf M1161 in order to attempt to mitigate a series of depredations that have occurred on and around an area of private land in New Mexico.

Depredation History and Assignments:

The following confirmed depredation incidents have occurred on and around the area of private land:

(1) The USDA APHIS-Wildlife Services (Wildlife Services) investigated a dead cow on February 14, 2015, north of Bill Knight Gap in New Mexico on private land. Wildlife Services confirmed the injuries to be wolf caused. Three wolves were observed the previous day near the depredation area. The IFT located mp1384 and mp1396 of the Fox Mountain pack near the depredation the following day. Likely, the additional wolf observed the previous day was an uncollared sibling of mp1384 and mp1396. As such, the IFT identified mp1384, mp1396, and an uncollared pup as being involved in this

depredation incident. GPS locations from AM1158 indicated that he was not in the area at the time of the depredation.

(2) Wildlife Services investigated a dead calf on February 26, 2015, northwest of Hulsey Lake on private land in New Mexico. Wildlife Services confirmed the injuries to be wolf caused, and to have occurred within 24 to 36 hours prior to the investigation. Telemetry signals, GPS locations, and photographs retrieved from trail cameras located all collared wolves and associated uncollared animals 3 to 7 miles away from the depredation site at the time of the incident. In addition, bite spread size and pattern was inconsistent with the other depredations described in this memo. Thus, the IFT determined that an uncollared wolf not thought to be associated with the Fox Mountain pack was likely involved in this livestock depredation.

(3) Wildlife Services investigated a dead calf on February 28, 2015, northwest of Hulsey Lake on private land in New Mexico. Wildlife Services confirmed the injuries to be wolf caused. GPS points placed M1161close to the depredation site the night of February 26th and the early morning hours of the 27th. The IFT determined that M1161 was involved in this livestock depredation.

(4) Wildlife Services investigated a dead calf on February 28, 2015, northwest of Hulsey Lake on private land in New Mexico. Wildlife Services confirmed the injuries to be wolf caused, and to have occurred approximately 24 hours prior to the investigation. GPS points placed M1161at the depredation site during the early morning of February 28, 2015. The IFT determined that M1161 was involved in this livestock depredation. Additionally, Wildlife Services investigated a dead cow on March 3, 2015, northwest of Hulsey Lake on private land in New Mexico. Wildlife Services confirmed the injuries to be wolf caused, and to have occurred approximately 48 hours prior to the investigation. GPS points placed M1161at the depredation site in the early morning of March 1, 2015 and evening of March 2, 2015. The IFT determined that M1161 was involved in this livestock depredation. These depredations occurred within a 24 hour period and were less than 0.20 miles apart; therefore they are considered 1 depredation incident involving M1161.

(5) Wildlife Services investigated a second dead calf on February 28, 2015, northwest of Hulsey Lake on private land in New Mexico. Wildlife Services confirmed the injuries to be wolf caused, and to have occurred approximately 12 hours prior to the investigation. Telemetry signals indicated that mp1384 was in the area and photographs retrieved from trail cameras show an uncollared animal with mp1384. Additionally, GPS evidence indicated that M1161 was not in the area at the time when the depredation was thought to have occurred. Thus, the IFT determined that mp1384 and an uncollared wolf (likely an uncollared pup from the Fox Mountain pack) were involved in this livestock depredation incident.

(6) Wildlife Services investigated an injured cow on March 3, 2015, northwest of Hulsey Lake on private land in New Mexico. The cow was subsequently euthanized due to its injuries. The IFT found the cow during hazing efforts in the morning of March 3, 2015.

Wildlife Services confirmed the injuries to be wolf caused. Telemetry signals placed mp1384 and mp1396 in the area of the depredation. In addition, photographs retrieved from trail cameras indicated an uncollared wolf had been traveling with mp1384 (likely an uncollared pup from the Fox Mountain pack). Thus, the IFT determined that mp1384, mp1396, and an uncollared pup traveling with these animals were involved in this livestock depredation incident.

(7) Wildlife Services investigated a dead calf on March 6, 2015, near Spur Lake on private property in New Mexico. Wildlife Services confirmed the injuries to be wolf caused. The IFT determined that an uncollared wolf (likely associated with 1384 and 1396) was involved in this livestock depredation incident; no radio-collared wolves were located in the depredation area during the estimated time of the depredation incident.

(8) Wildlife Services investigated a dead cow on March 8, 2015, on the Torriette allotment on public land in New Mexico. Wildlife Services confirmed the injuries to be wolf caused. Utilizing radio telemetry data, the IFT determined that mp1384, mp1396 and an uncollared wolf associated with the Fox Mountain pack were involved in this depredation incident.

In addition to the above confirmed depredation incidents, there was one probable depredation of a cow) investigated on February 28, 2015. The cow was located in the same area and on private land northwest of Hulsey Lake in New Mexico. This is not classified as depredation incident and is not assigned to particular wolves.

Previous Management Measures:

The IFT initiated hazing following the depredation investigations occurring on February 28, 2015. The IFT observed M1161 alone during one hazing effort. Although M1161 and mp1384 each moved away following hazing efforts, both animals subsequently returned to the area of depredations and were involved in separate, but additional depredations. For further information on previous livestock depredations, management measures and management actions that have occurred related to the Fox Mountain pack, please visit the Current Events Archive page of the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program website at http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/mexicanwolf/CEBRWRA_Ar.cfm.

Decision

I extend my sincere thanks to all those involved in doing the analysis and in implementing field efforts to protect livestock and conserve wolves. I make my decision in full consideration of the following:

1. The series of depredations during February and early March have all occurred in a similar area. In addition, the majority (6 of 8) of these depredation incidents have occurred on private land. mp1384, mp1396 and an uncollared wolf associated with the Fox Mountain pack have been involved in depredations in the absence AM1158 from the Fox Mountain pack. In addition

to this group, M1161 moved into the area and has been involved in its own depredation incidents.

2. Because mp1384, mp1396 and the uncollared wolf have intermittingly joined back with AM1158, the uncollared animal is likely a pup from the Fox Mountain pack. Therefore, mp1384, mp1396 and the uncollared animal traveling with mp1384 and mp1396 are unlikely to breed during 2015 based on age.

3. Our intent is to disrupt an increasing depredation situation that involves two separate groups of wolves (M1161, and mp1384, mp1396 and an uncollared wolf) preying on calving cows and young calves on private land.

4. On March 4, 2015, M1161 left the depredation area and traveled approximately 25 miles, returning to an area in Arizona where he was associated with F1332 in January and early February. At this time, the IFT are intensively monitoring M1161's movements. On March 9, 2015, M1161 was documented in close proximity to F1340.

Therefore, in consideration of these circumstances relevant to the situation and the management efforts by the IFT in response to the depredations and utilizing the flexibilities authorized in the 2015 Final Rule, my decision is to remove to captivity by live capture (1) either mp1384, mp1396 or an uncollared animal from the Fox Mountain pack, and/or (2) single M1161 if M1161 returns to the depredation area and is involved in additional depredation incidents. The goal of these removals is to reduce or stop depredations in the area by disrupting the behavior that is currently ongoing on and near private property. Thus, I instruct the IFT to end capture efforts following capture and removal of a single animal. Similarly, if mp1384, and/or mp1396 move out of the area we would cease trapping and continue to closely monitor mp1384 and mp1396. Additional depredations in this area by any of the animals listed in this decision memo (mp1384, mp1396, an uncollared pup associated with mp1384 or 1396, or M1161) would result in re-initiation of trapping if the depredations occur during the 60 day time period of this decision memo. If additional depredations by any of the animals listed in this decision memo occur within the 60 day scope of this decision memo, but transpire away from the area of the depredations covered in this memo, we will assess the need to conduct a removal to captivity by live capture from the area of the new depredation(s). If additional depredations by any of the animals listed in this decision memo occur beyond the 60 day scope of this decision memo and within 365 days of the depredation incidents described in this memo, we will reassess the potential need for a new decision memo to address the situation. If M1161 is removed as a result of this decision memo, we intend to translocate the animal into the experimental population in the future. If mp1384, mp1396 or the uncollared pup is removed as a result of this decision memo, we will evaluate the animal's future contribution to recovery based on the sex and age of the animal captured. If the IFT captures AM1158, or any uncollared adult female, the IFT should immediately release the animal(s) away from the private land, but within the Fox Mountain pack home range following capture.

Removal activities may occur on public and private lands within and adjacent to the Gila National Forest, provided that permission is granted by the landowner. This decision memorandum covers up to a 60-day period, effective on March 4, 2015.

The Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator permit (TE091551-8), issued April 4, 2013, under the provisions of 50 CFR 17.32, provides that Authorized Permittees may take any Mexican wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*) in the nonessential experimental population in a manner consistent with a USFWS-approved management plan or species management measure adopted by the USFWS pursuant to the provisions of 50 CFR 17.84, as well as to conduct activities related directly to the conservation, protection, and recovery of reintroduced nonessential experimental populations of Mexican gray wolves within Arizona and New Mexico. Provision S.1.of the permit provides that "Specifically, authorization includes all actions related to: capture including, but not limited to, leg-hold traps, helicopter or ground darting and net-gunning, and captive capture methods..." In accordance with Provision K, should any mortality or physical injury occur to a Mexican wolf during permitted activities, all operations must immediately cease and we are required to contact the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program within 24 hours.

The 2015 Final Rule states in section 17.84(7)(vii) that "The Service may or a designated agency may take any Mexican wolf in the experimental population in a manner consistent with a Service-approved management plan, special management measure, biological opinion pursuant to section 7(a)(2) of the Act, section 6 of the Act as described in §17.31 for State game and fish agencies with authority to manage Mexican wolves, or a valid permit issued by the Service through §17.32." Thus, employees of Wildlife Services are authorized to trap Mexican wolves in accordance with this Decision Memorandum, and any incidental death or injury of wolves during this operation will be covered under the Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator permit (TE091551-8). Wildlife Services employees working under this permit will not be considered negligent when exercising appropriate methodology. Appropriated methodology is defined as Wildlife Services employees following all established policies and Standard Operating Procedures associated with Mexican wolf recovery.

Following removal or the expiration of this decision memo, I direct the IFT to once again increase their management efforts and: (1) initiate a diversionary food cache(s) in order to reduce the future potential of wolves depredating on livestock while localized during the denning and rendezvous seasons, (2) initiate a range rider to monitor livestock in the Fox Mountain pack territory, (3) continue to conduct intensive monitoring and hazing of the members of the Fox Mountain pack in order to reduce wolf-livestock conflict, and (4) continue to coordinate with livestock owners and the Forest Service in the Fox Mountain pack territory to reduce wolf-livestock conflict.

I wish to thank the Mexican Wolf/Livestock Coexistence Council for their commitments toward financial compensation to the livestock producers for past, current, and any future depredation losses. I encourage the IFT to focus on addressing field efforts and needs associated with the continued monitoring of wolves in the area, with frequent reports conveyed to me through U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service contacts and normal agency channels.