



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Memorandum

To: Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator, Region 2

Through: Assistant Regional Director, Ecological Services, Region 2

From: **ACTING** Regional Director, Region 2

Jay E. Nicholas

Subject: Depredation Decision; Mexican Wolves AM1107 and AF858
(Rim Pack)

Under the final 10(j) rule (50 CFR Part 17) of January 12, 1998, the Interagency Management Plan of March 1998, and the Final Environmental Impact Statement of November 1996, two confirmed livestock depredation incidents within one year occurring in areas other than the primary wolf recovery zone by Mexican wolf male AM1107 and female AF858, trigger a decision on the appropriate continued management of the Rim Pack, including whether these wolves should remain in the wild or be removed from the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area (BRWRA). The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services investigated a depredation incident on April 22, 2011, involving AM1107, AF858, F1187, and F1213. According to the depredation report one calf was confirmed killed by wolves. The USDA Wildlife Services also investigated a depredation incident on July 18, 2011, involving AM1107 and AF858. According to the depredation report, one cow was confirmed killed by wolves. Both of these incidents occurred outside of the BRWRA on the San Carlos Apache Reservation.

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. I remain concerned about the overall status of the wolf population in the 10(j) area. Largely due to natural and unlawful mortalities in combination with past legal

removal actions, the Mexican gray wolf 10(j) population has not shown significant increases toward overall population goals. The population has remained relatively "flat," oscillating between 40 and 60 wolves.

2. The Rim Pack was formed in 2004 by wild born female wolf 858 and an uncollared male wolf. The Rim Pack has been confirmed as denning and having produced pups each year since 2004, and has been responsible for producing a minimum of 15 pups over seven years. Thus, this pack is important to achieving population goals. Disruption of pack dynamics, particularly as pups are reared, could jeopardize pup survival.

3. The Interagency Management Plan considers the severity of the depredations and the number of times the wolf (or wolves) have committed depredations. During the last seven years, the Rim Pack has been involved in 3 confirmed depredation incidents. This pack has demonstrated significant periods of time with no livestock depredations.

4. Other relevant circumstances exist in this situation. On May 29, 2011, the Wallow Fire started in close proximity to the Rim Pack den area. The fire burned over most of the Rim Pack home range prior to containment in mid July. The Rim Pack home range continued to be affected by the fire until consistent monsoon rains arrived in early August 2011. Due to the widespread nature (over 500,000 acres burned) of the Wallow Fire, and the effects it had on the Rim Pack's den area, we believe the pack was temporarily driven off of the National Forest and onto the San Carlos Apache Reservation (SCAR) where they killed a cow on July 18, 2011.

Additionally, due to the existing drought conditions, livestock were concentrated around limited water sources on this part of the San Carlos Apache Reservation. The carcass was located approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ mile away from Dry Prong Tank where a significant concentration of livestock was noted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) personnel during the depredation investigation. Members of the Interagency Field Team (IFT) hazed the Rim Pack adults after the depredation, and the wolves returned to their traditional home range in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest where they have remained to the present. Following the July 18, 2011, depredation, the IFT established a diversionary food cache in the Rim Pack home range in order to reduce the possibility of future depredations. After the rains became more consistent in August, livestock became more evenly distributed on the San Carlos Apache Reservation, and the IFT has discontinued the diversionary food cache.

5. During 2011, the IFT worked closely with members of the San Carlos Apache Tribe to respond quickly and effectively to requests to remove wolves from tribal lands. During January and April of 2011, members of the Rim Pack were located on SCAR five times. After each location was determined including the April 22, 2011,

depredation incident, the IFT increased monitoring of the Rim Pack, and when conditions allowed, conducted hazing activities to move the wolves onto National Forest lands. In each of these instances the wolves moved back onto the National Forest in a short amount of time. In addition to intensive monitoring and hazing activities, members of the IFT conducted trapping efforts which resulted in the capture and translocation of Mexican wolf F1213 from SCAR to the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest in March 2011. During the time frame of the Wallow Fire, May through August 2011, the members of the Rim pack were located on SCAR four times, and again the IFT increased monitoring and hazing when possible (many field activities were not allowed due to fire restrictions).

6. It is important to retain wild-born wolves in the 10(j) wolf population. Allowing for the natural rearing of wild born pups from the Rim Pack into adulthood is beneficial to overall population survival.

Therefore, in consideration of these six points and utilizing the flexibilities authorized in the Interagency Management Plan, my decision is the Rim Pack, including adults, yearlings, and pups, shall remain in the wild at this time. As we go forward we will reevaluate their status, taking into consideration any additional depredations that may occur. In addition, IFT personnel are authorized to implement a full spectrum of integrated and innovative methods to deter depredation behavior, including ground hazing on foot or by horseback and aerial hazing, trapping, and diversionary feeding, if deemed appropriate by IFT personnel.

We remain committed to assisting ranchers and permittees with depredation problems caused by wolves. I encourage the IFT to focus on addressing field efforts and needs associated with the Rim Pack's continued monitoring, with frequent reports conveyed to me through Service contacts and normal agency channels.