

2025 Interagency Field Team Work Plan for the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program

All work directly supports the main goals of the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program. Those goals are: 1) population monitoring, 2) conflict management, 3) population genetic management and monitoring, and 4) increasing social tolerance for Mexican wolf recovery through responsive management, outreach, education, and peer-reviewed scientific literature.

Population monitoring activities occur throughout the year to establish a reliable and comparable year-end population count, as well as annual trends (e.g., distribution, natality, recruitment, mortality). Some examples of these activities include capturing and collaring wolves with Global Positioning Systems (GPS)/Very High Frequency (VHF) radio collars, natal pup counts, assessing telemetry data from radio collared wolves, conducting annual end of year counts, surveying for new wolf activity in known range, and documenting wolf presence in expanded areas. Ongoing and future techniques for population monitoring are being evaluated in the Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Area (MWEPA) currently (e.g., marking fostered pups, camera/howling recording grids around dens and rendezvous sites to determine occupancy, non-invasive genetic sampling, developing a resource selection functions to predict den and rendezvous sites in unoccupied areas) and additional collaboration with researchers will continue.

Conflict management (i.e., nuisance behavior, wolf/livestock conflict) occurs throughout the year. The Mexican Wolf Interagency Field Team (IFT) works on proactively preventing depredations by coordinating with livestock producers, ranch managers, range riders, and agency range conservationists to cooperatively develop solutions to reduce conflict. The IFT assesses wolf activity around livestock, manages diversionary food caches to potentially reduce conflict, hazes wolves near livestock, applies non-lethal tools (e.g., fladry, Fox lights) where practical, relocates cattle carcasses away from current or potential conflict areas, and removes wolves when necessary. In 2025 the IFT will continue to use agency range riders, which are technicians employed by an IFT agency that spend the majority of their work implementing conflict mitigation measures. These agency range riders have largely been used to focus proactive conflict management efforts in depredation hotspot areas as well as rapid response to wolf/livestock conflict. The IFT also manages non-livestock conflicts with wolves located near areas of human activity or residences or wolves that exhibit unacceptable behavior around humans. Effective conflict management furthers Mexican Wolf Recovery Program efforts to increase social tolerance in the MWEPA.

Genetic management, via pup-fostering, initial releases, translocations, and removals (e.g., to avoid sibling pairings), will occur as outlined in the Annual Release and Translocation Plan to work towards increasing the genetic diversity of the population and meeting the objectives outlined in the 2022 Mexican Wolf Recovery Plan. In addition, translocations may occur throughout the year in response to management concerns or actions (e.g., wolves that establish outside of the Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Area).

Public presentations on Mexican wolf population recovery and management will occur as the IFT is able and with consideration to IFT workload and implementation of the four main goals of the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program.

In addition to the activities identified above, other field and office tasks routinely occur throughout the year, including:

- Data entry and quality checks.
- Staff training and development.
- Interagency database training and database maintenance.

- Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) revisions occur throughout the year. Emphasis will be on reviewing and revising those SOPs that the Mexican Wolf Management Team (MT) and Mexican Wolf Executive Committee (EC) have determined are most critical for the IFT to review and revise.
- Field work:
 - Conflict management as necessary (e.g., monitoring in depredation hotspots, diversionary food caching, hazing, carcass removal in areas with or potential for conflict).
 - Foothold trapping activities:
 - Preferred time-periods depend on the goal of trapping:
 - Adult capture and collar starts in mid-May for collared wolves, starts in June for uncollared wolves, and goes through October.
 - Pup capture and collar occurs September through October, concurrent with adult capture and collar efforts.
 - Management as necessary.
 - Wolf removals and translocations as necessary.
 - Managing supplemental food caches for packs that had pups fostered into them that year.
 - Scat sample collection for genetic population monitoring and to document survival of pup-fosters. Collection is done throughout the year, but June-August are months where collection is heavily focused since wolves are occupying den and rendezvous sites.
 - Survey unoccupied wolf habitat to document new wolf occupancy and abundance.
 - Ancillary field work as necessary (e.g., investigating sighting reports, wolf mortalities).
- Public outreach, including compilation and dissemination of quarterly reports and updating the online wolf location map.
- Prepare and submit management-oriented manuscripts for peer-review publications.

To reduce workload and cost in the face of an increasing wolf population and steady or declining agency budgets, the following strategies will be implemented:

Collars:

- The IFT will continue to use GPS/VHF radio collars.
- Continued implementation of the 2022 Mexican Wolf Recovery Plan's Implementation Strategy goal of having a minimum of two collars per pack and collar fostered wolves.

Data Reporting:

- The Mexican Wolf Recovery Program's database is robust, and a focus on accurate and timely data entry will reduce time spent on all reports and data summaries needed throughout the year by IFT members at multiple levels.
- The IFT will continue to produce annual progress reports in 2025 using the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program's database. We will continue to assign Albuquerque-based U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) personnel to lead efforts to compile the Annual Report. These efforts reduce annual workload considerably for all agency IFT members and increase timeliness of reports.

Food Caching:

- Look for ways to reduce the cost (financially and personnel time) of supplemental and diversionary food caches (e.g. utilizing roadkill).

Helicopter Operations:

- Annual helicopter count/capture operations will take place for 10-days (55 hours) at the end of January and rely on completed ground counts from November-January for annual count, as a continued cost saving measure.
 - In recent years, the IFT has found that ground counts have frequently been more successful than aerial counts at identifying the total number of animals in a pack. As such, when ground counts are available and considered reliable, the IFT will defer to these counts rather than focusing on counts during helicopter operations. Packs located in remote Wilderness/Primitive Areas and packs in which ground counts were unsuccessful would still be prioritized for counting in aerial operations.
 - Relying more on ground counting efforts will result in cost savings by reducing contracted helicopter hours.
 - More focused capture efforts also minimize risk to personnel by reducing the number of low-level aircraft flight hours.
 - We will also lower costs by reducing contracted hours for a veterinarian on the helicopter operation by relying more on agency veterinarians.
 - The IFT will explore use of smaller ground crews during helicopter operations to free up staff for other additional work that may occur, as needed. In some scenarios (such as wilderness or remote captures), the IFT will increase efficiency by using helicopter crews to process wolves in the field, rather than returning to a processing site.

Novel Monitoring:

- Continue to look for novel or different techniques to monitor our wolf population.
- Continue to work with researchers on ways to reduce invasive management (capture and collaring) and/or increase non-invasive sampling techniques to reach population metrics (e.g., abundance, survival, fecundity).
- Continue to look for methods in 2025 to document fostered pup survival and prioritize trapping based on the results of camera trapping at supplemental feeding sites as well as collecting scat samples at den and rendezvous sites.
 - Some additional methods we will explore to document fostered pup survival are: alternative ear tagging methods, placing pit tags in legs, using expandable pup collars, and more methods may be considered throughout the year.

Staffing:

- The IFT will explore potential use of smaller teams for pup-fostering operations to free up other personnel resources to respond to depredations, haze, stock diversionary food caches, etc.
- Look for opportunities to utilize IFT range riders and conflict specialists during the busy pup-fostering, helicopter survey and capture, and fall foothold trapping periods to assist with conflict management workloads.
- In Arizona, continue use of non-lethal Wildlife Services positions to conduct trapping for uncollared wolves when feasible, however, trapping is a tertiary priority for non-lethal Wildlife Services positions after conducting investigations and implementing less-than-lethal methods.
- Continue use of Wildlife Services wolf trapping specialist to improve the team's ability to document survival of fostered pups, trap in areas of uncollared wolves, and trap at the sites of depredations assigned to uncollared wolves quickly and effectively.

- Continue to improve and develop infrastructure for fleet and facilities. Work towards maintaining additional satellite workstations (Forest Service Work Centers or Ranger District Offices) with camper trailers to increase employee efficiency by potentially reducing response time and providing for more flexibility.

The FY2025 schedule for proposed IFT activities is as follows:

January

- Biologists complete data review and update their respective sections of the fourth 2024 Quarterly Report.
- IFT completes final adjustments for the 2025 Mexican Wolf Aviation Safety Operations Plan by the first week of January (note: these are minor adjustment related to capture priorities and timing of operations as the plan needs to be signed by USFWS in November of 2024). Final IFT planning meeting for the 2025 helicopter count and capture operations.
 - Finish landowner contacts regarding helicopter operations' planning and permissions.
- Field Work:
 - Establish food caches with remote cameras to locate uncollared wolves and create capture opportunities for helicopter operations (starts in December 2024).
 - Finalize 2024 ground population count efforts (ground population counts start in November 2024).
- 2025 helicopter count and capture operations starts on 1/27 (tentative as of 8/2024).

February

- 2025 helicopter count and capture operations completed by 2/7 (tentative as of 8/2024).
- The IFT meets for helicopter count and capture operations after action review and finalizes the 2024 Mexican wolf minimum population count.
- Once the minimum population count is finalized, data are entered into the database, and the data report is run, the IFT completes quality assessment and quality control (QAQC) for data collected in 2024.
- U.S. Forest Service (USFS) coordination of spring ground activities (e.g., thinning, prescribed burns). USFS provides maps and timelines to initiate conversations around potential conflicts with wolf denning.
- Begin assessing captive and wild population pup-fostering opportunities and logistics.

March

- The 2024 Mexican wolf minimum population count is announced to our partners and the public via a press release.
- IFT completes QAQC for data collected in 2024, which is included in the draft 2024 Annual Report.
- Continue USFS coordination of spring ground activities (e.g., thinning, prescribed burns). USFS provides maps and timelines to initiate conversations around potential conflicts with wolf denning.
- Attend USFS Annual Operating Instruction (AOI) meetings with permittees for grazing plans where and when invited. These also provide an opportunity for the IFT to give wolf updates and discuss potential conflict reduction strategies.
- Continue assessing captive and wild population pup-fostering opportunities and logistics.

April

- Biologists complete data review and update their respective sections of the 2025 Quarterly Report (First Quarter).
- Spring/summer cohort of US Fish and Wildlife Service and Arizona Game and Fish volunteers go through orientation and begin training.
- Continue assessing captive and wild population pup-fostering opportunities and logistics. Pup-fostering operations begin this month and continue during the month as captive pups are available and in synchrony with wild den pup production.
- Continue to attend USFS AOI meetings with permittees for grazing plans where and when invited; provide Mexican wolf updates and discuss potential conflict reduction strategies.
- Coordinate with USFS Districts to share general den locations and mitigate potential land use/management impacts.
- Field Work:
 - Den monitoring to estimate denning and whelp dates.
 - Natal pup counts at densites begin.
 - Routine pup and reproduction-related field work (e.g., pup counts by use of remote camera or visual observation begins.
 - Genetic management through implementation of pup-fostering operations begins.
 - Supplemental feeding of pup-fostered packs begins.
 - Diversionary feeding of denned packs in conflict areas begin.

May

- Continue assessing captive and wild population pup-fostering opportunities and logistics. Pup-fostering operations continue as captive pups are available and in synchrony with wild den pup production.
- Continue to attend USFS AOI meetings with permittees for grazing plans where and when invited; provide wolf updates and discuss potential conflict reduction strategies.
- Once USFS updates AOIs, USFS to update pasture rotation in the IFT Mexican Wolf Working Map.
- Continue coordination with USFS Districts to share general den locations and mitigate potential land use/management impacts.
- Field work:
 - Foothold trapping to collar adult Mexican wolves in collared packs begins.
 - Natal pup counts at densites continue.
 - Routine pup and reproduction-related field work (e.g., pup counts by use of remote camera or visual observation) continues.
 - Genetic management through implementation of pup-fostering continues.
 - Supplemental feeding of pup fostered packs continues.
 - Diversionary feeding of denned packs in conflict areas continues.

June

- IFT Field Teams reviews the draft 2024 Annual Report.
- Field work:
 - Mexican wolf rendezvous site documentation begins.
 - Collecting scat at rendezvous and den sites of pup-fostered packs begins.

- Routine pup and reproduction-related field work (e.g., pup counts, status of recruitment, and pup survival) continues.
- Supplemental feeding of pup fostered packs continues.
- Diversionary feeding of denned packs in conflict areas continues.
- Foothold trapping to collar adult Mexican wolves in collared packs continues, begins in uncollared packs.

July

- Biologists complete data review and update their respective sections of the 2025 Quarterly Report (Second Quarter).
- IFT Database Refresher and Updates Training.
- Field work:
 - Routine pup and reproduction-related field work (e.g., pup counts, status of recruitment, and pup survival) continues.
 - Supplemental feeding of pup fostered packs continues.
 - Diversionary feeding of denned packs in conflict areas continues.
 - Foothold trapping to collar adult Mexican wolves continues.
 - Mexican wolf rendezvous site documentation continues.
 - Collecting scat at rendezvous and den sites of pup-fostered packs continues.

August

- IFT Field Team sets trapping priorities and prepares for trapping season.
- IFT Leads draft the 2026 Annual Work Plan and 2026 Initial Release and Translocation Plan.
- The 2024 Annual Report is published.
- IFT Chemical Immobilization Training takes place (tentative, date will be determined by veterinarians)
- Field work:
 - Routine pup and reproduction-related field work (e.g., pup counts, status of recruitment, and pup survival) continues.
 - Supplemental feeding of pup fostered packs continues, if necessary.
 - Diversionary feeding of denned packs in conflict areas continues.
 - Mexican wolf rendezvous site documentation continues.
 - Collecting scat at rendezvous and den sites of pup-fostered packs continues until the end of the month. Opportunistic collection of scat continues throughout the year.
 - Foothold trapping to collar adult Mexican wolves continues.

September

- Submit the drafted 2026 Initial Release and Translocation Proposal and drafted 2026 Annual Work Plan to the MT for discussion, comment, and approval.
- Outreach begins to disseminate information to hunters in wolf-occupied areas of the MWEPA in an effort to reduce Mexican wolf mortalities.
- IFT leads begin drafting the 2026 Mexican Wolf Aviation Safety Operations Plan.
- Field work:

- Foothold trapping to collar adult Mexican wolves continues, foothold trapping to collar pups begins.
- Routine pup and reproduction-related field work (e.g., pup counts, status of recruitment, and pup survival) continues.
- Supplemental feeding of pup fostered packs continues, if necessary.
- Diversionary feeding of denned packs in conflict areas continues.
- Mexican wolf rendezvous site documentation continues.

October

- Biologists complete data review and update their respective sections of the 2025 Quarterly Report (Third Quarter).
- Fall/winter cohort of USFWS and AGFD volunteers go through orientation and begin training.
- When approved by the MT, the drafted 2026 Initial Release and Translocation Proposal and drafted 2026 Annual Work Plan will be submitted to the EC for discussion, comment, and approval.
 - IFT Leads will address any comments made by the MT before being submitting to the EC.
 - Once approved, the Plans will be finalized.
- IFT continues preparing the 2026 Mexican Wolf Aviation Safety Operations Plan and begins operational planning to identify and delegate roles, responsibilities, and duties.
- Outreach continues to disseminate information to hunters in wolf-occupied areas of the MWEPA in an effort to reduce Mexican wolf mortalities.
- Field work:
 - Foothold trapping to collar Mexican wolf adults and pups continues.
 - Supplemental feeding of pup fostered packs continues, if necessary, until the end of the month.
 - Diversionary feeding of denned packs in conflict areas continues.

November

- 2026 helicopter count and capture operations planning meeting at the beginning of the month.
- Mid-November: IFT completes the 2026 Mexican Wolf Aviation Safety Operations Plan and is sent in for review and signature by Regional and National Aviation Managers.
- Outreach continues to disseminate information to hunters in wolf-occupied areas of the MWEPA in an effort to reduce Mexican wolf mortalities.
- Field work:
 - 11/1: End-of-year population count begins.
 - Uncollared sign search.
 - Ground counts of known packs and single wolves.
 - Remote cameras deployed in areas where unknown or uncollared packs and singles could potentially be, included in count if documented.
 - Foothold trapping to collar Mexican wolf adults and pups continues, as temperatures and weather conditions allow.
 - Diversionary feeding of denned packs in conflict areas continues.

December

- 2026 helicopter count and capture operations planning continues.

- Private landowner contacts regarding helicopter operations' planning and permissions begin.
- Field work
 - End-of-year population counts continue:
 - Uncollared sign search
 - Ground counts of known packs and single wolves.
 - Establish food caches with remote cameras to locate uncollared wolves and create capture opportunities for helicopter operations.