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2012 MEXICAN WOLF POPULATION SURVEY COMPLETE NUMBERS UP FROM 2011

During its annual year-end surveys, the Mexican wolf Interagency Field Team (IFT) counted at least 75 Mexican wolves in the wild in Arizona and New Mexico at the end of 2012. Compared to the 2011 minimum population count of 58 wolves, this number demonstrates an increase in the known population in the wild.

"The 2012 count of 75 wolves is very exciting. This past year we have implemented a number of management actions – in collaboration with our partners and stakeholders – that have helped reduce conflicts related to recovering a sustainable population of wolves on a working landscape," said Benjamin Tuggle, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Southwest Regional Director. "Our strategy for 2013 will be to increase the genetic viability of the wild population, and implement management activities that support more wolves in the wild. Releases are one of the important tools we use for improving the genetic viability of the wild population."

Tuggle emphasized that the Service's partners in Mexican wolf recovery – the Arizona Game and Fish Department, White Mountain Apache Tribe, USDA Forest Service and USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service – Wildlife Services, and several participating counties have worked in coordination to decrease wolf- livestock interactions. In addition, the Mexican Wolf/ Livestock Interdiction Stakeholder Council has been able to provide compensation to livestock producers to offset the costs of wolf depredations.

"One of the keys to successful Mexican wolf repatriation is increasing the percentage of the population that is wild-born and in 2012 that percentage grew to nearly 100 percent with only one wolf on the ground that was captive-born. Wild-born wolves, compared to naïve wolves that were born in captivity, have demonstrated that they are less likely to have human and livestock interactions," said Larry Voyles, Director of the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

The results of the surveys reflect the end-of-year minimum population for 2012. Results come from population data collected on the ground by the IFT from November through December of 2012, as well as data collected from an aerial survey conducted in January 2013. This number is considered a minimum number of Mexican wolves known to exist in the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area as other non-collared wolves may be present in the recovery area, but were not located during the survey period.

The aerial survey was conducted by a fixed-wing aircraft and helicopter. Biologists used radio-telemetry and actual sightings of wolves to help determine the count. The results from the aerial survey, coupled with the ground survey conducted by the IFT, confirmed that there are 38 wolves in New Mexico and 37 wolves in Arizona. The survey indicated that there were 3 pairs that met the federal definition of breeding pairs at year's end, out of 13 known packs.

Pups born in the summer must survive to December 31 of the given year to be counted as part of the Mexican wolf population. The 2012 minimum population count includes 20 wild-born pups that survived through the end of the year. This marks the eleventh consecutive year in which wild born wolves bred and raised pups in the wild, and is an increase in the number of pups surviving to the end of the year over the 2011 number of 19. This is also considered a minimum known number since it might not reflect pups surviving but not documented.

For more information on the Mexican Wolf Reintroduction Program, visit www.fws.gov/southwest/es/mexicanwolf/ or www.azgfd.gov/wolf .

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