



United States Department of the Interior

U.S. 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: Regional Director, Region 2

Subject: Depredation Decision; Mexican Wolves AM871/AF861 (Middle Fork Pack)

Michelle Shumway
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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 by Mexican wolf male AM871 and female AF861 triggers a decision on the appropriate continued management of the Middle Fork Pack. This decision includes 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 Wildlife Services (Wildlife Services) investigated the depredation incidents on July 9, 2011, and according to their reports one yearling was determined to have died the evening of July 5, 2011, and the second yearling died three days prior to the investigation (July 6, 2011). These incidents occurred in the secondary recovery zone of the BRWRA.

On August 31, 2011, an injured yearling was found within the Middle Fork Pack's territory and investigated the following day. The Wildlife Services confirmed the injuries to be wolf caused, and the yearling was later euthanized. Both the Middle Fork Pack and lone female wolf F1105 were in the vicinity when the depredation occurred. On August 30, both adults from the Middle Fork Pack were approximately 1.34 miles northwest of the site of the injured calf. On September 2, F1105 was located within 2 miles south of the site of the injured calf. The Interagency Field Team (IFT) is still gathering information to determine whether the Middle Fork Pack or F1105 is responsible for this depredation.

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 legal removal actions in recent years, 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 2010 End of Year population survey documented only two breeding pairs in wild population, one of which was the Middle Fork Pack. AM871 and AF861 have been confirmed as denning and/or as having pups each year since 2006, and are currently documented as raising at least seven pups in the wild. 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 provides certain flexibilities to determine problem wolves. Wolves may not necessarily be problem wolves if depredations occur on public lands, or if they occur in areas or at times, that are critically important to wolves. The two confirmed depredations investigated on July 9, 2011, occurred between June 1 and September 30, and were within a mile of the pack's highly suspected rendezvous site. The Interagency Management Plan specifies that under such conditions, control of wolves will only occur if all other options for resolution of the conflict have been exhausted.
4. Other relevant circumstances exist in this situation. A range rider for the pack/area had recently resigned, and as a result of the temporary staffing shortage, the diversionary food cache for the Middle Fork Pack was not stocked just prior to the most recent potential depredation. Therefore, reinstating a range rider if possible, continuing the diversionary food cache, increasing monitoring, and potentially implementing hazing and wolf behavior modification methods may significantly assist in resolving future depredation conflicts.
5. This wolf pair has demonstrated significant periods of time with no livestock depredations.
6. The adults and pups in this wolf pack are determined to be of high genetic value to the 10(j) wolf population in the wild. Removal of this pack at this time could significantly adversely affect the overall genetic diversity and long-term survival of the 10(j) wolf population.
7. 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 Middle Fork Pack into adulthood is beneficial to overall population survival.

Therefore, in consideration of these seven points and utilizing the flexibilities authorized in the Interagency Management Plan, my decision is the Middle Fork Pack, including adults, any yearlings, and pups, shall remain in the wild through November 1, 2011. We will reevaluate their status at that time, taking into consideration any additional depredations that may occur.

During this time period, a range rider, if possible, and the diversionary food cache should remain in place until such time when deemed no longer necessary (e.g., cattle are moved from the area, wolves move from the area). In addition, Agency 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, if deemed appropriate by IFT personnel.

We remain committed to assisting ranchers and permittees with depredation problems caused by wolves. I wish to thank the Mexican Wolf Interdiction Fund and the associated Stakeholder Council for their commitments toward financial compensation to the livestock grower for past, current, and any future depredation losses. I encourage the IFT to focus on addressing field efforts and needs associated with the Middle Fork Pack's continued monitoring, with frequent reports conveyed to me through U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service contacts and normal agency channels.