



News Release

Public Affairs Office
PO Box 1306
Albuquerque, NM 87103
505/248-6911
505/248-6915 (Fax)

Southwest Region (Arizona • New Mexico • Oklahoma • Texas) <http://southwest.fws.gov>

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Contacts: Tom Buckley, 505-248-6455, Tom_Buckley@fws.gov

2009 MEXICAN WOLF POPULATION SURVEY COMPLETE

A minimum count of 42 Mexican wolves were found in the wild in Arizona and New Mexico at the end of 2009, according to the annual survey conducted by the Interagency Field Team (IFT) for wolf reintroduction. The survey indicated two pairs met the federal definition of breeding pairs at year's end, the same number counted in 2008. Surveys are completed in the January following the reporting year. Pups born in the summer must survive to December 31 before they are counted into the total Mexican wolf population. There are 27 wolves in Arizona and 15 wolves in New Mexico.

"I'm extremely disappointed and troubled about this year's low numbers," said Benjamin Tuggle, Regional Director for the US Fish and Wildlife Service. "These findings are very disturbing and I am determined to identify the reasons for this decline and turn the situation around so that we see more Mexican wolves in the wild during 2010."

The Service and our partners intend to examine the possible causes and all management options available during the course of this year in an attempt to reverse this year's downturn in population numbers according to Tuggle. "This does not change our commitment to establishing a biologically viable population of Mexican wolves in the Southwest," he said. If anything, this strengthens my determination to recover these wolves to their natural habitat."

The reintroduction and recovery of the Mexican wolf is a cooperative, multi-agency partnership between U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and the Arizona Game and Fish Department, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, White Mountain Apache Tribe, USDA Forest Service and USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service - Wildlife Services.

"The expertise and cooperation our partners provide toward the recovery of Mexican wolves has been and continues to be an essential part of the program," said Tuggle.

Fixed-wing aircraft are used to locate packs. When a wolf or wolf pack is located, a helicopter is then used to count uncollared wolves that are associated with collared wolves in any particular packs. If a wolf capture was needed, the helicopter crew used net guns or immobilizing drugs delivered via darts. Two wolves were captured during this year's census. Ground crews, including a veterinarian, examined the wolves and performed a standard processing which includes weights,

measurements, blood-draw, and vaccines. Before the wolves were released the team put radio collars on them.

“Our field team members work long hours under the most difficult conditions to make the recovery program successful” said Tuggle. “Even though this year’s numbers are disappointing, their efforts to conduct this biologically robust program are greatly appreciated.”

The Service did not permanently remove any wolves from the wild; however, several that were seen and documented during 2009 were not located during the annual count. The numbers this year are down from last year’s number of 52 Mexican wolves.

There were 31 pups born to seven packs in 2009, with seven pups surviving until the end of the year. Pup mortality of 50 percent in the wild isn’t unusual, but this year the greater than 50 percent mortality was very disappointing and of great concern.

In 2009 there were eight wolves found dead, four adults and four pups of the year. Two were confirmed shot, and six were cause unknown pending necropsy.

Although there were no new wolf releases during the past year, there were five translocations of four wolves (one twice). A translocation is when an individual free-ranging wolf is captured and moved to another location within the recovery area. In the case of the wolf that was moved twice, she had wandered out of the recovery area each time and had to be captured and returned.

Of those four translocated wolves, one was found dead and is under investigation, one was returned to captivity, one is missing and considered fate unknown, and one is still in the wild.

The 2009 survey will be discussed in more detail in the Interagency Field Team Annual Report that will be available in March.

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