United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Memorandum

To: Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator, Southwest Region

Through: Assistant Regional Director, Ecological Services, Southwest Region

From: Regional Director, Southwest Region

Subject: Management Decision; Bluestem Pack

Under the *Revision to the Regulations for the Nonessential Experimental Population of Mexican wolves (*Canis lupus baileyi*)* (10(j) Rule), which was published on January 16, 2015, the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) or designated agency may carry out intentional harassment, nonlethal control measures, translocation, placement in captivity, or lethal control of problem wolves. The Bluestem Pack is confirmed as being responsible for two recent depredations (see below). I recommend no removals of wolves from the Bluestem Pack at this time, pending further depredations by the pack during this grazing season. While I am concerned that recent depredation trends may indicate a change in the pack behavior, it is contrary to their previous 7- year history of low-level cattle loss. Furthermore, since those depredations, the pack has moved farther away from cattle-occupied pastures, and the grazing season ends in those same pastures on October 1, and on nearby pastures on November 1.

I recommend that the Interagency Field Team (IFT) continue to implement proactive management efforts, including managing diversionary food caches, and monitoring wolf and cattle interactions closely until the end of the grazing season. Further depredations during this grazing season may indicate that either individual wolves or pack behavior has changed or non-lethal management techniques are not working well enough. Therefore, if the Bluestem Pack depredates again before November 1, the IFT should immediately initiate efforts to remove by live capture up to two wolves from the Bluestem Pack. This removal order will be in effect until either a total of two wolves (not including young of the year, and not inclusive of both adult breeding wolves) are removed or livestock are no longer present after the November 1 end

grazing date, whichever comes first. Young of the year will be collared and released, as will F1042 or M1341 if the other has already been captured and removed.

Bluestem Pack Depredation History

During the near 7-year period (2009-current) in which F1042 has been the breeding female wolf in the Bluestem Pack, the pack has had a total of five depredation incidents and two injuries to livestock, including some years with no depredations:

- 2009 - Bluestem Pack - no depredations
- 2010 - Bluestem Pack– 7/1/10 depredation incident; 7/3/10 confirmed injury
- 2011 - Bluestem Pack - no depredations
- 2012 - Bluestem Pack - no depredations
- 2013 - Bluestem Pack -11/15/13 depredation incident
- 2014 - Bluestem Pack– 7/20/14 confirmed injury; 11/1/14 depredation incident
- 2015 - Bluestem Pack– 8/31/15 depredation incident; 9/3/15 depredation incident

Current Conditions

The Bluestem Pack has recently had 2 confirmed depredation incidents and 1 probable depredation within a 4-day period. An increasing pattern in depredation trend may suggest a change in pack behavior regarding specific predation on cattle.

Chronology of Recent Events Prompting this Management Decision

8/29/15 – Cattle are moved into a pasture where the Bluestem Pack has a rendezvous site.

8/31/15 – 1 calf confirmed killed by wolves 0.4 mile from the rendezvous site.

9/2/15 – A calf carcass was investigated near the 8/31/15 depredation and 0.1 mile from the rendezvous site. Nine Bluestem wolves, including several radio collared wolves, were chased off the carcass by the USDA –APHIS Wildlife Services agent. Both satellite and telemetry locations placed the Bluestem Pack at the carcass. Because the carcass was nearly fully consumed, there was not enough evidence to confirm the cause of death, and instead it was classified as probable wolf predation. Because it was classified as probable, it is not logged as a depredation incident.

9/2/15 – The IFT established a diversionary food cache to attempt to divert the pack from further depredations, and the pack was documented to utilize the cache later the same day.

9/3/15 – 1 calf confirmed killed by wolves 2.4 miles from the rendezvous site.

9/3/15 – Discussions with U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to explore options with cattle movements and pastures. Affected permittee was interested and willing to move cattle out of area, but had just moved cattle into the area on 8/31/15 and had no help to move cattle out.

9/4/15 – IFT observed 7 adults and 6 pups about 2.5 miles from the 9/3/15 depredation. The adults 'stashed' the pups and began traveling towards livestock areas. The IFT used cracker shells to haze the adults from going towards cattle.

9/5/15 – The Bluestem Pack continued to maintain a rendezvous site in the area after cracker shell hazing, and the IFT observed the pack returning and feeding on the 9/3/15 calf carcass in the morning. Additionally, M1404's satellite collar located him at the carcass at 0100 and 0700 hours.

9/6/15 – The pack was documented in the same area in the morning. The IFT began planning a hazing attempt to get the adults to move pups to areas further from cattle, but by evening, the pack moved several miles away towards the den area, in a possible response to high Labor Day Weekend recreational use.

9/8/15 - Another diversionary food cache was placed near the new pack location.

9/9/15 – The pack moved pups again to an area about 4.6 miles from cattle, but still within the area of the food cache.

9/24/15-9/26/15 – Permittees will begin moving cattle from the area of the depredations for October 1 removal date.

Decision

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. During the last 7 years, the Bluestem Pack has had low levels of depredations, averaging < 1 depredation incident per year and ranging from 0 to 2 per year, and is holding a territory that excludes other packs that may exhibit higher levels of depredation. While removals can be effective in stopping depredations in packs that have actually shifted predation more significantly towards cattle, they also could change pack dynamics resulting in pack turnover that may increase depredations.

2. I am concerned about the most recent depredations, but so far they do not vary significantly from the low -level pattern of depredations exhibited by the pack in the past 7 years.

3. In the meantime, the pack has moved their pups farther from cattle by a distance of 4.6 miles, their subsequent travel through cattle areas has been significantly reduced, and no further depredations have occurred.

4. Removal of cattle will begin around September 24 with an expected completion date of October 1 in the immediate area, and November 1 in the neighboring pastures.

5. Our intent is to stop the depredation behavior of the Bluestem Pack.

6. Further depredations may signify a trend that differs from the past 7 years and indicate that the pack is switching more towards cattle. Further losses raise concerns for more depredations if left unattended.

Therefore, my decision is to not remove wolves at this time. However, if the Bluestem Pack depredates again before November 1, 2015, I authorize the IFT to immediately initiate efforts to remove by live capture up to two wolves from the Bluestem Pack. This removal order will be in effect until either a total of two wolves (not including young of the year, and not inclusive of both adult breeding wolves) are removed or until livestock are no longer present after the November 1 end grazing date, whichever comes first. Young of the year will be collared and released, as will F1042 or M1341 if the other has already been captured and removed. The goal of these removals is to reduce or stop depredations in the area. If additional depredations occur after November 1, 2015, I will reassess the potential need to conduct additional removals commensurate to the situation.

Removal activities may occur on Federal, Tribal, and private lands within and adjacent to the Apache National Forest, provided that permission is granted by the private landowner or Tribe. In the meantime, I direct the IFT to once again continue or increase their management efforts and: (1) Continue to provide and maintain diversionary food cache(s) in order to reduce the future potential of wolves depredating on livestock while localized during the denning and rendezvous seasons, (2) continue to conduct intensive monitoring and hazing of the members of the Bluestem Pack in order to reduce wolf-livestock conflict, (3) continue to coordinate with livestock owners and the USFS in the Bluestem Pack territory to reduce wolf-livestock conflict, and (4) continue to collar additional wolves within the Bluestem Pack.

The Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator permit (TE091551), issued May 6, 2015, under the provisions of 50 CFR 17.32, provides that Authorized Permittees may take any Mexican wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*) in the nonessential experimental population in a manner consistent with a USFWS-approved management plan or species management measure adopted by the USFWS pursuant to the provisions of 50 CFR 17.84, as well as to conduct activities related directly to the conservation, protection, and recovery of reintroduced nonessential experimental populations of Mexican gray wolves within Arizona and New Mexico. Provision S.1. of the permit provides that "Specifically, authorization includes all actions related to: capture including, but not limited to, leg-hold traps, helicopter or ground darting and net-gunning, and captive capture methods: handling; possessing; administering health care; propagating; radio collaring, or other marking techniques; releasing, translocating, and cross-fostering; obtaining and preserving blood, tissue, fur, semen, ova, and other samples that are considered parts of Mexican wolves (scat is not considered a part of a Mexican wolf and can be collected without a permit); transporting between approved Mexican wolf captive management facilities in the United States and Mexico, to and from Veterinarian care facilities, and to approved release sites; purposeful lethal take (purposeful lethal take is limited to Mexican wolves within the MWEPA in Arizona and New Mexico); hazing via less-than-lethal projectiles; injurious harassment; research; and carrying out any other USFWS-approved husbandry practice, law enforcement, or management action for Mexican wolves."

The 2015 10j Rule states in section 17.84(7)(vii) that "The Service or a designated agency may take any Mexican wolf in the experimental population in a manner consistent with a Service-approved management plan, special management measure, biological opinion pursuant to section 7(a)(2) of the Act, section 6 of the Act as described in §17.31 for State game and fish agencies with authority to manage Mexican wolves, or a valid permit issued by the Service through

§17.32." Thus, employees of the USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services are authorized to trap Mexican wolves in accordance with this Decision Memorandum, and any incidental death or injury of wolves during this operation will be covered under the Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator permit (TE091551). USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services employees working under this permit will not be considered negligent when exercising appropriate methodology. Appropriate methodology is defined as USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services employees following all established policies and Standard Operating Procedures associated with Mexican wolf recovery.

I wish to thank the Mexican Wolf/Livestock Council and the Farm Services Administration for their financial compensation to the livestock producers for past, current, and any future depredation losses. I encourage the IFT to focus on field efforts and needs associated with the continued monitoring of wolves in the area, with frequent reports conveyed to me through U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service contacts and normal agency channels.