

Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project  
Adaptive Management Oversight Committee  
Moratorium for Calendar Year 2006  
(Standard Operating Procedure 0.D)  
October 10, 2005

The Mexican Wolf Blue Range Reintroduction Project's Adaptive Management Oversight Committee (AMOC) will not allow new (initial) releases of Mexican wolves in Calendar Year 2006, if the number of breeding pairs in the wild<sup>1</sup> is six or more on December 31, 2005 (i.e. minimum threshold). This document provides background on what led to this decision, and outlines how this moratorium will be implemented, if the minimum threshold is met.

### Background

In any wildlife reintroduction, the desire is to reach a point at which the wild population no longer needs enhancement by release of captive individuals. Captive releases are costly in terms of time, money, and other resources. Moreover, wild-born/reared individuals are generally superior to captive-born/reared animals in several ways.

The point at which a transition could or should be made to reliance on growth in the wild Blue Range Mexican wolf population has been a discussion topic for several years, dating back to development of the Environmental Impact Study addressing the proposed reintroduction effort. Initial AMOC discussion in 2003 revolved around biological aspects of the question. However, other factors also needed to be considered, in view of the fact the reintroduction is occurring across a mosaic of public and tribal land ownership and management, with private in-holdings. Guidance offered by the nonessential experimental population rule under which reintroduction is authorized must also be considered.<sup>2</sup> Events early in 2005 brought these issues to the forefront.

On February 12, 2005, at constituent request, Congressman Pearce (R-NM) convened two meetings, in Glenwood and Socorro, New Mexico, to discuss local concerns about Mexican wolf recovery efforts in New Mexico. At the Congressman's request, senior staff from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Region 2 attended the meetings to listen and respond to concerns of invited participants, who were primarily members of the livestock industry in central New Mexico.

Major concerns expressed at these meetings can be summarized as follows:

1. Opposition to the Mexican wolf recovery program in general, and specifically to the Blue Range Reintroduction Project.
2. The number of wolves in the wild is much greater than the numbers reported by AMOC, and exceeds AMOC agencies' capacity to manage them.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the January 12, 1998 Final Rule authorizing the Blue Range reintroduction, "breeding pair" means an adult male and an adult female that have produced at least two pups during the previous breeding season that survived until December 31 of the year of their birth.

<sup>2</sup>The January 12, 1998 Final Rule establishes, through guidance on "take" of wild wolves, that management flexibility (i.e. the ability to control wolves by removal from the wild) begins when the number of breeding pairs in the wild is six or more.

3. Compliance with the nonessential experimental population rule for the Reintroduction Project forces translocation of problem wolves (i.e. depredators and nuisance animals) from Arizona to New Mexico, thus causing disproportionate hardship on the New Mexico livestock industry and other residents of the Recovery Area in New Mexico, without adequate compensation.
4. Eight Open House (public) meetings held by AMOC in January 2005 in Arizona and New Mexico to discuss various aspects of the Reintroduction Project did not provide a sufficient opportunity for public testimony on individual or organizational concerns.

In response to the February 2005 meetings, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service crafted a proposed moratorium for AMOC consideration. AMOC received the rough draft proposal on April 20, and discussed it at a previously-scheduled meeting on April 21. Cooperator consensus indicated the proposal, with modifications, had sufficient merit from an administrative and managerial perspective to be brought forth for public comment, discussion, and final AMOC action (i.e. approval or rejection). AMOC made various modifications, and brought the Draft Proposed Moratorium to the public for initial discussion in a previously-scheduled public meeting on April 22 (San Carlos, Arizona).

From April 22 through July 31, 2005, the Draft Proposed Moratorium was available to the public for comment. It was also discussed in eight AMOC public meetings in June 2005, four each in Arizona and New Mexico. All comment received, whether verbal or written, was evaluated and carefully considered in reaching a final decision on this matter.

#### The Calendar Year 2006 Moratorium

AMOC has determined that, if the number of breeding pairs of wild Mexican wolves (as defined in the Final Rule) is six or more (minimum threshold) on December 31, 2005, it will enact a moratorium as follows:

1. During Calendar Year 2006, AMOC will not allow any new releases<sup>3</sup> of packs composed of captive-reared wolves that have not previously been in the wild in Arizona or New Mexico. This moratorium will provide time for AMOC to:
  - a. Complete its ongoing Five-Year Review of the Reintroduction Project and make recommendations for changes in any and all aspects of the Project;
  - b. Complete current expansion of field staff, and provide training for new staff essential to wolf management;
  - c. Continue to evaluate the effectiveness of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the Reintroduction Project that were developed and implemented in 2005;

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<sup>3</sup> This applies only to non-tribal lands. Releases on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation are under jurisdiction of the White Mountain Apache Tribe

- d. Investigate options and, if feasible, initiate development of techniques by which to better assess the total number of wolves (collared and uncollared) in the wild;
  - e. Increase Project outreach to further enhance local awareness and understanding of the adaptive management framework for the Project; and
  - f. Continue collecting information on wolf management issues as they occur, thus providing better information on which to base short and long-term adaptive management decisions.
2. During Calendar Year 2006, AMOC will, however, allow translocations<sup>4</sup> of “experienced” (i.e. wild-caught) wolves throughout the Recovery Area, under the following stipulations:
    - a. Translocations will be in accordance with affected State agency and Tribal guidance and will be conducted in strict compliance with Project SOP 6.0 (Translocations of Mexican Wolves) and SOP 13.0 (Control of Mexican Wolves).
    - b. Translocation sites for wolves with depredation histories will be prioritized by the following criteria:
      - i. Sites absent livestock;
      - ii. Sites within the State or Tribal lands on which the depredation occurred; and
      - iii. Likelihood that any future depredation(s) will occur.
    - c. Translocations of wolves with a depredation history (i.e. fewer than three known or likely depredations) will be proposed and evaluated in strict compliance with SOP 6.0, which requires notification of, and comment opportunities for, landowners and permittees in the immediate area for which translocation is being considered. Final decisions on translocations of wolves with depredation histories shall be made by the Director of the State or Tribal Wildlife Agency responsible for the proposed translocation site, after discussion with AMOC.
  3. Consistent with Reintroduction Project SOP 13.0 (Control of Mexican Wolves), chronic problem wolves (i.e. those known or likely to have committed three or more depredation incidents) shall be permanently removed from the wild in Arizona and New Mexico.
  4. Individual captive wolves that have not previously been in the wild in Arizona or New Mexico will be released as necessary in the Primary Recovery Zone to offset losses due to unlawful killings or other causes, where such individuals are necessary for management purposes (e.g. to sustain population growth or enhance genetic diversity).

## Summary

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<sup>4</sup> Translocations of wolves are an essential management tool in the Reintroduction Project. They provide a means of addressing local problem situations, while still retaining wolves in the wild, thus providing for continued progress toward the Reintroduction Project’s current population goal of “at least 100 wolves” (throughout the Recovery Area described in the Final Rule).

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This moratorium is being enacted because AMOC believes the administrative and social contexts of this reintroduction effort warrant it, and because a hiatus on new pack releases for one calendar year will not substantially impede progress toward population objectives. The moratorium covers Calendar Year 2006 only, and provision is made for replacing individual wolves lost to unnatural or other causes.

In closing, AMOC notes that the question of whether to enact a moratorium, and the justification for and composition of a moratorium, should have been melded into the pre-existing Five-Year Review, review of relevant Standard Operating Procedures, and development of the Project's Annual Work Plan for 2006. Thus, the need for, and elements of, any future guidelines for new releases will be discussed as AMOC and the Project's Interagency Field Team construct Annual Work Plans for each year beyond 2006. These documents will be discussed at AMOC's quarterly public meetings in Arizona and New Mexico, with ample opportunity for public comment to ensure full consideration of relevant concerns before decisions are made.

Document MW SOP 0D.AMOC Moratorium.Final.20051010.doc