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Contacts: Jeff Humphrey, 602-242-0210 ext. 222, jeff_humphrey@fws.gov
Lynda Lambert (623) 236-7203 llambert@azgfd.gov

2014 MEXICAN WOLF POPULATION SURVEY COMPLETE - POPULATION EXCEEDS 100 -

The Mexican Wolf Interagency Field Team (IFT) has completed its annual year-end population survey, documenting a minimum of 109 Mexican wolves in the wild in Arizona and New Mexico at the end of 2014. At the end of 2013, 83 wild wolves were counted. This is the fourth consecutive year with at least a 10 percent increase in the known population – a 31 percent increase in 2014.

“In 1982, the Mexican wolf recovery team recommended a population of at least 100 animals in the wild as a hedge against extinction; until we initiated the first releases in 1998, there had been no Mexican wolves in the wild in the United States since the 1970s,” said Southwest Regional Director Benjamin Tuggle. “Although there is still much to be done, reaching this milestone is monumental!”

“This survey demonstrates a major accomplishment in Mexican wolf recovery. In 2010, there were 50 Mexican wolves in the wild; today there are 109, a more than doubling of the population in Arizona and New Mexico. With our Mexican wolf population consisting of wild-born wolves, we expect the growth rates observed this year to continue into the future. In spite of considerable naysaying, our 10(j) program has been a success because of on-the-ground partnerships. We have every reason to believe that our efforts at reintroduction will continue to be successful,” said Arizona Game and Fish Director Larry Voyles.

In spring of 2014, the Interagency Field Team (IFT) successfully implemented a field technique in which genetically valuable pups were transferred to a similarly aged litter of an established pack.

During the count operation, the IFT captured one of the two pups that were placed in the established pack during 2014, which confirmed this “[cross-fostering](#)” technique as an additional method for the IFT to improve the genetics of the wild population. In addition, the IFT conducted 14 releases and translocations during 2014, some of which provide promise for improving the wild population’s genetic health in the future.

“Testing and implementing new management techniques, such as cross-fostering, can help us improve the genetics of the wild population,” said Tuggle. “The experimental population is growing – now our strategy is to focus on establishing a genetically robust population on a working landscape.”

The results of the surveys reflect the end-of-year minimum population for 2014. Results come from population data collected on the ground by the IFT from November through December of 2014, as well as data collected from an aerial survey conducted in January and February 2015. This number is considered a minimum number of Mexican wolves known to exist in the wild in Arizona and New Mexico, as other Mexican wolves may be present but uncounted during surveys.

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 a total of 19 packs, with a minimum of 53 wolves in New Mexico and 56 wolves in Arizona. The current survey documented 14 packs that had at least one pup that survived through the end of the year, with two that had at least five surviving through the end of the year.

The 2014 minimum population count includes 38 wild-born pups that survived through the end of the year. This is also considered a minimum known number since it might not reflect pups surviving but not documented.

The Mexican wolf recovery program is a partnership between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 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.

For more information on the Mexican Wolf Reintroduction Program, visit

<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/mexicanwolf/> or www.azgfd.gov/wolf.

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