

Wolf pack to be eliminated

By Nick Gevock - 12/30/2009

State wildlife officials have ordered a troublesome wolf pack in the Big Hole Valley be wiped out after repeated attacks on livestock.

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks determined that despite several wolves from the Miner Lakes pack being killed by federal agents and hunters, the wolves would not change their behavior, said Carolyn Sime, FWP wolf program coordinator. The decision came after the pack this month again attacked livestock, which was the fourth time the pack has gotten into trouble.

"Between incremental control and hunter removal, we've not seen that behavior improve," Sime said. "At some point you've just got to pull the plug and say we've done everything we can here and this thing just isn't going to turn around." Biologists estimated the pack contained 15 wolves.

Hunters in Montana's first-ever wolf hunt this year killed three members of the pack. In addition, FWP after the season authorized federal trappers to kill an additional five wolves from the pack to reduce its size in response to livestock attacks.

But the attacks continued despite the pack's reduction in size. This month an agent with U.S. Wildlife Services confirmed that a calf was injured by wolves near Jackson in the upper Big Hole Valley, which is within the territory of the Miner Lakes pack.

The calf is not expected to live.

FWP this month made the decision to kill between 16 to 22 wolves in areas of the state where wolves were causing problems after the wolf hunt was over. Sime said the agency received criticism that the control actions were too much, but she said the measure was within the guidelines laid out in the state wolf plan.

The removal of the Miner Lakes pack is also within those bounds given its record of repeated attacks following the incremental control measures taken.

"The goal with incremental control is to remove problem wolves, wolves that have that targeted behavior toward livestock and sometimes you don't get the right wolves, or the depredation doesn't stop because other wolves in the pack are learning to attack livestock," she said. "This (wolf control) is following through with what we say we're going to do, even if it's unpopular." — Reporter Nick Gevock may be reached at nick.gevock@mtstandard.com