Montana Gray Wolf Program

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' 2008 annual wolf program report summarizes successful efforts to implement the approved state plan to the extent allowed by federal regulations. FWP leads wolf monitoring, directs conflict management, coordinates and authorizes research, and leads outreach efforts. FWP works closely with tribes, a variety of other state and federal agencies, interested organizations and individuals to continue the transition to managing wolves like other wildlife. For now, wolves are still listed.

Montana's wolf conservation and management plan is based on the work of the wolf advisory council, a diverse working group. Its balanced approach ensures the long-term success of wolf recovery in a landscape where people live, work, and recreate. The plan:

- recognizes wolves as a native species and part of Montana's wildlife heritage,
- allows wolves to find their place on the landscape similar to other wildlife, and
- addresses and resolve conflicts.

2008 Highlights

Wolf Numbers

- The population is secure but dynamic. Wolves share a landscape with people. Like other wildlife species, Montana's wolf population is subject to checks and balances, including strong reproduction in some areas, disease, vehicle strikes, and mortality due to conflicts with people.

- As of Dec. 31, 2008, the minimum Montana wolf population estimate was 497 wolves in 84 verified packs, 34 of which qualified as a "Breeding Pair." That's about an 18 percent increase from last year, compared with 34 percent the previous year. The rate of population growth is slowing down, in part because the best of the best habitat is already occupied.
  - Northwest Montana Endangered Area: 256 wolves in 45 packs, 17 Breeding Pairs.
  - Southern Montana Experimental Area: 241 wolves in 39 packs, 17 Breeding Pairs.

- The majority of the increase was in northwestern and southwestern Montana. Numbers in western Montana decreased slightly. Twenty-three packs straddle the Montana/Idaho border, and 14 of them are counted in Montana. Nine others are counted in the Idaho population. Additionally the Montana population grew of its own accord through numerous dispersals and formation of new packs.

- A total of 155 wolf mortalities were documented in Montana in 2008, 71 percent of which was livestock related (n=110 wolves). The remaining mortalities were: nine illegal, 16 car/train strikes, six incidental and agency-related, four natural, one self defense, and nine unknown.

Wolf Distribution

- Statewide, wolf distribution remained about the same. New 2008 packs established primarily in northwestern and southwestern Montana. But wolves are great travelers and could show up anywhere in Montana. Many dispersal events were documented and 22 new packs formed in 2008.

- About 95 percent of the Montana wolf population lives outside national parks on a combination of public and private lands.

- The public can help monitor the wolf population by reporting wolves or wolf sign to FWP.

Outreach Activities

- Increasing public awareness of wolves and their management is a top priority for FWP. FWP works with local communities to incorporate wolves into the landscape and to strike the balance between wolves and people. Other FWP staff, USDA Wildlife Services personnel, and our tribal wildlife partners also provided information and did public outreach.

- Outreach efforts take many forms, including one-on-one conversations, media interviews, printed materials, documentary films, FWP Outdoor Reports and press releases, and formal presentations.

- FWP's wolf staff gave a minimum of 48 formal presentations to about 3,100 people in 2008, but literally spoke to thousands more about wolf ecology, wolf-livestock interactions, wolf-big game interactions, human safety, Montana's wolf plan, federal delisting efforts, and more. Dozens of media interviews occurred, too.

- FWP's wolf management Web pages are very popular and visitors spend more time on the wolf pages than the average of all other FWP Web pages visited. From mid-April to December 31, about 50,000 total visits were tallied – averaging about 150-400 visits day. The public can also report wolf activity online.

Wolf-Livestock Interactions

- Montana wolves routinely encounter livestock, though preying on them seems to be a learned behavior. Wolf depredation on livestock is difficult to predict in space and time. Nonetheless, FWP and USDA Wildlife Services (WS) work with livestock producers to decrease risk of loss to the extent possible.

- FWP and WS work together to address conflicts using a combination of non-lethal and lethal tools. Federal regulations and the state plan guide FWP's decision-making. Conflicts are addressed on a case-by-case, incremental basis, striving to connect the agency response to the damage in space and time. This is similar to the approach taken when other wildlife species damage private property in Montana.

- The Montana Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program got underway in 2008. The Governor-appointed board met twice. Using a small amount of state general funds and a significant donation from Defenders of Wildlife, about $83,000 in claims for confirmed killed livestock was paid. Additional donations were received from the Montana Cattlemen's Association and the Greater Yellowstone Coalition. The goals are to decrease of risk of livestock loss through proactive tools and to reimburse losses.

- Confirmed cattle death losses increased from 75 in 2007 to 77 in 2008, and confirmed sheep death losses increased from 27 to 111. Other livestock confirmed killed include: eight llamas, two horses, two dogs, and seven goats. Additional losses occurred, but either could not be verified or were deemed "probable."

- A total of 110 wolves were killed to prevent further depredations. Private citizens killed five wolves caught actively chasing or attacking livestock and no wolves were killed by special permit.

Funding, Delisting, and Regulated Public Hunting

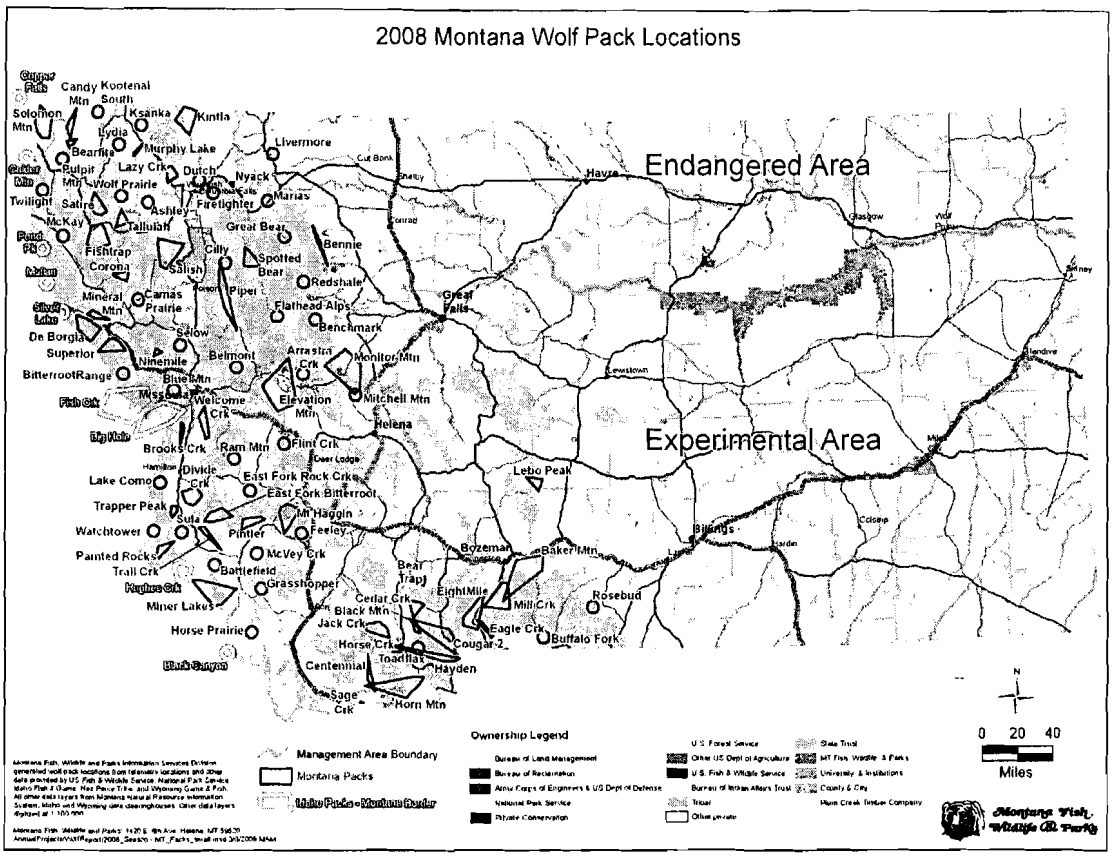
- With Montanans' support, FWP took on the added responsibility of wolf conservation and management in 2004, contingent on federal funding. Federal funding continued in 2008. Montana is focused on securing adequate funding from federal and private sources for the long term.

- The February 2008 federal decision to delist wolves was challenged in court. Montana intervened in the lawsuit. An injunction eventually led the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to withdraw its decision. Late in 2008, the USFWS announced it would delist the northern Rocky Mountain population everywhere except Wyoming. That decision is expected to take effect early 2009. Renewed legal challenges are expected, and Montana will, again, seek to intervene. The legal situation continues to be very dynamic.

- In 2008, FWP and Commission finalized the biennial framework for the 2008/2009 wolf hunting seasons. The 2008 season was blocked by a court-ordered injunction. License sales and the 2009 season will not occur until wolves are successfully delisted, but 2009 quotas will be established.

See: www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf

- to read and download the full Montana Wolf Conservation and Management 2008 Annual Report
- to report wolves and wolf sign
- to learn more about wolves, federal regulations, and the state program



Who Do I Contact?

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USDA Wildlife Services (to request investigations of injured or dead livestock):

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To Report a Dead Wolf or Possible Illegal Activity:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Missoula, Montana: (406) 329-3000
Casper, Wyoming: (307) 261-6365

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:
1-800-TIP-MONT
Nearest FWP Regional Office or game warden