



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

JAN - 3 2017

The Honorable Louie Gohmert  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations  
Committee on Natural Resources  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Gohmert:

Enclosed are responses prepared by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to questions submitted following the Subcommittee's September 21, 2016, oversight hearing titled "The Status of the Federal Government's Management of Wolves."

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this material to the Subcommittee.

Sincerely,

Christopher P. Salotti  
Legislative Counsel  
Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Debbie Dingell  
Ranking Member

**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations**  
**1334 Longworth House Office Building**  
**Wednesday, September 21, 2016**  
**2:00pm**

**Oversight Hearing on**  
*"The Status of the Federal Government's Management of Wolves"*

Questions from **Chairman Louie Gohmert (TX-01)** for Mr. Steve Guertin, Deputy Director for Policy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

- 1. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced its intent to double the size of its red wolf captive breeding population, with the aim of eventually reintroducing those wolves into the wild anywhere in the region between Texas, Pennsylvania, and the Atlantic Ocean. Please identify the specific areas in which the Service is considering introduction. Please also identify the Service's goal for total number of wolf reintroduction areas and the number of wolves that would likely be introduced in each area.**

**Response:** No specific locations for reintroduction have been identified at this time. The Service must first secure the captive population of red wolves before considering the establishment of any new populations in the wild. This past September, the Service committed to identifying potential new sites for additional reintroduced populations by October 2017. To do so, the Service will coordinate closely with State fish and wildlife agencies as it works collaboratively through the recovery planning process to identify potentially suitable sites based on habitat characteristics. This would include stakeholder and partner engagement, appropriate rulemaking, and public review and comment. The current Red Wolf Recovery Plan calls for the establishment of three wild populations. It is premature to speculate on the number of wolves that may be released at any future site.

- 2. The Service severely underestimated the habitat needed for successful red wolf recovery in North Carolina and Tennessee. Please explain, in thorough detail, the methodology that the Service will use to evaluate potential reintroduction areas throughout the region to ensure that enough habitat is available in future red wolf recovery efforts.**

**Response:** The Service learned a great deal from its experience with red wolf reintroductions through the non-essential, experimental population in eastern North Carolina to date. The Service now has a much better understanding of red wolf habitat and space requirements, as well as other important logistical and societal factors that must be considered in establishing and managing a wild red wolf population. We now know the space needs of red wolves exceed the available federal land base in eastern North Carolina. As such, successful reintroduction efforts must engage private landowners in reintroduction decisions and population management and must ensure that

the interests and needs of the community are protected. The recent report by the Red Wolf Recovery Team (included as an addendum) concluded that the socio-political factors related to red wolf reintroductions are as important as ecological factors in determining the likelihood of success. The Service will carefully consider these societal needs and ensure that affected communities are fully engaged in all potential reintroduction efforts.

- 3. What exactly does the Service mean when it says it will manage the red wolf captive breeding population as part of the non-essential, experimental population? Please explain, in detail, how this management approach will work. Service staff also mentioned that captive wolves will receive a “wildlife experience,” please explain the meaning of “wildlife experience” in this context.**

**Response:** Conservation of genetic diversity is an important aspect of recovering species, including the red wolf. In the past, the Service’s partners in the red wolf Species Survival Plan managed genetic diversity within the captive populations by carefully selecting the wolves that will be paired for breeding purposes on an annual basis. This process has conserved approximately 89 percent of the genetic diversity represented in the 14 founding wolves. Our intention going forward is to better integrate the wild red wolf non-essential, experimental population into the overall management of genetic diversity within the entire population by bringing wild red wolves that are of particularly high genetic value into captivity to be paired with captive animals. The Service plans to manage all red wolves, both the captive breeding population and non-essential, experimental population, as a single entity. Animals will be moved between the captive and wild populations to maintain genetic diversity for both populations.

Maintaining a wild population that is fully integrated with the captive population will allow for animals removed from the wild to support the necessary expansion and improved genetic health of the captive population and also retain some of the influences of natural selection on the gene pool. A wild population also would serve as a small stock source for new reintroduction efforts. Selecting animals that are believed to have the best chance of surviving the initial release, successfully establishing territories and reproducing is essential to maximize the chances for success of a new population of red wolves. These qualities are more likely to be found in wild-born or wild-fostered wolves. Additionally, any wolf released into unfamiliar territory faces increased risks. These risks are reduced for animals that are already skilled hunters, not habituated to human presence and care, and fostered in the wild. The chance for survival increases for introduced wolves if they have experienced living on their own in the wild. The concept of “wild experience” incorporates natural selection into captive breeding efforts as well as the fostering of captive-bred pups in the wild.

- 4. How has the Service addressed its failures to receive written consent of owners prior to releasing wolves on private property? How will the Service keep red wolves off of private property going forward? Has the Service standardized its procedures for dealing with wolves and/or wolf releases on private property? If so, please provide written documentation of those procedures.**

**Response:** Before 2014, the Service did not require written consent for red wolf recovery actions on private lands. This was consistent with the 1995 governing rule (50 C.F.R. 17.84(c)), which did not require such written consent. During that timeframe, however, the Service did enter into written or verbal agreements with landowners to access private lands for the management of red wolves. In 2014, and thereafter, the Service required written consent from willing private landowners for all red wolf recovery actions on their properties. Also in 2014, the Service stopped the practice of relocating red wolves onto private lands.

In September 2016, the Service announced it would refocus the project to federal lands within Dare County, North Carolina. The Service recognizes that red wolves will not stay on federal lands. Prior to the September 29, 2016, preliminary injunction by Federal Judge Terrence Boyle, the Service had committed to removing red wolves from private lands when requested to do so by the landowner in accordance with the 1995 rule. In accordance with the injunction, the Service now can only remove red wolves when there is a risk of harm to people or property. Red wolves removed from the landscape will be handled and cared for humanely. Some wolves removed from private lands would be released on federal lands in Dare County and others will be relocated to a captive breeding facility. The Service will continue to seek written agreements with willing landowners adjacent to federal lands to facilitate management of wild wolves.

5. **The Service identified coyote hybridization as an existential threat for the red wolf. Does the Service have a plan for limiting hybridization in the wild? If so, please provide it to the Committee. If not, does the Service intend to generate such a plan prior to additional releases of red wolves into the wild?**

**Response:** The Red Wolf Adaptive Management Plan (included as an addendum) was developed for the express purpose of managing coyote genetic introgression into the red wolf population. Its components include monitoring of the population to identify hybrid animals for management action. Potential actions include removing hybrid animals from the population or sterilizing and releasing them for use as placeholder animals, which continue to hold territorial space until that animal can be replaced naturally or by management actions. The plan also includes an active research effort to assess the effectiveness of management actions so that adjustments can be made as needed. Scientific research has shown the plan to be effective in limiting hybridization.

6. **Director Sandoval from the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish stated that the biggest contributing factor to the lack of success in Mexican wolf recovery efforts is the Service's unwillingness to cooperate with the States. How does the Service intend to repair its poor relationship with states involved in wolf recovery efforts? Does the Service intend to involve states in its revised Mexican Wolf recovery plan?**

**Response:** Throughout the initial efforts to reintroduce Mexican wolves, the Service has cooperated with the states of Arizona and New Mexico. Although the New Mexico

Department of Game and Fish withdrew as a partner in the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program in 2011, the Service has continued to encourage them to reengage and has continued to provide information to keep them up-to-date on the program. New Mexico Department of Game and Fish supports the Service's efforts to revise the 1982 Mexican Wolf Recovery Plan. In December 2015, the Service reinitiated efforts to develop a revised recovery plan for the Mexican wolf based on the best available science. We have convened workshops and worked collaboratively with representatives of the states of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah; federal agencies in Mexico; the White Mountain Apache Tribe; the Forest Service; and independent scientists from both countries to review the biological information that will inform the development of the revised recovery plan. All four states have been extensively involved in recovery planning workshops, including biologists and legal counsel from the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. Since December 2015, we convened five recovery-planning workshops in the United States and Mexico; the four states participated in all five workshops, which are facilitated by the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Conservation Breeding Specialist Group. In addition, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish participated as a Cooperating Agency in the Service's development of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the revision to the regulations for the nonessential experimental population of the Mexican wolf. That EIS was completed in November 2015.

7. **Does the Service intend to introduce Mexican wolves into Colorado and Utah? If so, how would such introductions be justified when the Service itself identified only the southwest corner of New Mexico and Southeast Arizona as the northern extent of its historic range?**

**Response:** We have no plans to introduce Mexican wolves into Utah or Colorado. Only as a final resort, after full consideration of options south of I-40, would we consider looking north.

8. **The OIG found that a Mexican wolf field team coordinator and her employees deliberately interfered in livestock predation investigations. Please provide the Committee with an update about steps that the Service has taken to discipline and/or fire this employee. Please also provide the Committee with information about how the Service plans to ensure similar interferences in predation investigations do not occur in the future.**

**Response:** In 2013, prior to the OIG inquiry, the Service recognized that the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program was not performing adequately in some key functions pertaining to field operations and made decisive management changes to address those shortcomings, including personnel moves and hiring additional field staff. In order to resolve this, the Service reassigned the former Field Projects Coordinator to an administrative position based in Tucson, Arizona in August 2013. The current Field Projects Coordinator is now located in the Albuquerque, New Mexico office. The Field Projects Coordinator position now oversees not only the field operations in the current Mexican wolf population area, but also in the areas where the population is expected to

expand, in accordance with the revised experimental population 10(j) Rule. This new organization will facilitate consistent management of all field operations under the Field Projects Coordinator as the Mexican wolf population expands. In 2015, the Service also hired an Interagency Field Team (IFT) Leader, who is located in the Alpine, Arizona IFT Office. This position directly supervises the Service staff in the IFT Office and reports to the Field Projects Coordinator. This position also coordinates directly with the other IFT staff and the local livestock producers, landowners, and communities to improve communications with stakeholders.

Investigations of livestock depredations are typically conducted by staff of the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Wildlife Services (USDA-Wildlife Services), who determine the cause of death. The Service is involved only if asked by USDA-Wildlife Services to assist. If the USDA-Wildlife Services confirms the cause of death as a wolf depredation, the Service and jurisdictional IFT lead (state or tribe) review radio telemetry data and recent observations to determine which wolves were in the area at the time of the depredation. This information enables the IFT to manage the situation to deter additional depredations using a suite of management actions including hazing, trapping and translocation, and removal of wolves from the wild if necessary to stop chronic depredations.

- 9. Is there evidence of hybridization of the Mexican wolf with domesticated dogs? How will the Service ensure that hybridization of the Mexican wolf will not occur with dogs, coyotes, and other wolf species? Please provide all genetic testing results that the Service has performed on Mexican wolves.**

**Response:** The Service monitors the genetics of the wild Mexican wolf population by taking blood samples from every canid handled, as well as through the opportunistic collection and testing of hair and scat from some areas. All samples are sent to the Laboratory for Ecological, Evolutionary, and Conservation Genetics at the University of Idaho for species confirmation, meaning the samples are analyzed to determine if they are from a pure Mexican wolf, pure coyote, pure dog, or hybrid. The Laboratory also uses DNA analyses to determine the parentage of the animal.

In the Mexican wolf experimental population, hybridization is a rare event. Three confirmed hybridization events between Mexican wolves and dogs have been documented since the reintroduction project began in 1998. In the first two cases, hybrid litters were humanely euthanized. In the third case, four of five pups were humanely euthanized; the fifth pup, previously observed by project personnel but not captured, has not been located and its status is unknown (BRWRA Monthly Project Updates, June 24, 2011, <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/mexicanwolf/CEBRWRA.cfm>). This pup likely died based on the age of the pup and the circumstances associated with this animal (after June of that year, the adult female was observed several times traveling alone, and the IFT was unable to document the survival of the pup. The pup was at an age (1-2 months) that would have made survival on its own highly unlikely. In July, the IFT captured and placed the female in temporary holding in an attempt to observe or capture the pup; the

pup was not observed during this time frame or before the female was removed from the wild in December 2011, further indicating the pup had not survived).

No hybridization between Mexican wolves and coyotes has been confirmed through our genetic monitoring of coyotes, wolves, and dogs. Our response to the three hybridization events with dogs has negated potential impacts to the genetic integrity of the experimental population from these events. Moreover, the likelihood of hybrid animals surviving, or having detectable impacts on wolf population genetics or viability, is low due to aspects of wolf sociality and fertility cycles.

All genetic testing results for Mexican wolves in the wild population are included as an addendum to this document. It should be noted, however, that the Service does not conduct these analyses. Samples are sent to, and the analyses are conducted independently by, the Laboratory for Ecological, Evolutionary and Conservation Genetics at the University of Idaho.

- 10. Please provide the total number of captive-released Mexican wolves that are alive in captivity and also the total number of captive-released Mexican wolves that are alive in the wild. What is the maximum possible number of Mexican wolves, including observed first-year pups, that could be living in the wild today? Why did the Service stop reporting this graphically in annual IFT reports after 2002?**

**Response:** As of July 2016, there were four Mexican wolves that were born in captivity, released to the wild, and now live again in captivity. They are M863, M1049, M1133, and F1046.

Our best estimate is that there was a minimum of 97 wolves in the wild as of December 31, 2015.

All of the wolves alive in the wild at the end of 2015 were born in the wild. Since then, we have cross-fostered 6 pups from captivity to the wild. These captive-born pups were removed from their natal dens in captivity at less than 10 days old, and two-each were placed into three similarly aged litters in the wild. If successful, cross-fostering allows for captive-born pups to be placed into wild dens and be raised by experienced wolves in the wild. Of the six captive pups placed into wild dens in 2016, we have confirmed at least two of them have survived. The IFT is continuing efforts to confirm the survival of additional cross-fostered pups.

Mortality occurs throughout the year and is particularly high on young pups, so while we have documented reproduction, we will not have a complete idea of how many of these young pups and adults have died until the annual population survey conducted in the winter. Annual surveys are conducted in the winter because it is when the population is experiencing the least amount of natural fluctuation (i.e. in the spring the population increases dramatically with the birth of new pups and declines throughout the summer and fall as mortality is particularly high on young pups). Thus, we summarize the total number of wolves at a fairly static or consistent time of year. This allows us to establish

comparable year-to-year trends at a time of year that accounts for most mortality and survival of young pups.

The "maximum" population reported in 2002 represented the minimum documented population plus the addition of "fate-unknown wolves" (previously radio collared, but the radio collar failed and the signal was lost). Some of the fate-unknown animals were likely dead, while others could be alive, and still others were known to be alive but could no longer be monitored via telemetry due to collar failure. Thus, this "maximum" number was confusing and represents a combination of possible fates (likely dead, likely alive, etc.) for wolves. Further, the longer an animal is considered fate-unknown, the more likely it is that the animal is dead.

After 2002, the IFT improved methods for counting wolves in the wild. The current technique includes the use of helicopters and trail cameras to count wolves. Through these methods, the IFT was able to obtain evidence of the fate-unknown animals that were alive with a failed collar, and those that were likely dead. Thus, it was no longer necessary to generate a maximum population estimate based on fate-unknown animals. Further, the minimum population count represents the best trend in the population without the vagaries of fate-unknown animals accumulating through many years of a project. The IFT continues to expend significant resources counting the population, inclusive of: (1) fate-unknown animals that are determined to be alive; (2) uncollared animals that are associated with a collared pack; and (3) uncollared packs and single animals. The minimum population count, however, is a minimum and generally underrepresents the true population by a small proportion of animals.

**11. What is the average annual number of Mexican wolves that permanently disappear? Under what criteria does the Service presume a missing Mexican wolf is dead? Are Mexican wolves that are missing and documented as "presumed dead" tracked, tallied and compared against known mortalities? If not, please explain why.**

**Response:** In general, the project has 2-3 radio-collared animals each year that are fate-unknown (radio-collared animals that have not been documented through radio telemetry or visual evidence for three months) and presumed dead. We base the presumption of death on loss of radio contact with no indication of transmitter failure, if subsequent bi-weekly telemetry flights and bi-monthly search flights failed to locate the animal over a large area, and if the animal failed to be observed for at least three months through intensive monitoring efforts. These numbers are tracked relative to an overall failure rate (inclusive of wolves that are determined to be dead; fate-unknown and presumed dead; and removed from the wild) based on radio collar data and reported in each annual report since 2007. There is some uncertainty associated with whether or not these wolves have died, and there is complete uncertainty about the cause of death, so the number of mortalities does not include fate-unknown animals, but represents a minimum number of documented mortalities based on actual carcasses that are found.



- 12. How many confirmed wild-born, first-year Mexican wolf pups have been observed since 1998? How many of those pups died or disappeared within the first year of life? What percentage of those pups are still alive today?**

**Response:** For the period covering 1998-2015, 383 pups have been documented as wild-born. Of those, for the period covering 2005 to 2015, we have documented 323 pups, approximately 103 of which reached adulthood; and many of those have since died during adulthood. The project estimates that on average, 54 percent of the pups that are born die prior to reaching one year of age (consistent with most mammal populations). Much of this mortality occurs during the first 30 days of life, and prior to when the IFT counts pups. Overall, roughly 32 percent of the pups we do count are expected to reach adulthood, and of those animals, 19 percent are expected to die during each year of adulthood. The 2015 end-of-year minimum population in the wild primarily consisted of wild-born wolves, ranging in age from "young of the year" (less than one year old) to 10 years old (two wolves were over 10 years old).

Questions from **Rep. Dingell** for Mr. Steve Guertin, Deputy Director for Program management and policy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

- 1. On September 29, 2016, Judge Terrence Boyle in the Eastern District of North Carolina issued a preliminary injunction preventing the Fish and Wildlife Service from removing wolves from the landscape unless there is a showing of danger to people or property. In his order, Judge Boyle admonished the FWS regarding its duty to conserve red wolves in the wild. In light of this decision, will the FWS revisit its recent proposal on changes to red wolf management?**

**Response:** No. The Service is committed to recovering the red wolf. We are moving forward with the implementation of a series of actions announced in September 2016 to secure the captive and wild red wolf populations. We believe this strategy is scientifically sound and will move us toward recovery.

- 2. What are your management plans from now until the Fall of 2017 for the current wild red wolf population? Do you intend to remove wolves from Pocosin Lakes NWR to Dare County?**

**Response:** We do not anticipate removing red wolves from private or public lands due to Judge Boyle's preliminary injunction. The Service will only authorize take of red wolves when there is a threat to human safety or to the safety of livestock or pets as dictated by Judge Boyle's order. When the preliminary injunction is lifted, the Service will resume managing red wolves in accordance with the existing 1995 rule and its proposed course of action to refocus red wolf recovery actions on federal lands.

- 3. How many red wolves are currently being held in captivity? How long have they been held?**

**Response:** Currently, there are approximately 225 red wolves in over 40 captive breeding facilities around the country. Red wolves have been held and bred in captivity at over 40 zoos and institutions around the country since 1969.

**4. How many red wolves have been removed from the wild from 2014-2016?**

**Response:** Since 2014, the Service removed nine wolves from the five-county non-essential, experimental population area in eastern North Carolina.

Questions from **Rep. Newhouse** for Mr. Steve Guertin, Deputy Director of Policy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

- 1. The gray wolf is an important issue to my district in Central Washington, where as you said the gray wolf has recently expanded its range. I have been frustrated by the lack of movement by the Fish & Wildlife Service to delist the gray wolf in the lower 48 states. In your testimony you state: "Our goal, consistent with our legal mandates, is to recover wolves—so that they are no longer threatened or endangered—and return management of those recovered wolves to the States." However, since issuing a proposed rule to delist the gray wolf in 2013, the Service has not taken further action on the rule, which you state is due to several court decisions vacating the delisting decision. What is the status of the federal government's appeal in those cases? Additionally, if your goal is to "return management of those recovered wolves to the States," what steps can the Service take in the interim to help states prepare to manage their own wolf populations?**

**Response:** The Service has worked tirelessly to delist recovered populations of gray wolves and return management to the states. For nearly a decade now, these decisions have consistently been met with legal challenges. While the Northern Rocky Mountain population of gray wolves (except for wolves in Wyoming) has been delisted and under state management since 2012, the Service's 2011 and 2012 determinations delisting the recovered wolves in Wyoming and the recovered population in the Western Great Lakes (WGL), were vacated by separate D.C. District Court judges in 2014, reinstating Endangered Species Act protections for these wolves. The June 13, 2013, rule to which you refer was premised upon wolves in Wyoming and the WGL being both recovered and delisted. At the Service's recommendation the Department of Justice is actively appealing both of the 2014 court decisions and recently participated in oral arguments on September 23 and October 18, 2016. We are now awaiting decisions from the court.

The state wildlife agencies in Wyoming, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan have more than sufficient experience managing wolf populations within their borders, as each was able to successfully implement their respective wolf management programs prior to the court reinstating Federal protections for wolves in their states. The Washington and Oregon wildlife agencies are currently actively managing the recovered and delisted wolf populations within the eastern one-third of their states and the Service is coordinating closely with these agencies and California Department of Fish and Wildlife to provide technical assistance, including identifying non-lethal measures (e.g., physical barriers,

deployment of visual and auditory devices, and active hazing), to help prevent gray wolf depredations on livestock where wolves are federally protected. In addition, the Service administers the Wolf Livestock Demonstration Project Grant Program to provide grants to states and tribes to support livestock producers conducting proactive, non-lethal activities to reduce the risk of livestock loss due to predation by wolves and to compensate livestock producers, as appropriate, for livestock losses due to such predation. Washington was awarded funds in fiscal year 2015 and has been selected to receive funds for fiscal year 2016.

- 2. I am concerned that the Service is not treating the appeals process with enough urgency and is using the court decisions as a cop-out to not move forward with the 2013 proposed rule, which is strongly opposed by many environmental organizations. The proposed delisting rule states the Service “evaluated the classification status of gray wolves currently listed in the contiguous United States and Mexico under the Endangered Species Act of 1973” and found the “best available scientific and commercial information indicates that the currently listed entity is not a valid species under the Act.” Outside of appeals, what actions are you taking to ensure that sound science is being followed and that recovered species are being delisted from ESA?**

**Response:** As you mention, the Service is actively participating in the appeals process and we anticipate receiving the court decisions in 2017. If we prevail in these cases, the Service intends to take action on our 2013 proposal, because we find that gray wolves in the lower 48 states, except for the Mexican wolf subspecies in the Southwest, are recovered and no longer warrant protection under the ESA. In the meantime, we find ourselves at the mercy of the courts with respect to the legal status of gray wolves in the lower 48 states under the ESA.

The Service continues to make improvements to the implementation of the ESA. However, regardless of what we can do to improve implementation of the ESA, the fact is that recovery is not a simple or fast process. There will always be complicating biological and human factors to contend with. Recovery of listed species is often a lengthy, intricate process, reflective of the long periods of time that the species faced impacts leading to listing. As our world continues to evolve, climate change impacts are felt, and our economy and populations grow, species will face growing threats that will impact the recovery process. With limited resources available, it is important for the Service to balance multiple mandates under the ESA, including preventing species from going extinct and bringing them off the list through recovery efforts.

- 3. Recently, the Profanity Peak wolf pack in Eastern Washington has drawn considerable attention. Since July 8th, the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife documented at least 13 depredation events on livestock, including eight confirmed and five probable depredations. The Profanity Peak pack is located in the Eastern-third of Washington State, where the wolf is not federally listed. Washington Fish & Wildlife decided to initiate a lethal removal effort of the pack in August and has since removed a total of six wolves. Can you discuss how the U.S.**

**Fish & Wildlife Service works with state-level wildlife management agencies to manage wolves located in areas that are not under federal management? How is the Fish & Wildlife Service working with individual state agencies to prevent wildlife and livestock depredations?**

**Response:** State wildlife agencies manage gray wolf populations that are no longer listed under the Endangered Species Act due to successful recovery efforts, including those in Montana, Idaho, eastern Washington and Oregon, and north central Utah. The Service's role in these areas has been to provide technical assistance to States when requested and to distribute federal funds to prevent livestock depredations and compensate for livestock losses. The Service awards prevention and compensation funding to States and Tribes through the Wolf Livestock Demonstration Project Grant Program, as described in P.L. 111-11. In 2015 the Service awarded \$900,000 in grants under this program distributed among eight States and the White Mountain Apache Tribe. In the coterminous United States where gray wolves are still listed as endangered, outside of Wyoming where wolves are listed as a nonessential experimental population, the Service's assistance to State agencies in managing wolves is currently limited to non-lethal measures.

In federally-listed areas, the Service works closely with State fish and wildlife agencies to prevent livestock depredations. Specifically in Washington, the Service participates in the State's Wolf Advisory Group meetings and also meets with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) leadership and USDA APHIS Wildlife Services on how depredation investigations will be handled in the listed portion of the state. In FY2016, the Service's Washington Fish and Wildlife Office obligated \$65,000 from its Recovery budget to help WDFW provide technical assistance to landowners. This was in addition to the approximately \$100,000 WDFW received from the Service for livestock depredation response efforts in FY2016. In the listed portion of Washington State, individuals can use non-lethal munitions, including cracker shells and rubber bullets, to haze wolves near livestock; the use of these tools must be done in coordination with WDFW and federal authorities. The Service continues to work closely with landowners and WDFW and is taking steps to increase our capacity to provide assistance with wolf deterrents and non-lethal measures aimed at reducing wolf-livestock conflicts in Washington.

Other examples of the Service's works with state-level wildlife management agencies includes:

- In the listed portion of Oregon, the Service has authorized active hazing of wolves near livestock, including the use of rubber bullets and other management techniques that are "not reasonably anticipated to result in death or permanent disabling of the animal" in helping prevent depredation and other conflicts.
- In Minnesota, where gray wolves are listed as a threatened species, the Service has promulgated a special rule under section 4(d) of the ESA, which allows state and federal government agents to relocate or remove wolves that are verified to have depredated on livestock.

The Service works with each state to authorize and implement a state management plan that meets the state's needs. We understand that each state has unique circumstances and we work with our state partners on a state-by-state basis to address their specific needs.

- 4. Proponents of keeping a federal ESA listing for the gray wolf often argue that the wolf plays a critical role in "ecosystem balance." However, one issue that is drawing increased attention is the impact the wolf has had on the Shiras Moose. When wolves were reintroduced in 1995 in the Northern Rocky Mountains, federal estimates predicted the impact to these moose populations would be 7% to 13%. However, recent reports and studies have found that Shiras Moose populations have declined by almost 90%. What steps has the Service taken to address this growing problem and how do you plan to continue protecting the wolf, while also ensuring these moose populations do not decline further?**

**Response:** Declines of the Shiras moose (moose) across its entire range, from Minnesota to the Northern Rockies, have been well studied over the past decade. The reasons for the decline of the moose are primarily loss of habitat and impacts associated with climate change (leading to parasite load issues directly impacting health and vigor), in conjunction with the secondary impact of predation. For example, research has demonstrated substantial declines in moose in many local areas where wolves do not exist and predation is not an issue. Consequently, the best available science does not support a cause-effect relationship between wolf numbers and decline (or increase) of Shiras moose in Wyoming.

In Wyoming, and the Jackson/Yellowstone area in particular, nutritional deficiencies and habitat loss have largely been responsible for the decline of the moose. Subsequently, wolves have been able to exploit vulnerable Shiras moose in this area and, thus, contributed to the decline. However, predation by wolves has been opportunistic and not the primary cause.

Delisting has allowed significant State flexibility in its management of the gray wolf population in the Northern Rocky Mountains. While the delisting rule was vacated for gray wolves in Wyoming, that case is on appeal. It remains the Service's view that the entire Northern Rocky Mountains gray wolf population is biologically recovered and therefore management of the entire population should belong to the States. We remain confident that the States will be successful in achieving a reasonable balance between the needs of a recovered wolf population and other public needs.

- 5. In a state like Washington, with split management of grey wolves and a state plan with recovery goals in excess of Federal requirements, could a Section 4d exemption possibly help to add consistency and ensure that wolf populations across the state are all benefiting from successful state management?**

**Response:** The WDFW is currently managing gray wolves in the eastern one-third of the state, which was delisted along with the rest of the Northern Rocky Mountain gray wolf population (except for Wyoming) in 2012. The western two-thirds of the State and any

wolves that may occur there are part of the broader gray wolf listing which has a legal status of endangered under the ESA. When a species is listed as endangered, all the take prohibitions (section 9) of the ESA apply. Section 4(d) does allow the Service to issue a rule that establishes specific prohibitions and exceptions that are tailored to the specific conservation needs of threatened species. Section 4(d) of the ESA applies only to species listed as threatened; this authority does not apply to species listed as endangered, such as the gray wolf.

While a section 4(d) rule is not currently an option for consideration, the Service is actively working with WDFW and providing technical expertise regarding appropriate non-lethal measures (e.g., physical barriers, deployment of visual and auditory devices, and active hazing) that may be used to help prevent depredation on livestock within the state. In addition, the Service administers the Wolf Livestock Demonstration Project Grant Program to provide grants to states and tribes to support livestock producers conducting proactive, non-lethal activities to reduce the risk of livestock loss due to predation by wolves and to compensate livestock producers, as appropriate, for livestock losses due to such predation. Washington was awarded funds in fiscal year 2015 and has been selected to receive funds for fiscal year 2016.

Questions from **Rep. Pearce** for Mr. Steve Guertin, Deputy Director of Policy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

**1) The Department of the Interior (DOI) Inspector General (IG) Report from June 29, 2016 states on page 8 that the IFT coordinator of the Mexican Gray Wolf Recovery Program (MGWRP) did not know the difference between an Alaskan Gray Wolf and a Mexican Gray Wolf, despite the significant differences.**

**a. Why did the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) hire someone that could not even make this simple distinction?**

**Response:** The statement in the OIG Report is: "The former IFT member felt that the former IFT coordinator, who had worked with wolves in Alaska, had been unprepared to assume the role of coordinator because she did not understand the differences between Alaskan and Mexican wolves, but then did not listen to those who did understand and offered to help her." The context of this statement was to note that there are management differences between gray wolves in Alaska (where the Former IFT Coordinator managed them on a National Wildlife Refuge), and Mexican wolves on working landscapes in the Southwest.

**b. Is it a common practice for the FWS to hire coordinators that are not familiar with the species they are tasked with recovering?**

**Response:** See response above.

**2) In Director Ashe's letter addressed to me on September 2, 2016 he claims that the current IFT coordinator spends roughly "50 percent" of his time "working on issues**

specifically related to Grant and Catron counties.” However, in the travel logs sent by the FWS to my office it appears the IFT coordinator only made 3 visits to New Mexico from January 2014 through August 2016. He also made 49 trips to Arizona.

- a. **Could you explain why he spends so much time in Arizona and not New Mexico?**

**Response:** The Mexican Wolf IFT office has been located in Alpine, Arizona since the reintroduction program began in 1998. The Field Projects Coordinator (termed above as IFT Coordinator) usually stays in a hotel in Alpine, Arizona when he travels to work out of the IFT office. The Field Projects Coordinator’s official travel location, therefore, is accurately shown as Alpine, Arizona. From the Alpine IFT office (which is located near the border of Arizona and New Mexico), the IFT manages wolves in both Arizona and New Mexico (although as of this year, the Arizona Game and Fish Department conducts most of the wolf management in Arizona out of an office in Pinetop, Arizona). The Arizona Game and Fish Department staff conducts most of the management of Mexican wolves in Arizona, and, following the departure of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish Department from the recovery program in 2011, Service employees conduct most of the management of Mexican wolves in New Mexico. The Field Projects Coordinator spends additional time travelling to sites in New Mexico within a single day, which does not require travel expenses. The Coordinator also spends time talking to landowners, livestock producers, and others in New Mexico regarding Mexican wolf management issues by phone.

- b. **How does the coordinator travel from Albuquerque, where he’s stationed, to Arizona?**

**Response:** The IFT Coordinator travels to the Alpine IFT Field Office and conducts field work from a government vehicle.

- c. **When he travels to Arizona, does he stay overnight?**

**Response:** In general, the Field Projects Coordinator stays overnight when he travels to the Alpine Field Office.

- i. **If so, please provide logs for overnight stay.**

**Response:** The travel log, included in the Director’s September 2, 2016 response, which was derived from the government’s Concur travel program, provided the dates on which the IFT Field Projects Coordinator stayed overnight in Arizona. The travel log is included as an addendum to this document.

Questions from **Sen. Thom Tillis (NC)** for Mr. Stephen Guertin, Deputy Director for Policy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

**1. A report on the Red Wolf Program recently released by the Office of the Inspector General found that Fish and Wildlife Service violated its rule by releasing 132 wolves into the wild between 1987 and 2013 when the rule had only provided for the release of 12 wolves. Furthermore, many of these wolves were released on private lands without permission from the landowners, something Fish and Wildlife Service maintained it was not going to do.**

**a. Normally, if they shoe were on the other foot and it was a private landowner violating breaking a law or federal regulation, there would be some sort of recourse.**

**Response:** In 2014, the Service acknowledged it made some mistakes in its management of the Red Wolf Recovery Program. In those past instances, the Service only released wolves on private lands with agreements – either written or verbal – to do so. Since then, the Service has managed the non-essential, experimental population in eastern North Carolina in accordance with the 1995 rule (50 C.F.R. 17.84(c)). The Service is no longer releasing wolves on private lands.

**b. What action did Fish and Wildlife take to correct this clear and obvious violation of its own rules?**

**Response:** Over the past three years, the Service has conducted comprehensive reviews of the Red Wolf Recovery Program, ensured the program is in compliance with enacted rules, and reorganized the program to avoid future deviations from the existing rules. The Service also is complying with Judge Boyle's order.

**2. As Fish and Wildlife attempted to manage its non-experimental population of wolves and secure that population on federal lands, the agency made the promise that it would remove Red Wolves found to be on private lands at the landowners' request. Additionally, Fish and Wildlife Service has stated that it would issue private take permits to landowners for the landowners to trap the wolves to be returned to the Agency.**

**a. How many landowners made requests to Fish and Wildlife Service to have wolves removed from private lands?**

**Response:** The Service has received six requests to remove red wolves from private lands as of October 2016. In previous years, the number of these requests has been less than ten per year with the exception of 2014 when the Service received 405 requests. In 2014, the Service received several petitions with multiple signatures requesting removal of red wolves from private properties. Upon contacting each requestor, the Service determined that many of the



landowners had no evidence that red wolves were on their property. Several requestors also indicated that they were unaware of the purpose of the petitions.

**b. How many special take permits have been applied for?**

**Response:** The Service does not issue trapping permits to private landowners for the removal of red wolves since the agency or agents of the Service, including private trappers, conducts the trapping operations. When trapping efforts are abandoned, the Service may issue an authorization to take a red wolf by lethal means.

**c. How many special take permits have been issued by the Agency?**

**Response:** As of October 2016, the Service has issued five lethal take authorizations affecting three properties.

**3. Mr. Myers' mentions in his testimony that the flooding at the Pocosin Lakes Wildlife Refuge may have adversely impacted its suitability to support the wild wolf population.**

**a. What is the condition of that refuge now given the ongoing hydrology restoration efforts?**

**Response:** The Service is taking a science-based approach working with hydrologists to restore the natural hydrology and rewetting pocosin peat soils at the Pocosin National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). Since the Refuge was established in 1991, the Service has been working to restore the pocosin peat soils in three of the most significantly ditched and drained areas affecting nearly a third of the Refuge's 110,107 acres. Restoration activities include raising the elevation of existing berms and installing flashboard riser water control structures in strategic locations. The Service will then use this infrastructure to stop the artificial drainage of rainwater from the peat soils through the ditch system. The new infrastructure enables the Refuge to rewet historically drained peatlands and return lands to a natural, seasonally-saturated condition. Within the restored area, low-lying areas where standing water may be present seasonally are expected and may be acceptable for foraging and hunting by terrestrial wildlife, including red wolves. The flooding recently experienced on the Refuge and adjacent private lands is the result of excessive amounts of rain falling on lands already saturated by repeated tropical events including Hurricane Matthew aggravating conditions in ditches, creeks, and sounds, already full from previous rain events. No management strategy would prevent localized flooding on or off the Refuge under these conditions. We are working diligently with adjacent landowners to ensure a better understanding of the hydrology restoration effort and to identify opportunities of mutual interest that have great potential to improve drainage conditions for these landowners.

**b. How many wolves are currently living on the Refuge?**

**Response:** Five adult red wolves are known to use portions of the Refuge. We are uncertain as to the number of pups potentially born in 2015 or 2016 that may use portions of the Refuge at this time.

**4. It is my understanding that Fish and Wildlife Service can account for less than 30 wild wolves with collars and have estimated that there are about 15 more wolves whose whereabouts are unknown.**

**a. What steps will the Agency make to recover these 15 “missing” wolves?**

**Response:** The current wild population estimate is approximately 45 wolves, including the known number of animals (28 radio collared wolves) and a percentage of the number of observed puppies born this spring that were PIT tagged but not collared because they were too small. The exact number of these young animals that survive their first year of life will not be known until they are old enough to be safely trapped. However, trapping cannot occur until the existing federal court injunction has been lifted. Additionally, there are a small, but unknown, number of animals that avoid being trapped and are undetected on the landscape, as well as animals that inhabit lands to which we do not have access.

**b. If the Agency already has difficulty tracking the collared wolves that are out there, how can I and private landowners be assured that a wolves will be accurately tracked and kept off private lands in any future non-experimental population site that are created?**

**Response:** The Service is able to closely monitor the wild population when its biologists can trap and fit adult red wolves with tracking collars. In recent years, reduced access to private lands has limited the agency’s ability to find red wolf litters and conduct trapping operations that would allow for a more accurate account of the wild population and movement of red wolves on the landscape. Additionally, the recent injunction has further limited the Service’s ability to trap wolves for monitoring activities.