

Lolo DAU (GMUs 10 and 12)

Abstract

The Lolo DAU consists of IDFG GMUs 10 and 12. During 2008 it was home to 10 documented packs tallied for Idaho and 2 border packs tallied for Montana (Figure 13; Table 5). Six of 8 reproductive packs qualified as breeding pairs; the reproductive status of 2 packs was unknown. Documented mortalities ($n = 5$) included other human (illegal take, vehicle collision, etc.; $n = 2$) and unknown ($n = 3$) causes. There were no confirmed or probable wolf-caused losses to domestic cattle or livestock. Confirmed ($n = 6$) wolf-caused losses of domestic dogs were attributed to unknown wolves northwest of Lowell, ID. Six wolves were captured by Program personnel that resulted in the placement of 5 new radiocollars.

Background

Lands within this DAU are almost entirely publicly-owned and administered by the U.S. Forest Service. The southern portion of the DAU is within the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area. Historically, ungulate habitat productivity was high in this DAU. However, habitat productivity has decreased following decades of intensive fire suppression. Approximately one-third of the DAU has good access for motorized vehicles with medium road densities. The remaining portion has low road densities with good trails. Until the 1930s, wildfires were the primary habitat disturbance mechanism in this DAU. Between 1900 and 1934, approximately 70% of the Lochsa River drainage was burned by wildfires. Between 1926 and 1990, over 1,900 km of roads were built in this area to access marketable timber. State Highway 12 along the Lochsa River was completed in 1962 and became the primary travel corridor. In 1964, most of the southern portion of GMU 12 was designated as part of the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness (IDFG 2007).

Management Direction

As outlined in the Wolf Plan, current wolf-ungulate conflict levels are high and wolf-livestock conflict levels are low (no livestock grazing) within this DAU. Wolf management direction for the Lolo DAU calls for initially reducing and then maintaining wolf numbers at stable but lower levels, primarily to alleviate identified conflicts with ungulate populations.

Documented Resident Packs

Bimerick Meadow

Monitoring radiocollared females B289 and B398 (newly captured in 2008) led to the location of a rendezvous site where a single gray pup was observed in late August. This pack was not a breeding pair in 2008 due to documentation of only 1 pup.

Deception

Probable breeding female B213's signal was detected on mortality mode during a monitoring flight in December 2007; the radiocollar was believed to be beneath the ice of the North Fork Clearwater River. The carcass was recovered in mid-August; no cause of death could be ascertained. B352, radiocollared as a 4-month-old pup in 2007, was found dead of illegal cause in February 2008. The sole remaining radiocollared wolf, probable breeding male B354, did not

localize his movements during the denning season, nor throughout the summer, which suggested the pack did not produce a litter of pups; it was unlikely that there was a breeding-age female in the pack after B213's death. Field efforts failed to locate evidence of reproduction. This pack was not reported as a breeding pair for 2008.

Eagle Mountain

An outfitter inadvertently discovered this pack's den site in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness where 1 pup was observed. By the time a capture effort was initiated after receiving this report, the pack had abandoned the site. Trapping was attempted due to continued wolf activity, and two wolves were briefly captured but managed to pull free from the traps. Without the aid of radiocollared wolves in this pack, further efforts to count pups were not undertaken. Founding pack member male B136's radiocollar has likely expired, and female B295 has not been located since late 2007. This pack was reproductive, but was not considered a breeding pair for 2008.

Five Lakes Butte

An interview with the outfitter/guides that operate near this pack's traditional home site provided information that there was no wolf activity occurring there in 2008 (similar to 2007), so no further effort was made on this pack. This pack was not considered a breeding pair.

Kelly Creek

Four pups and 4 adult-sized wolves, including B237, were accounted for at a new rendezvous site for this pack in September. During the October monitoring flight, B237's signal was detected on mortality mode; her remains were collected and USFWS Law Enforcement opened an investigation. Based upon field observations, pack size was estimated at a minimum of 7 wolves. The longstanding Kelly Creek pack, no longer with a radiocollared member, was reported as a breeding pair in 2008.

Lochsa

Female wolf B345, the sole radiocollared member of this pack, led a biologist to a rendezvous site where 5-6 pups were located. Two adult-sized wolves were also observed there. An aerial observation of at least 15 wolves provided the official pack size estimate. The Lochsa pack was considered a breeding pair for 2008.

Pot Mountain

Capture efforts conducted in this area throughout spring and summer resulted in the placement of 2 GPS radiocollars; one on female B382 and another on male B393. A third wolf was caught, but died from capture-related cause. Minimal ground tracking efforts were undertaken and no documentation of reproduction was obtained. Minimum pack size was estimated at 11 based on aerial observation (including multiple pups) and this pack was reported as a 2008 breeding pair.

Spirit Ridge

Subadult female B339's signal was detected on mortality mode in January. A site investigation was attempted, but snow conditions were such that the mortality site could not be reached. The mortality beacon was finally found in July at the pack's rendezvous site; it was believed wolves had carried the radiocollar there from where it had originally been detected. Eight pups were observed; the largest litter recorded in Idaho in 2008. Two wolves were radiocollared, adult male

B387 and subadult female B388. B388 was found dead 1 month after capture; cause of death could not be ascertained due to carcass decomposition. The Spirit Ridge pack qualified as a breeding pair for 2008.

Documented Border Packs

Big Hole (ID)

The Big Hole pack was officially counted as an Idaho pack in 2008. Fieldwork was a coordinated effort between the Nez Perce Tribe, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MTFWP), and University of Montana personnel. Male B348 made an extraterritorial foray from the pack. It was located with radiocollared pack mate B347 within the home range in January, but was found approximately 48 miles (77 km) northwestward in March. By June B348 had returned to the Big Hole pack's territory, where it remained into September before contact was lost again. Two pups were observed, though based upon howling a minimum of 3 pups was estimated. This pack qualified as a breeding pair for Idaho in 2008. Two wolves that died in Montana (including one pup and B151) were attributed to this pack but not tallied in the Idaho report.

Bitterroot Range (MT)

This documented border pack was tallied for Montana in 2008. See the respective State's annual report for information on this pack.

Brooks Creek (MT)

This documented border pack was tallied for Montana in 2008. See the respective State's annual report for information on this pack.

Fish Creek (ID)

The Fish Creek pack denned in Idaho for the third consecutive year in 2008. Ground-tracking of radiocollared wolves B235 (suspected breeding female) and B236 (adult male) in the Kelly Creek drainage in late July, where aerial locations during denning season suggested a rendezvous site would be found, failed to detect either of those wolves or provide evidence of pups. In early September a biologist located a rendezvous site approximately 6 miles (10 km) from where the initial attempt was made. At this site 5 pups were observed, along with both radiocollared wolves and 8 uncollared adult-sized wolves. B236's signal was detected on mortality mode in December; the site has yet to be investigated. This border pack was considered an Idaho breeding pair for 2008.

Other Documented Wolf Groups

Saturday

Biologists verified at least 2 wolves in this group based on track evidence in 2007. No field effort was undertaken in 2008.

Table 5. End of year summary of estimated pack size, natality, mortality, dispersal, monitoring status, wolf captures, and livestock depredations for documented and suspected wolf groups within Idaho Department of Fish and Game Lolo Data Analysis Unit, 2008.

Wolf group ^a	Min. no. wolves detected ^b	Reproductive status		Documented mortalities				Known dispersal	Monitoring status			Confirmed & (probable) wolf-caused livestock losses			
		Min. no. pups prod. (died) ^c	Reported as		Natural	Control ^e	Other human ^f		Unknwn ^g	Active radio collars	No. wolf captures ^h	No. wolves missing ⁱ	Cattle	Sheep	Dogs
			reprod. pack	breeding pair ^d											
DOCUMENTED PACKS															
Big Hole (ID) ^j	6	3	YES	YES	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Bimerick Meadow	3	1	YES	NO	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
Bitterroot Range (MT) ^j															
Brooks Creek (MT) ^j															
Deception	1	?	NO	NO	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Eagle Mountain	3	1	YES	NO	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Fish Creek (ID) ^j	15	5	YES	YES	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Five Lakes Butte	?	?	NO	NO	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kelly Creek	7	4	YES	YES	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lochsa	15	5	YES	YES	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Pot Mountain	11	2	YES	YES	0	0	1	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	0
Spirit Ridge	9	8	YES	YES	0	0	0	2	0	1	2	0	0	0	0
SUBTOTAL	70	29			0	0	2	3	0	9	6	3	0	0	0
SUSPECTED PACKS															
SUBTOTAL	0	0			0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
OTHER DOCUMENTED GROUPS															
Saturday	?												0	0	0
SUBTOTAL	0	0			0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
UNKNOWN															
	?				0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
SUBTOTAL	0	0			0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
DAU TOTAL	70	29			0	0	2	3	0	9	6	3	0	0	6

^a Documented packs = territorial groups of wolves usually consisting of an adult male and female and their offspring from one or more generations, and has the potential to reproduce (2 adults of opposite sex). Suspected packs = geographic areas where wolf pack presence was suspected but not verified, or where wolf

presence was verified but did not meet documented pack status. Other documented groups = verified groups not meeting either documented or suspected pack status (e.g., lone wolves, potential mated pairs, etc.). Unknown = geographic areas where wolf presence was previously unverified and/or no data on group status was known.

^b Summing this column does not equate to number of wolves estimated to be present in the population.

^c Number in parentheses indicates known pup mortality; pup mortalities tallied in the appropriate column in “documented mortalities.”

^d Breeding pairs are the measure of Federal and State wolf recovery and management goals. A breeding pair is defined as “an adult male and a female wolf that have produced at least 2 pups that survive until December 31 of the year of their birth...”.

^e Includes agency lethal control and legal take.

^f Includes all other human-related deaths.

^g Does not include pups that disappeared before winter.

^h Includes wolves captured for monitoring purposes during 2008. Most, but not all, were radiocollared.

ⁱ Radiocollared wolves that became missing in 2008.

^j Border pack officially tallied to (STATE); territory known/likely shared with Idaho. Data on these packs can be found in Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery 2008 Annual Report; data for mortalities and/or depredations by non-Idaho border packs that occurred within Idaho are presented here.