

Mexican Wolf Recovery Program (Program) Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

Title: Operating Procedures of Domestic Livestock and Pet Depredations

Number: 11.1

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Purpose: This SOP describes the procedures Interagency Field Team (IFT) personnel will follow when domestic livestock or pets are discovered dead or injured and wolf predation is the suspected cause of the injury or death. This SOP shall be implemented in an approach that gives due consideration to providing intended wolf management flexibility while adequately and appropriately documenting the cause of death or injury attributed to potential or suspected wolf attacks. These procedures reflect incident management experience gained through the Program to date. This SOP represents, in part, the “Service approved Management Plan” referenced in the 2022 Revised Experimental Population Rule (2022 10(j) Rule, 50 CFR 17.84(k)).

Exceptions: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Regional Director must approve any exceptions to this SOP.

Background: Depredations of domestic animals (e.g., livestock and pets) are an important management concern of the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program (Program). Although confirmed wolf depredations are typically few in number relative to other causes of livestock death, chronic depredation can have adverse economic impact for an individual livestock owner and each wolf depredation becomes inordinately controversial (Bangs et al. 1998). Therefore, IFT responses to depredation reports must be completed in a timely, thorough, consistent, and professional manner to alleviate losses, allay landowner concerns, minimize future depredations, and provide producers the opportunity to seek compensation for a confirmed or probable wolf depredation.

Procedures:

Note: SOP 11.1 is intended to provide specific guidance to IFT personnel to initiate the depredation investigation, conduct depredation investigations, complete depredation reports, determine if a wolf or wolves are responsible for the depredation, and communicate potential management actions or recommendations. Requests for depredation investigations to agencies or employees who are not members of the IFT, may initially be handled via other agency protocols and procedures. IFT members should initially contact U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services (WS) lead investigator for the appropriate state, as soon as possible, and subsequently inform the Jurisdictional IFT Lead. **Telephone numbers pertaining to this SOP are available in Microsoft Teams.**

1. Receiving a report
 - a. IFT contact information and follow-up.
 - i. Livestock owners or the public should communicate, as soon as possible, any report of a possible wolf depredation on domestic livestock or pets to WS or the IFT at (928) 339-4329.
 - b. The IFT will handle reported incidents as follows:
 - i. Reported wolf depredations in Arizona occurring on non-tribal lands:
 - (1) IFT personnel receiving a report from a livestock owner, member of the public, or any other source who suspects a wolf depredation will notify WS personnel and subsequently the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) IFT Leader/designee, as soon as possible.
 - (2) If WS takes the report of a suspected wolf depredation directly from the resource owner, they will provide notification, as soon as possible, to the AZGFD IFT of the report.
 - ii. Reported wolf depredations in Arizona occurring on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation:
 - (1) IFT personnel receiving a report from a livestock owner, member of the public, or any other source who suspects a wolf depredation will notify the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Field Projects Coordinator (FPC)/designee and the White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT) IFT Leader/designee.

- (2) If WS takes the report of a suspected wolf depredation directly from the resource owner, they will provide notification, as soon as possible, to the WMAT IFT Leader/designee of the report.
 - iii. Reported wolf depredations in Arizona occurring on the San Carlos Apache Reservation (SCAR):
 - (1) IFT personnel receiving a report from a livestock owner or a member of the public who suspects a wolf depredation will notify the USFWS FPC/designee, who will provide direct coordination with the SCAR USFWS biologist, and to proceed with any IFT support as directed. Note: until and unless the San Carlos Apache Tribe (SCAT) provides permission for and requests support from AZGFD IFT members to access SCAR lands for wolf management purposes, IFT ground support for the SCAT will be limited to WS personnel on the IFT.
 - (2) If WS takes the report of a suspected wolf depredation directly from the resource owner, they will provide notification, as soon as possible, to the USFWS FPC/designee of the report.
 - iv. Reported wolf depredations in New Mexico:
 - (1) IFT personnel receiving a report from a livestock owner or member of the public who suspects a wolf depredation will notify the WS personnel and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) IFT Leader, as soon as possible.
 - (2) If WS takes the report of a suspected wolf depredation directly from the resource owner, they will provide notification, as soon as possible, to the NMDGF IFT of the report.
2. The IFT will coordinate a field response to reports of suspected wolf depredation incidents as follows:
- a. The objective of the Program in responding to all reported wolf depredation incidents is for WS to provide a field response to conduct an on-site incident investigation of all wolf depredation reports by accessing the incident site within 24 hours, if possible, of receiving the report.
 - i. WS IFT members are the primary investigators for such incidents (i.e., IFT Incident Investigator). Accordingly, IFT personnel initially contacted and receiving incident reports will make every effort to reach a WS IFT member to request an investigation.
 - ii. In the unlikely event a WS IFT member is not available within 48 hours, WS will request a non-WS IFT personnel to initiate an investigation into reported depredation incidents.
- Note: In all cases, IFT members may not access private land without the landowner's prior approval.**
- b. If a livestock owner denies access for incident investigation, the IFT Incident Investigator shall immediately notify the Recovery Coordinator/designee, FPC/designee, and the Jurisdictional IFTL/designee of that denial. Note: a livestock owner has no legal authority to deny agency access to sites on public lands, but, under State Law in AZ and NM, livestock, whether live or dead, remain the property of the owner and the owner may deny agency access to the live animal or carcass itself (e.g. for handling, sampling). However, on private lands the landowner does have the legal right to deny access to agencies (except in a law enforcement investigation).
3. IFT will complete an on-site incident investigation, as follows.
- a. The priority for anyone arriving at the scene, or otherwise assisting WS with the investigation, is to protect the scene to minimize altering or damaging evidence. IFT personnel, accordingly, must proceed as follows:
 - i. In cases where a WS IFT member is available to respond, WS IFT personnel will initiate contact with the affected party to ensure permission for access, visit the scene within 24-48 hours, secure and investigate the scene per Step 3b (below).
 - ii. In cases where a WS IFT member is not available or unable to respond (i.e., WS IFT personnel cannot arrive at the scene within 48 hours of receiving the report), WS state offices will coordinate with the IFT to ensure that:
 - (1) Another IFT member will be designated to initiate contact with the affected party, visit the scene within 48 hours and conduct an investigation per Step 3b, below;
 - (2) Only one IFT member will be assigned to investigate an individual incident.

- b. At the scene of the reported depredation incident, the IFT Incident Investigator will:
 - i. Conduct the field investigation and document physical evidence as outlined by Wildlife Services' standards.
4. Upon completing the on-site investigation, the IFT Incident Investigator shall:
 - a. Verbally notify the Jurisdictional IFTL/designee or the FPC/designee of their preliminary determination of "likely killed by a Mexican wolf" or determination of cause of death if not wolf related within 48 hours of the investigation; and
 - b. WS State offices shall notify the Jurisdictional IFTL and the USFWS FPC of the final determination. Until a final determination is made, it is important that there is no communication from any personnel on the cause of death to avoid conflicting information provided to the permittee.
5. The Jurisdictional IFTL/designee or FPC/designee upon receiving notification from the WS investigator of an incident that has a preliminary determination of "likely killed by a Mexican wolf" will contact the affected resource owner and implement IFT management actions as determined to be necessary based on the totality of circumstances to mitigate any active or potential wolf conflict.
6. Upon receiving the final determination and report, the Jurisdictional IFTL/designee shall assign the depredation incident to a specific wolf/wolves, uncollared, or unknowns and enter it into the database. The Jurisdictional IFTL shall be responsible for contacting other IFT leaders or other sources of relevant information as necessary to complete the assignment (Note: if differences of viewpoint among the IFT personnel on assigning the depredation to a specific wolf or wolves the decision will fall to the Jurisdictional IFT lead). The database shall clearly indicate whether the reported depredation has been determined to be a depredation incident (See USFWS annual reports for definitions).
7. After completing a database entry, the Jurisdictional IFTL/designee shall coordinate with the FPC and other IFTLs to initiate discussion regarding any additional management response(s)/recommendation(s) that may be needed.
8. The requirements above apply equally to public, state, and private lands, but they do not apply to Tribal lands (the latter including WMAT and SCAT lands) unless the appropriate Tribal authority voluntarily adopts them within the framework of their USFWS-approved wolf management plan.
9. Project management response.
 - a. In accordance with 2022 10(j) rule, wolves that are considered problem wolves, including those that were involved in a depredation on lawfully present domestic animals or involved in nuisance behavior, may be subject to control actions, such as, intentional or opportunistic harassment, nonlethal control measures, translocation, placement in captivity, or lethal control.

Approvals: The Interagency Field Team developed this SOP, the Management and Executive Teams provided review, information and advice, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Southwest Regional Director approved on September 26, 2024.

References:

Bangs, E.E., S.H. Fritts, J.A. Fontaine, D.W. Smith, K.M. Murphy, C.M. Mack, and C.C. Niemeyer. 1998. Status of gray wolf restoration in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 26:785-798.