U.S. Fish and Widlife Service
Region 2
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Decision Notice
and
Finding of no Significant Impact
To Construct Mexican Wolf Release Pens in the Apache National Forest, Arizona

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Contents

Click here to see a schematic of the wolf release pens.

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The attached Environmental Assessment (EA), which is incorporated herein by reference, discusses the proposed construction of Mexican wolf release pens in the Apache National Forest, Arizona. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) proposes to build small chain-link fence pens on up to three of seven designated potential release pen sites (shown in maps attached to the EA as Appendix B) beginning in November, 1997. The three sites designated for pen construction in 1997 are Campbell Blue, Hawk's Nest, and Turkey Creek. The FWS will acclimate wolves in the pens for up to several months before release. The four sites that are not built on in 1997, i.e., Crow Poison, Engineer Spring, Pace Creek, and XXX Ranch, are designated as potential future release pen sites, where pens may be built as needed during the Mexican wolf reintroduction effort.

Pursuant to 50 CFR 1508.20 and 1508.28, the EA tiers off of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) issued in 1996 by the FWS entitled "Reintroduction of the Mexican Wolf Within its Historic Range in the Southwestern United States". The FEIS addresses all anticipated effects of wolf reintroduction in the area, except for the site-specific pen construction and related effects that are addressed in the EA. The EA and FEIS are available from: Mr. David R. Parsons, Mexican Wolf Recovery Leader, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Office, P.O. Box 1306, Albuquerque, NM 87103-1306.

Three alternatives were considered in the EA: 1) Alternative A - (Proposed Action): Release Pens with Limited Restrictions on Public Access and Disturbance-Causing Land Uses;

2) Alternative B: Release Pens Only with No Restrictions; and 3) Alternative C: No Action.

Based on the analysis and evaluation in the EA, it is my decision to approve the Proposed Action and Preferred Alternative, Alternative A - the construction of Mexican wolf release pens in the Apache National Forest, Arizona, with limited restrictions on public access and disturbance-causing land uses, including the Mitigation Measures therein. This alternative best fits the requirements of Mexican wolf reintroduction while minimizing potential impacts.

An Environmental Impact Statement on the Proposed Action is not required. This action does not significantly affect the quality of the biological or human environment, there are no major cumulative or secondary environmental effects, and there are no adverse effects on threatened or endangered species. The proposal conforms with all applicable laws and regulations. Implementation may take place immediately.

Signed by the Regional Director, Nancy Kaufman, November 3, 1997

Environmental Action Memorandum

Within the spirit and intent of the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other statutes, orders, and policies that protect fish and wildlife resources, I have established the following administrative record and have determined that the action of: construction of Mexican wolf release pens in the Apache National Forest, Arizona.

is a categorical exclusion as provided by 516 DM 6 Appendix 1. No further documentation will be made.

is found not to have significant environmental effects as determined by the attached Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact.

is found to have special environmental conditions as described in the attached Environmental Assessment. The attached Fining of No Significant Impact will not be final nor any actions taken pending a 30-day period for public review (40 CFR 1501.4 (d)(2)).

is found to have significant effects, and therefore, a "Notice of Intent" will be published in the Federal Register to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement before the project is considered further.

is denied because of environmental damage, Service policy, or mandate.

is an emergency situation. Only those actions necessary to control the immediate impacts of the emergency will be taken. Other related actions remain subject to NEPA review.

Other Supporting Documents: Environmental Assessment tiered off of Environmental Impact Statement.

Regional Director, Nancy Kaufman, signed 11/3/97

Initiator - Wildlife Biologist, Wendy Brown, signed 10/30/97

Mexican Wolf Recovery Leader, David Parsons, signed 10/30/97

Regional Environmental Coordinator, Roy Perez, signed 10/30/97

GM (New Mexico)/ARD (Ecological Services), Ren Lohoefener, signed 10/31/97

Environmental Assessment for the Construction of Mexican Wolf Release Pens in the Apache National Forest, Arizona

INTRODUCTION

The Mexican wolf (*Canis lupis baileyi*) has been extirpated from the wild in the United States, with the last known wolf being taken in 1970 (Brown 1983). The status of the Mexican wolf in Mexico is uncertain, but very few are thought to remain in the wild, and the existence of viable populations is extremely unlikely. The Mexican wolf was eradicated largely through persistent control efforts undertaken to eliminate depredation of livestock. In 1976, the Mexican wolf was officially listed as an endangered species under the provisions of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended. The ESA establishes the policy that all Federal agencies "shall utilize their authorities in furtherance of the purposes of this Act." The ESA also requires the Secretary of Interior to "develop and implement plans...for the conservation and survival of endangered species."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) approved the Mexican Wolf Recovery Plan in 1982 (USFWS 1982). The Recovery Plan recognizes that recovery of this subspecies requires re-establishment in suitable habitats within its historic range. The specific recovery objective for the Mexican wolf is "to conserve and ensure the survival of *Canis lupis baileyi* by maintaining a captive breeding program and re-establishing a viable, self-sustaining population of at least 100 Mexican wolves in the middle to high elevations of a 5,000-square-mile area within the Mexican wolf's historic range". The FWS has achieved the first part of this objective, having supported and overseen the breeding program for the Mexican wolf captive population that currently consists of 178 animals. In furtherance of the second part of the recovery objective, i.e., reintroduction, the FWS has held several groups of Mexican wolves in isolated pens designed to reduce contact with humans and to prepare candidate wolves for release to the wild.

In June 1995, the FWS issued its Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), entitled "Reintroduction of the Mexican Wolf Within its Historic Range in the Southwestern United States" for public review (USFWS 1995). Approximately 18,000 people and organizations participated during the comment period in a variety of ways. Fourteen public open house meetings were held in addition to three formal public hearings. Each comment was reviewed and considered in preparation of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), released in December 1996 (USFWS 1996). The Preferred Alternative in the FEIS calls for the gradual release of about 15 pairs, or family groups, of captive-raised Mexican wolves into the designated Primary Recovery Zone within the Apache National Forest in east-central Arizona. Releases will continue until reproduction in the wild is able to sustain the population. Wolves released in the Apache National Forest will be allowed to disperse throughout the entire Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area (BRWRA) which encompasses both the Apache National Forest and the adjacent Gila National Forest.

The FEIS addresses all anticipated effects of wolf recovery in the BRWRA, except for the site-specific pen construction and related effects that are addressed in this Environmental Assessment (EA). This EA thus "tiers off" the contents of the FEIS, which are incorporated herein by reference, pursuant to 50 CFR 1508.20 and 1508.28. The FEIS should be referred to for a detailed description of the Mexican wolf

reintroduction project. (The FEIS and other FWS documents referred to herein are available from the Mexican Wolf Recovery Leader at the FWS Regional Office in Albuquerque.)

On March 4, 1997, the Secretary of the Department of the Interior signed the Notice of Record of Decision and Statement of Findings on the Environmental Impact Statement on Reintroduction of the Mexican Gray Wolf to its Historic Range in the Southwestern United States. The Secretary's decision authorizes implementation of the Preferred Alternative in the FEIS. A concurrence in the Record of Decision was signed by the Secretary of Agriculture because of the involvement of the National Forests. Pursuant to that concurrence, the U.S. Forest Service is conducting its own environmental review of the proposed release pen construction.

Initially, the FWS and cooperating agencies will reintroduce up to three pairs or family groups of captive-raised Mexican wolves using a "soft release" method. A soft release involves holding the family groups in separate, temporary, secure, chain-link pens within the BRWRA Primary Recovery Zone for up to several months before releasing them.

PURPOSE, NEED, AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the release pens is to hold the release candidates in order to acclimate them and increase their affinity for the area (Fritts 1992). At the appropriate time, to be determined by the FWS Mexican Wolf Recovery Leader, the gates will be opened and the wolves allowed to leave. The Service has determined that construction of the temporary "soft release" pens is needed to carry out the reintroduction, which is needed to begin the recovery of the Mexican wolf. No existing pens are available that could serve the same purpose in the BRWRA Primary Recovery Zone.

Specific objectives are to: (1) provide three pens for releasing captive-raised Mexican wolf pairs or family groups into the BRWRA Primary Recovery Zone in the late winter or spring of 1998; (2) provide a temporary, safe, secure environment for the wolves slated for release; (3) minimize the exposure of wolves to humans and disturbance-causing land uses during acclimation; (4) minimize National Forest impacts by locating release pens away from heavy-use trails, recreation areas, and roads; (5) place wolves in the vicinity of native prey; (6) minimize the wolves' exposure to livestock during the initial release phase; (7) place pens near perennial water sources; (8) place pens at adequate distances from recovery boundaries, human habitations, and other pen sites; and (9) provide for an average of three future release pen sites annually in the BRWRA, for approximately the succeeding four years, until no further releases are necessary.

IMPACT ISSUES ADDRESSED

Consideration of the likely areas of potential impacts by the FWS and the interagency pen site selection team (discussed below) led to a focus in this EA on four topic areas: 1) biological impacts, 2) archaeological impacts, 3) public access impacts, and 4) land use impacts. These are addressed under each alternative herein.

ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

Introduction

This section first describes the specifications of the release pens and the immediate effects associated with their construction. It then describes the temporary restrictions on public access and disturbance-causing land uses that would be associated with each occupied release pen under the Mexican wolf experimental population rule. The process of selection of the seven potential pen sites is described and then the Proposed Action and two alternative approaches to accomplishing wolf releases within the BRWRA Primary Recovery Zone are addressed.

Specifications of Release Pens

The release pens will be separated by several miles; each pen will occupy approximately 0.33 acres. An average of three pens will be constructed or used each year, at three of the seven potential sites discussed herein, for approximately three to five years. Pens will be constructed of 10' x 10' pre-constructed, self-supporting panels of heavy-gauge chain link fence with an inward 2' overhang (Figure 1). Panels will be connected above ground; there will not be a need to dig post holes. A 4' wide apron of chain link will extend from the bottom of the fence inward, to prevent wolves from digging out, and a battery-powered electric fence will deter animals from entering or escaping from the pen.

Field personnel camps will be established at sites approximately 0.25 - 0.50 miles from the pens, and will consist of wall tents and, possibly, a camp trailer. Sanitation will be provided by portable toilets. Camps will be designed to accommodate daily use by two to four people, with occasional use by up to ten. Camping will be low impact and all equipment will be promptly removed after release of the wolves. Field personnel will provide basic husbandry (food, water, etc.) and protection from disturbance for the wolves in pens. To the extent possible, wolves will be fed on the carcasses of road-killed wild game, which may need to be hauled into the sites by truck, all-terrain vehicles, or snow machines. Until fed to wolves, carcasses will be stored at facilities well away from the pens to prevent attracting other predatory animals. If not available at the site, water will be hauled in storage containers.

Figure 1 - Schematic diagram of typical wolf release pen

All pens will be located near existing roads or trails, and vehicle traffic will be confined to these roads as much as possible during and after construction. Construction of the first three pens is expected to take place in November, 1997. (Construction of any subsequent pens may be at different times of the year depending on release plans for that year.) Each pen will require approximately three to seven days of construction work, with crews of five to ten people working. Expected impacts from pen construction include minor surface disturbance from vehicle and foot traffic.

Approximately 500 linear feet of surface compaction will result from the actual placement of each of the three pens. Soil within the pens will also be compacted, and the constant presence of wolves confined to a small area will cause the temporary loss of some plants. Wolves are expected to create trails or paths for patrolling their pens and thus concentrate and limit their impacts.

Wolves will occupy pens for about six to twelve weeks during the acclimation period, which may vary by pen and by year, but will fall between approximately January 1 and May 15. Each pen will accommodate a family group (mated pair plus offspring) of three to eight wolves. Wolves will be outfitted with radio collars before entering pens. Field personnel will access the area to deliver wild game carcasses, both while the wolves are in the pens, and after animals are released, until the FWS determines the animals are successfully hunting on their own. Releases from each pen will be staggered to allow intensive monitoring of released animals. For pen sites on pastures within active livestock allotments,

wolves will be released at least 30 days prior to livestock entry onto that particular pasture.

After the wolves are released, the pens may be maintained for a short period until the wolves leave the pen area. Then, the pen gates and one or more fence panels will be removed, which will allow free access through them by wildlife or cattle. Pens may be completely taken down shortly after release, or may remain for several months or longer. This may vary by pen site. If the pen site is determined to be needed for the next wolf release season, all equipment that might be subject to vandalism or theft will be removed, leaving only the chain link fence. All pens will be completely removed when the FWS determines that no more soft releases are necessary.

Temporary Restrictions on Public Access and Disturbance-Causing Land Uses Around the Pens under the Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Rule

The area immediately surrounding pen sites will be closed during the time that wolves occupy pens.(1)

Closures may extend for up to a one-mile radius around the pens. In many cases a lesser distance will be adequate. The proposed closures or use restrictions would be flexible and on an as-needed basis to protect Mexican wolves from harm. These would not occur in such a way as to prevent access to private property or to authorized use locations on public property. No closure would exceed an area of about three square miles (i.e., a circle with a one mile radius, which is about 2,000 acres). Release pen closures would only be necessary when the pens are occupied and for the short period after release when the wolves may still be occupying the immediate pen area.

Release Pen Site Selection Process

On May 20, 1997, an interagency team of representatives from the FWS, U.S. Forest Service, Arizona Game and Fish Department, and USDA APHIS Animal Damage Control (now Wildlife Services) met to begin the soft release pen site selection process. At this meeting the criteria for selecting release sites were reviewed and approved by the group. The primary objectives of the selection criteria are to give wolves the best opportunity to begin hunting appropriate prey, to avoid livestock conflicts, and to contain wolves within the BRWRA. Impacts on local communities and traditional use activities should be minimized.

The possibility of locating a release pen within the Blue Range Primitive Area was discussed at this time. It was acknowledged that the logistical, impact, and access problems associated with release pens within the Blue Range Primitive Area would be significant. It was agreed that sites outside the Primitive Area were preferable if they met all the selection criteria. (The FWS will re-consider the option of using the Blue Range Primitive Area in the future if necessary.)

Eighteen possible sites in the BRWRA received preliminary consideration; this list was narrowed down to eight candidate sites: Campbell Flats, Crow Poison, Hannagan Meadows Heliport, Hawk's Nest Canyon, Pace Creek, Stray Horse, Turkey Creek, and XXX Ranch. Site visits were made on May 20-22 by members of the interagency team to better evaluate the eight candidate sites based on the criteria. Through this initial evaluation, one of the sites, Stray Horse, was dropped because it lacked some of the necessary selection criteria. A form was then sent to each agency for evaluating the remaining seven sites (Appendix A). These forms listed the selection criteria with a weighting factor given to each of the listed criteria. On June 25, 1997, a second meeting was held by the site selection team, which included a representative for the counties in the affected area. At this meeting the completed evaluation forms were

reviewed. A public outreach plan was also developed.

On August 6, 1997, the FWS sent an information letter to approximately 1,300 interested or potentially affected members of the public, in conjunction with a news release requesting input on the seven selected potential release pen sites by August 19, 1997. Thirty-five responses were received from individuals and twelve responses from organizations. (Copies of these comments and the FWS's responses to them are on file with the Mexican Wolf Recovery Leader at the FWS Regional Office in Albuquerque.) Ten potentially affected people in the BRWRA Primary Recovery Zone were met with directly. Through this process and additional discussions with the selection team, two additional sites, Engineer Spring and Campbell Blue, were recommended to be added to the list of potential pen sites. Also, the Campbell Flats site was dropped because a suitable pen site could not be located within the BRWRA Primary Recovery Zone and the Hannagan Meadows Heliport site was dropped due to the potential for disturbance of wolves and recreational use conflicts. Thus, the seven sites proposed here for potential use, with descriptions of their locations, are listed in Table 1. Attached maps show their locations (Appendix B).

Table 1: Locations of seven potential wolf release pen sites on the Apache National Forest.

Proposed Sites: CB-Campbell Blue, CP- Crow Poison, ES-Engineer Spring, HN-Hawk's Nest, PC-Pace Creek, TC-Turkey Creek, XXX-Triple X Ranch

Site	Road	Section	Township	Range	Elevation
CB	**Unmarked**	**36**	**41/2N**	**30E**	**7750'**
CP	**FS 59**	**20**	**6S**	**30E**	**8100'**
ES	**Unmarked**	**32E/33W**	**2N**	**29E**	**7200'**
HN	**FS 37C**	**4**	**4N**	**29E**	**8100'**
PC	**FS 281**	**20**	**41/2N**	**31E**	**7400'**
TC	**Unmarked**	**35**	**1S**	**29E**	**6000'**
XXX	**FS 475C**	**30**	**1S**	**30E**	**4400'**

Alternative A - (Proposed Action): Release Pens with Limited Restrictions on Public Access and Disturbance-Causing Land Uses

The FWS proposes to build and use wolf release pens, as described under Specifications of Release Pens, above, on up to three of seven potential release pen sites beginning in November, 1997, within the BRWRA Primary Recovery Zone. The three sites designated for pen construction in 1997 are Campbell Blue, Hawk's Nest, and Turkey Creek. The FWS and cooperating agencies will take steps that provide the greatest likelihood of successful reintroduction, including minimizing human contact with, and acclimating, the wolves in the pens for up to several months before release.

The four sites that are not built on in 1997, i.e., Crow Poison, Engineer Spring, Pace Creek, and XXX Ranch, are designated as potential future release pen sites, where pens may be built as needed during the Mexican wolf reintroduction effort as described in the Preferred Alternative in the FEIS. Reasons for

retaining or relocating pen sites in subsequent years may include: pen security, location of wolf pack territories, prey distribution and density, water access, and changes in livestock distribution and stocking dates. Other procedures may be used for the subsequent releases if determined by the FWS and cooperating agencies to be appropriate.

In addition, under the Proposed Action, the FWS and the Forest Service will restrict public access and "disturbance-causing land use activities", as defined in the draft final Mexican wolf experimental population rule. These restrictions may apply up to a one-mile radius around the release pens while occupied by wolves.

Mitigation Measures Included in the Proposed Action

As mitigation for potential effects of the Proposed Action, public information efforts will advise people in the BRWRA of the potential, temporary, limited restrictions on public access and disturbance-causing land uses associated with the pen locations. These restrictions will be the minimum necessary to avoid disturbance of the wolves. Several land uses are expressly allowed even within the one-mile radius, including those defined in the draft final Mexican wolf experimental population rule, cited in footnote 1, above. The specifically allowed uses within the closure areas with respect to release pens in the BRWRA are: (1) legally permitted livestock grazing and use of water sources by livestock; (2) livestock drives if no reasonable alternative route or timing exists; and (3) vehicle access over established roads to private property and to areas on public land where legally permitted activities are ongoing if no reasonable alternative route exists.

The Proposed Action with respect to potential use of the XXX Ranch pen site includes additional mitigation. If the site is to be used, alternative access to the trails within one mile of the pen site would be designed with the Forest Service. The closure around the pens would be applied so as not to limit public access to the nearby Blue River Corridor.

Additional biological mitigation measures described below are to be carried out by the FWS and cooperating agencies as an integral part of the Proposed Action. These will avoid any potential adverse effects to endangered species from the construction, maintenance, or dismantling of the pen sites and caretaker facilities. These measures have been provided to the FWS by the Apache National Forest in its Biological Assessment and Evaluation of the project.

Arizona hedgehog cactus - Due to the limited potential range of this cactus, the only potential sites to which the following mitigation measure applies are Turkey Creek and XXX Ranch: 1) the caretaker and release pen sites will be surveyed prior to implementing any ground-disturbing actions; no Arizona hedgehog cacti detected during these surveys will be disturbed.

Bald eagle - The following mitigation measure applies to all potential sites:

1) if a roost or nest is found within 0.25 miles of any pen site, the FWS will consult with its Arizona Ecological Services Field Office to determine whether specific conservation actions are needed.

Mexican spotted owl - The following mitigation measures apply to all potential sites:

1) surveys will be conducted for potential Mexican spotted owl (MSO) habitats within 0.25 miles of all of the proposed pen sites during 1998, even if the sites will not be used until later years; if MSOs are found, the FWS will consult with its Arizona Ecological Services Field Office to determine whether any

additional conservation actions are needed; 2) removal of pens will be delayed until after August 31 unless surveys of potentially occupiable habitat within 0.25 miles of the pens indicate that MSOs are not present; 3) noise levels during the breeding season will be minimized to avoid exceeding ambient levels, utilizing sleds or other less noisy methods to transport carcasses to the wolves; and 4) the cutting of trees will be limited in "restricted" pine-oak habitats to pine trees less than 9 inches dbh; pen locations will be selected to avoid cutting down snags.

Peregrine falcon - The following mitigation measures apply to all potential pen sites:

1) noise levels during the breeding season will be minimized to avoid exceeding ambient levels; 2) surveys for occupancy of all potentially suitable cliffs within one mile of the proposed sites will be conducted following Ward (1994); 3) attempts will be made to locate facilities associated with the caretaker and pen sites out of the line-of-sight of cliffs that might provide suitable habitat for eyrie construction; and 4) if an eyrie is found within one mile of any site, the FWS will consult with its Arizona Ecological Services Field Office to determine whether any additional conservation actions are needed.

Alternative B: Release Pens Only with No Restrictions

Under this alternative, the same seven potential sites would be used for construction of the soft release pens, using the same methods and mitigation measures as described above under Alternative A. However, unlike Alternative A, no restrictions would be imposed on public access or disturbance-causing land use in the areas around the pens. (Thus, no mitigation measures would be necessary to reduce the potential effects of those restrictions.) Anyone would be able to visit the pens at any time and conduct any otherwise-lawful activity in their immediate vicinity.

Alternative C: No Action

The no action alternative means that no pens would be built and no public access or land use restrictions imposed. Wolf releases would still occur in the BRWRA Primary Recovery Zone, but they would be straight out of a crate carried by vehicle driven into the BRWRA Primary Recovery Zone. Under this approach, the wolves likely would disperse more rapidly from the release site than under Alternative A.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A description of the BRWRA Primary Recovery Zone, which contains the seven potential release pen sites, is found in the Affected Environment section of the FEIS, which is incorporated herein by reference. That description addresses the following topics: geography, climate, water, vegetation, animals, land ownership and management, agency and local government plans and policies, land development, livestock grazing, forestry, mining and other natural resource extraction, public access and recreation, and the regional economy, employment and population. Some additional relevant site-specific information about the potential sites is contained below in the section on Environmental Consequences**.**

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

CONSEQUENCES OF ALTERNATIVE A - (PROPOSED ACTION): RELEASE PENS WITH LIMITED RESTRICTIONS ON PUBLIC ACCESS AND DISTURBANCE-CAUSING LAND USES

1. Biological Impacts

The information here was provided by the U.S. Forest Service, which undertook a Biological Assessment and Evaluation for listed and proposed species under the ESA (T. Myers, Apache National Forest). A total of 16 listed and two proposed species were analyzed.(2) The seven potential pen sites do not occur within any designated or proposed critical habitats.

Campbell Blue: No adverse effects are likely if the mitigation measures for the bald eagle, Mexican spotted owl, and peregrine falcon are implemented.

Crow Poison: No adverse effects are likely if the mitigation measures for the bald eagle, Mexican spotted owl, and peregrine falcon are implemented.

Engineer Spring: No adverse effects are likely if the mitigation measures for the bald eagle, Mexican spotted owl, and peregrine falcon are implemented.

Hawk's Nest: No adverse effects are likely if the mitigation measures for the bald eagle, Mexican spotted owl, and peregrine falcon are implemented.

Pace Creek: No adverse effects are likely if the mitigation measures for the bald eagle, Mexican spotted owl, and peregrine falcon are implemented.

Turkey Creek: No adverse effects are likely if the mitigation measures for the Arizona hedgehog cactus, bald eagle, Mexican spotted owl, and peregrine falcon are implemented.

XXX Ranch: No adverse effects are likely if the mitigation measures for the Arizona hedgehog cactus, bald eagle, Mexican spotted owl, and peregrine falcon are implemented.

2. Archaeological Impacts

The information here was provided by the U.S. Forest Service, which undertook surveys for historic and prehistoric sites at the potential pen sites (D. Hoffman, Alpine Ranger District, Apache National Forest, and R. Whitten, Clifton Ranger District, Apache National Forest).

Campbell Blue: No sites were found.

Crow Poison: No sites were found.

Engineer Spring: No sites were found.

Hawk's Nest: No sites were found.

Pace Creek: No sites were found.

Turkey Creek: No sites were found.

XXX Ranch: No sites were found.

3. Public Access Impacts

The information here was provided by the U.S. Forest Service, which reviewed the potential for public access conflicts within the one-mile temporary restriction area around the release pen sites (D. Hoffman, Alpine Ranger District, Apache National Forest, and F. Hayes, Clifton Ranger District, Apache National

Forest).

Campbell Blue: The only activity that may be affected would be reduced public access for the spring turkey hunt resulting from closure of the road within one mile of the release pens.

Crow Poison: The only activity that may be affected would be reduced public access for the spring turkey hunt resulting from closure of the road within one mile of the release pens.

Engineer Spring: The only activity that may be affected would be reduced public access for the spring turkey hunt resulting from closure of the road within one mile of the release pens.

Hawk's Nest: The only activity that may be affected would be reduced public access for the spring turkey hunt resulting from closure of the road within one mile of the release pens.

Pace Creek: The only activity that may be affected would be reduced public access for the spring turkey hunt resulting from closure of the road within one mile of the release pens.

Turkey Creek: The only activity that may be affected would be reduced public access for the spring turkey hunt resulting from closure of the road within one mile of the release pens.

XXX Ranch: The Proposed Action with respect to potential use of the XXX Ranch pen site includes additional mitigation to minimize potential public access impacts due to closure of trails and a trail head within one mile of the site . If the site is to be used, alternative access to the trails within one mile of the pen site would be designed with the Forest Service. The closure around the pens would be applied so as not to limit public access to the nearby Blue River Corridor. Reduced public access for the spring javelina hunt may result from the closures around the pen site.

4. Land Use Impacts

The information here was provided by the U.S. Forest Service, which reviewed the potential for land use conflicts within the one-mile temporary restriction area around the release pen sites (D. Hoffman and B. Dyson, Alpine Ranger District, Apache National Forest, and F. Hayes, Clifton Ranger District, Apache National Forest).

It should be noted again that under the draft final Mexican wolf experimental population rule, livestock grazing falls under the definition of land uses that are specifically allowed, i.e., would not be restricted within the one-mile radius restricted area. Furthermore, for all the potential pen sites discussed on grazing allotments, the wolves would be released more than 30 days before cattle enter the allotment, except for the Engineer Spring pen site (see discussion below). No impacts on livestock grazing are expected as a result of potential restrictions on disturbance-causing land uses. (Projected impacts on livestock grazing in the BRWRA generally from predation by wolves are assessed in the FEIS.)

Campbell Blue: This is within the Isabel Timber Sale area, which is currently under contract. However, all of the cutting units along the road that accesses the potential pen site have been harvested and the cutting units have been closed. No more timber management activities are anticipated in these units in 1998. However, in 1999 and succeeding years, tree thinning, seeding, and, possibly, prescribed burning are anticipated. These uses can be scheduled so as not to conflict with the winter/early spring potential future occupancy of the release pens. No other potentially conflicting land uses exist.

Crow Poison: No conflicting land uses exist.

Engineer Spring: The pasture of the allotment is currently winter-use only, with the cattle coming off by mid-May. The ability exists to isolate the cattle from the wolf pen site during early spring by pasture rotation. Current allotment plans call for the pasture where the proposed pen site would go to be rested in 1999. No other potentially conflicting land uses exist.

Hawk's Nest: No conflicting land uses exist.

Pace Creek: No conflicting land uses exist.

Turkey Creek: No conflicting land uses exist.

XXX Ranch: No conflicting land uses exist.

CONSEQUENCES OF ALTERNATIVE B: RELEASE PENS ONLY WITH NO RESTRICTIONS

1. Biological Impacts

For each of the pen sites involved, the biological impacts would the same as under Alternative A, that is, no adverse effects are likely if the mitigation measures are implemented. Here, however, increased disturbance to the nonessential experimental population of wolves in the pens would be expected due to the open public access. Visitation and potential disturbance from other human uses of the area could reduce the wolves' affinity for the area, before and after the releases, and could reduce the likelihood of their successfully establishing breeding populations in the BRWRA.

2. Archaeological Impacts

For each of the pen sites involved the archaeological impacts would be the same as under Alternative A, that is, no sites would be affected.

3. Public Access Impacts

No access restrictions would occur, except the minimal prevention of public use resulting from the approximately 1/3rd acre pen exclosure the wolves occupy.

4. Land Use Impacts

No land use impacts would occur, except the minimal prevention of other land uses resulting from the approximately 1/3rd acre pen exclosure the wolves occupy.

CONSEQUENCES OF ALTERNATIVE C: NO ACTION

1. Biological Impacts

No site-specific biological impacts would occur because no pen construction or other activities would occur, other than the exceedingly minor impact of temporarily driving a vehicle into the BRWRA Primary Recovery Zone and releasing the wolves.

The primary negative impact of this alternative would be the likelihood that the wolves released would lack acclimation and affinity to the designated Primary Recovery Zone. Individual wolves would be more likely to separate from their family group. This could result in increased mortality of wolves and reduced prospects for success of that release (Fritts 1992). The animals would be more likely to disperse into areas that may be less suitable. The wolves may be more likely to "home" in the direction they were

just brought from (out of the BRWRA entirely) and may be less likely to establish breeding packs. Increased management may be necessary.

2. Archaeological Impacts

No impacts would occur.

3. Public Access Impacts

No impacts would occur.

4. Land Use Impacts

No impacts would occur.

LITERATURE CITED

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LIST OF PREPARERS AND AGENCIES AND PEOPLE CONSULTED

This EA was prepared by Peter Jenkins, Wendy Brown, and Keith Rutz (Americorps) of the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program, FWS Regional Office in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

The interagency pen site selection team consisted of:

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Steve Faraizl, USDA APHIS Wildlife Services

Jim Hinkle, Arizona Game and Fish Department

Marty Moore, Apache County

Mike Rising, Apache National Forest

Additional people, beyond those listed above, consulted with in the preparation of this EA included:

U.S. Forest Service	Arizona Game and Fish Department	U.S. FWS
Randall Chavez	Dan Groebner	Ed Bangs
Jim Copeland	Terry Johnson	Steve Crozier
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Frank Hayes	Bob Vahle	Bruce Palmer
Don Hoffman		David Parsons
Sandy Knight		
Terry Myers		
Jay Stephen		
Nancy Walls		
Robert Whitten		
Don Wood		

Biological Resources Div., USGS	U.S. National Park Service	Greenlee County
Dr. L. David Mech	Mike Phillips (former position)	Rob Stokes

Additionally, the FWS sent an information letter to approximately 1,300 interested or potentially affected members of the public, in conjunction with a news release requesting input on the seven preliminarily selected potential release pen sites. Thirty-five responses were received from individuals and twelve responses from organizations. Copies of these comments and the FWS's responses to them are on file with the Mexican Wolf Recovery Leader at the FWS Regional Office in Albuquerque. Ten potentially affected people in the BRWRA Primary Recovery Zone were met with directly.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - SITE EVALUATION FORM

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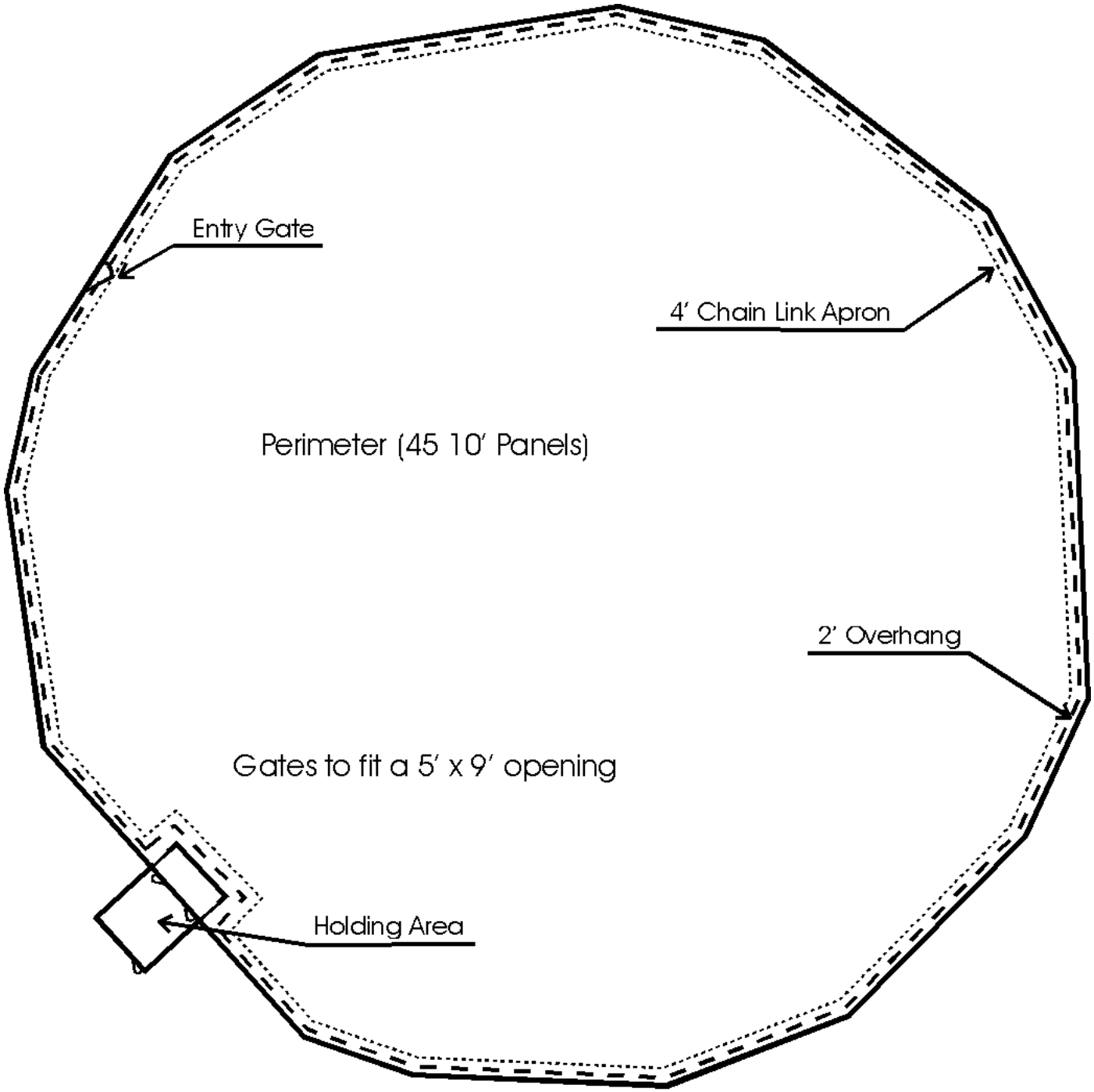

Notes:

- Each polygon side will vary in length, but will be in 10' increments to accommodate the 10' portable panels.
- The total perimeter will consist of (45) 10' x 10' panels.
- The pen configuration shown is only an example of the many possible layouts, that may or may not resemble actual field layout.

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MEXICAN WOLF SOFT RELEASE PEN SITE EVALUATION

Site:

Evaluator:

Agency:

Criteria is weighted with a factor of either (1) or (2) with (2) rating higher.

Please evaluate each of the following site criteria on a 1-5 scale with 5 rating highest:

(2)	Distance from recovery area boundaries	1 2 3 4 5
(2)	Game populations - density, distribution, seasonality	1 2 3 4 5
(2)	Livestock - density, distribution, seasonality	1 2 3 4 5
(2)	Security	1 2 3 4 5
(1)	Hunting seasons - timing and intensity of use	1 2 3 4 5
(1)	Other recreational use	1 2 3 4 5
(1)	Accessibility	1 2 3 4 5
(1)	Water availability	1 2 3 4 5
(1)	Site topography	1 2 3 4 5

Comments or issues of concern:

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1. The proposed Mexican wolf experimental population rule was attached to the DEIS as a draft and was then published in the Federal Register on May 1, 1996 (61 FR 19237-19248). Public comments were accepted on it through July 1, 1996. As a result of this public review, the FWS has refined the provision on temporary closures around release pens. Section 17.84(k)(8) of the draft final rule, which will be approved and published prior to release of the wolves, provides: "On public lands, the FWS and cooperating agencies may temporarily restrict human access and 'disturbance-causing land use activities' [see definition in Section 17.84(k)(15)] within a 1-mile radius around release pens when wolves are in them."

Section 17.84(k)(15) of the draft final rule defines a "disturbance-causing land use activity" as: "Any land use activity that the Service determines could adversely affect reproductive success, natural behavior, or survival of Mexican wolves. These activities may be temporarily restricted within a 1-mile radius of release pens, active dens, and rendezvous sites. Such activities may include, but are not limited totimber or wood harvesting, management-ignited fire, mining or mine development, camping outside designated campgrounds, livestock drives, off-road vehicle use, hunting, and any other use or activity with the potential to disturb wolves. The following activities are specifically excluded from this definition(1) legally permitted livestock grazing and use of water sources by livestock; (2) livestock drives if no reasonable alternative route or timing exists; (3) vehicle access over established roads to private property and to areas on public land where legally permitted activities are ongoing if no reasonable alternative route exists; (4) use of lands within the national park or national wildlife refuge systems as safety buffer zones for military activities; (5) prescribed natural fire except in the vicinity of release pens; and (6) any authorized, specific land use that was active and ongoing at the time wolves chose to locate a den or rendezvous site nearby."

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2. The species analyzed were the jaguar, lesser long-nosed bat, black-footed ferret, American peregrine falcon, bald eagle, Mexican spotted owl, southwestern willow flycatcher, brown pelican, Little Colorado spinedace, spikedace, Gila trout, razorback sucker, Apache trout, loach minnow, Arizona hedgehog cactus, and Parish alkaligrass (proposed). Also, the assessment noted that the pen sites were within the historic range of the now-extirpated wild Mexican wolf and it addressed potential effects of the pens on the nonessential experimental population of Mexican wolf proposed to be reintroduced.