

Denali National Park and Preserve

January to December 2020 Wolf Pack Narratives

NOTE: Pack narratives span from January 1 to December 31, 2020. Pack names are followed by the fall 2020 pack count.

Wolf identification numbers are created as follows: first two digits refer to the year they were first collared, second two digits are assigned sequentially to wolves collared for the first time that year, the first letter indicates the color of the wolf (G-gray, B-black) and the second letter indicates the sex (F-female, M-male). Thus 0811GM is a gray male wolf that was the 11th wolf collared in 2008.

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Eastern Packs

Grant Creek (13 wolves)

No additional Grant Creek wolves were collared in March of 2020. Grant Creek pack denned at the Wigand Flats Den summer 2020, and females 1402GF, 1906GF, and 1915GF have all been in attendance at the den site. Beginning around 5/29, presumed breeding male 1501GM began to travel with Eagle Gorge 1406GF in the area in where she had been ranging for the past 6 months.

No additional Grant Creek wolves were collared in November 2020. The pack recruited 4 pups for a fall count of 13. 1501GM continued traveling with 1406GF until 8/20/20 and was then alone until his death by starvation on 9/14/20. His skull, when cleaned, revealed healing puncture wounds consistent with bites from another wolf, which could potentially have been incurred at about the time of his departure from Grant Creek pack.

Riley Creek (7 wolves)

In early 2020, 1202BF began again to travel separately from 1911GM, spending increasing amounts of time around Healy and the highway. In early March she was killed ultimately by drowning in the Nenana, after having sustained several incapacitating gunshot wounds. Around this same time, another wolf joined the remaining two wolves (1911GM and one companion). In March we collared a new wolf in this pack, 2001GM. 2001GM and 1911GM did not always travel together over the spring, but the small pack denned at the traditional Tek den complex, supporting our hypothesis that the third wolf in the group is a female.

Riley Creek recruited 4 pups, for a fall pack count of 7. The pack denned in the Teklanika den complex area but used a den hole that had not been previously identified. They moved to a rendezvous site on the Sanctuary River in July. In November, we collared the adult female, 2007BF.

Sunday Creek (9 wolves)

The Sunday Creek pack was first collared in November 2019. Three wolves were collared: Adult male 1914GM, adult female 1921GF, and a female pup 1922GF. This pack resides along the northeast corner of the park. The collar on 1914GM ceased transmission shortly after capture, leaving the fate of 1914GM unknown. The pack continued to range in the Stampede Corridor area and denned this summer.

The Sunday Creek pack denned at the Dry Creek Den and recruited 6 pups. In early September, 1922GF was killed after getting caught in an out-of-season snare north of Healy. In November, we collared adult male 2012GM. The pack now consists of 3 adults and 6 pups.

Tekla (3 wolves)

The Tekla pack, which ranges north of the Stampede Corridor, was collared in November 2019. At that time, it was a pack of 10 and we collared an adult male and female 1913BM and 1912GF. Both collared animals in this pack were harvested by March 2020 (1912GF in February, 1913BM just days before March capture began), making this pack difficult to monitor. A new active den was located in the territory and was attended by the remaining members of the pack.

In November 2020 we were able to locate the pack and collar 3 adult members: 2005BM, 2006BM, and 2010GF. It seems that denning failed for this pack, as no pups were recruited. Shortly after captures, 2006BM took a foray outside the territory, and after returning to the territory still moved separately from the pack. This could indicate pre-dispersal behaviors.

Erratics (12 wolves)

This new pack was located in November of 2020 on the Erratics ridge near headquarters. We collared female pup 2013GF and adult male 2014GM. The pack consisted of 12 members, including as many as 6 pups. This pack seems to be ranging the road corridor west to Savage, Riley Creek and headwaters of the Savage, and along the Parks Highway corridor as far south as Carlo Creek.

Cantwell Creek (12 wolves)

This new pack was located in November of 2020 in the upper Cantwell Creek drainage. It consisted of 12 members. We collared adult female 2008GF and yearling 2009GF. The pack seems to be primarily on the south side of the range in the Broad Pass/Cantwell area with forays north of the range.

Western Packs

Abbie (8 wolves)

The GPS portion of 1910GF's collar failed in September 2019. Luckily in November 2019 we were able to collar 1916GM. The fall count for Abbie pack was 7 wolves. The GPS portion of 1916GM's collar failed in late April 2020. Flights documented 1910GF near the freshly-dug-out Slippery Creek den in spring 2020.

Abbie recruited 2 pups this summer, for a fall count of 8 wolves. In November 2020 we recollared 1916GM to replace his failed collar, and collared 2011GF. The pack continues to range in the Slippery, Birch, and Hauke Creek areas

Bearpaw (4 wolves)

In March 2020, we re-collared 1805GM and collared new male 2002GM. The pack again denned in the Sandless-Flume den/rondy complex. The Bearpaw pack recruited 3 pups, for a fall count of 6 wolves. Matriarch 1006BF died on 10/25/20 of unknown causes, at an impressive 10.5 years of age. The pack continues to range in its traditional territory.

Blanc (14 wolves)

Blanc appeared to establish a new den spring 2020 on the Swift Fork River near the western boundary of the park. Blanc recruited at least 5 pups, growing to a fall size of 14 wolves. The GPS portion of 1918GF's collar failed for most of the summer and fall, although by the end of December it was transmitting more regularly again. Blanc continues to range in the far southwestern corner of the park and beyond.

Eagle Gorge (0 wolves)

Since April 2019, 1406GF has been traveling alone, ranging in an area that generally includes the southern Kantishna Hills south to the McKinley River and east to the Toklat. 1406GF continued to range primarily in the Kantishna Hills winter and spring 2020. Beginning May 29th, she was joined by 1501GM of Grant Creek and they began traveling together.

After spending much of the summer with 1501GM, 1406GF was again alone by late August. Although she was alive October 1st, for a fall pack count of 1, on October 5th she was killed by wolves, likely the Grant Creek Pack.

John Hansen (4 wolves)

Our ability to monitor this pack was hampered beginning in summer 2019: the six-year-old 1707BF died of unknown natural causes (likely starvation) in September, and nine-year-old 1302M separated from the pack by mid-summer. In addition, 1302GM's collar was failing making him difficult to impossible to locate. Reports from Lake Minchumina confirmed that a resident pack still existed, but the full pack count was unknown. Four wolves, including 1302, were seen together in late September 2019.

In March 2020, we were able to collar two members of this pack, 2003GM and 2004GM. We are confident they are a continuation of the same pack based on aerial sightings and range. In spring 2020 2004GM dispersed to the northeast. The pack denned at Deep-Woman Den as in the previous year.

John Hansen did not recruit any pups in 2020, despite evidence of denning. The fall pack size was 4 wolves. The pack continues to range in the Minchumina area.

North Face (6 wolves)

The North Face pack got its name as its first member, 1917GM, was captured in November 2019 on the tundra bench just across from the North Face lodge in Kantishna. The next day we collared his companion, female 1920GF. So far their relatively small territory includes the Moose Creek drainage, Thorofare pass, and south to Clearwater Creek. Fall count was 2 wolves. North Face pack continued ranging in the same area through spring 2020. They denned at the Pirate Creek den. No additional adults were seen with the pack.

North Face pack recruited 4 pups, a good number for only a pair of adults. They continued to range in the Wonder Lake/Moose Creek to Turtle Hills area.

Roosevelt (14 wolves)

The Roosevelt pack remained at 12 strong through spring 2020. The pack denned at the Roosevelt Den on the Kantishna River.

The Roosevelt pack continues to be a powerhouse, recruiting 6 pups for a fall pack size of 14 animals. However even a pack this large still has some challenges: a monitoring flight in August saw the pack scattered by a bear charging into a kill site. The GPS portion of 1904GF's collar failed in late September.

Sesui (1 wolf)

In September 2019 the previously lone wolf, 1808GM picked up a companion, and we were able to collar her in November 2019 (1919GF), resulting in a fall count of 2. The Sesui pair denned at the Herron-Castle den spring 2020. No additional adults have been observed with the pack.

The Sesui pack had a difficult summer. At least 4 pups were sighted, but by mid-September the pack was so low-energy that the pups did not even lift their heads in response to the plane overhead. On September 18th, 1919GF died of starvation, and although her body was consumed, the pups were never seen again. The end of the year sees this pack back to the single male 1808GM.

Dispersers

Sometimes wolves collared in the Denali Wolf Project Study Area end up dispersing to areas far away. With the use of collars that collect GPS location data and transmit the data via the Iridium satellite network, we have been able to document the movements of these wolves. However, given the distance from the main study area, our aerial tracking flights do not cover these wolves' ranges so we know do not know if these wolves are traveling with other wolves or have started a new pack.

June 2020:

2004GM: At this time the only dispersing individual is 2004GM from the John Hansen Pack. He dispersed to the northeast and has been hanging around in the Minto Lakes area.

1905GM: 1905GM died of unknown causes April 2020.

December 2020:

2004GM: remains in the Minto Lakes area. His movement suggests territory maintenance and he is likely part of a pack there.