

Denali National Park and Preserve

January to December 2024 Wolf Pack Narratives

NOTE: Pack narratives span from January 1 to December 31, 2024. Pack names are followed by the October 1 2024 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 2108GM is a gray male wolf that was the 8th wolf collared in 2021.

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Eastern Packs

Erratics (4 wolves)

Erratics pack began the year with a pack count of 6 in March. No additional wolves were collared in March. The Erratics pack again denned in the Carlo Pass den, and had no obvious rendezvous sites. They recruited just 1 pup, and had a fall pack size of 4. We collared 2411GF in November, a young adult female. Back in early 2023, 2013GF had dispersed outside of the park and traveled east past the Richardson Highway. GPS locations indicated that she died in October 2023. In fall 2024, we received confirmation that 2013GF was harvested.

Serena (3 wolves)

This pack began the year with a spring count of 8 wolves. We did not add any additional collars in March. Breeding female 2309GF's collar went into mortality mode on May 10th, and we discovered that she had died of a ruptured uterus associated with late-stage pregnancy or labor complications. Her five unborn pups perished with her. This event seemed to have a large impact on pack dynamics, as remaining collared animals 2113GM and 2307GF both soon began to travel separately outside their traditional pack territory. 2113GM became a local disperser (see Dispersers), but 2307GF eventually returned to Serena's territory and in November 2024, we collared large adult male 2406GM with 2307GF. The pack had a fall count of 3 wolves.

Riley Creek (13 wolves)

The reign of Riley Creek as a large and successful pack continued. They had a March count of 13 animals. In March we re-collared breeding male 1911GM, who is currently the oldest wolf in our monitoring pool; we estimated that he was born May 2015, making him over 10 years old in late 2024. Despite his age and the loss of sight in one eye, he remains a fearless individual, who even charged and tried to attack the helicopter when it pursued him. We also collared a younger female, 2401GF, in March. The pack denned at a new site on the Sanctuary River and recruited 6 pups. In November we collared adult female 2410BF. The fall count for Riley Creek remained 13 wolves. In mid-December, 2410BF left the Riley Creek pack and almost immediately joined with 2308GM (see Dispersers).

Wigand (5 wolves)

The Wigand pack began as a pair that were collared in the spring of 2024, consisting of a large grey male, 2403GM, and reddish-coated female, 2404GF. In the short time between placing the collar and completing the activation procedure from the office, 2403GM's collar went off-air and disappeared. 2404GF went on to whelp in the central Wigand flats, with help from a new black male that was seen during aerial monitoring flights. They recruited 3 pups, for a fall pack size of 5 wolves. In November 2024, we collared 2404GF's companion, 2413BM. He had about a dozen porcupine quills in his mouth and lips at the time of capture, which we removed for him. An observation during an aerial monitoring flight shortly before November capture operations illustrated the tenacity of 2404GF, and how pups have a learning process to become effective hunters:

"I heard and located her [2404GF] in the NE Wyoming hills. Was the same two adults and 3 pups that I saw on the 27th. They were trudging slowly up a steep hill south bound towards the big draw that runs into the E. Fork. They were spaced out with the black male and pups roughly a half mile behind her. She was just cresting out on top when I

saw her and a herd of sheep that were also on top of the flat plateau. There were a dozen rams and around 24 ewes and lambs for around 30 head total. She saw them at the same time they saw her and the race was on for escape terrain. Sheep had a solid 200 meter head start but she managed to close the distance to a whisker just as they passed thru some cobble stones. The sheep never faltered but it caused her to fall back. She countered by switching to the other side of the flock out of the rocks and managed to gain on that side and was able to grab a lamb just before they reached some rocky cliffs. She grabbed it by the back leg and they then pinwheeled around in circles for a fair while, as she didn't dare let go for a more lethal hold. Eventually they fell off over the steep side of a hill and spun their way down it a fair way before coming to a stop. Meanwhile the black male was just now getting to the top of the hill where the chase started and you could see him pick up speed as his nose started to tell him what had transpired. He started to run and with just one hesitation when he came to the spot they had veered off over the side, he quickly worked that out and shot over the side to help 2404GF finish the job. I stuck around to see the pups join the feast, but when they eventually lolly-gagged their way to the top and picked up the scent trail, they overshot the veered off corner and continued on into the herd of sheep now standing on the top of a cliff area. They messed around looking at them but never made a chase towards them. When I left, they were still milling about trying to sort out where the adults had gone.”

Unfortunately, 2404GF was harvested in December in the Stampede.

Lynx Mountain (8 wolves)

After Bearpaw female 2301BF dispersed in April of 2023, she appeared to settle later that year in a territory to the northeast of the Park. Because she was outside the study area, and in an area of thick vegetation, monitoring opportunities were limited. In 2024, her GPS locations revealed denning behavior, and a flight in late fall found that she was in a pack of 8, including some pups. Monitoring of this pack will likely remain very limited.

Western Packs

Abbie (8 wolves)

Abbie continued to be a strong pack in 2024. They had a March count of 8 wolves, and we did not add any additional collars. Right around whelping time in May, 2308GM began making forays outside the territory. They grew longer and longer until he was fully dispersed (see Dispersers). The pack denned at a new site on the Muddy River, and recruited 4 pups. In November we collared a very small light-colored female 2409GF, of similar coloring to 2112GF. The pack had a fall count of 8 wolves.

Bearpaw (4 wolves)

The Bearpaw pack started the year with 2 wolves, who continued to maintain a territory primarily to the north of the park, in the area of the Bearpaw mountains. Limited monitoring was conducted on this pack, but they did den and recruit 2 pups, for a fall count of 4 wolves.

Glacier City (1 wolf)

Glacier City pack seemed to struggle this year. They had a spring count of 4 wolves. In March 2024, we recollared breeding female 1904GF, and also collared a younger female, 2402GF. In late April, 2402GF began to move separately from 1904GF, first within the territory and then ranging by herself to the west of the traditional territory, with occasional returns (see Spyglass). The large uncollared black male that had been the presumed breeding male had not been seen with the pack since late in 2023, and neither 1904GF nor 2402GF showed any signs of denning through patterns of GPS locations, and pups were never seen. 1904GF was consistently seen alone through the end of the year, for a fall pack size of 1.

Roosevelt (2 wolves)

Roosevelt remained a small pack this year. 1903BF picked up a companion over the winter, for a spring count of 2 wolves. She denned at a her previously used densite on the Kantishna, but no pups were ever seen. In November 2024, we replaced her collar, and found her to be in good health although all four of her canine teeth were broken – a level of wear not uncommon for wolves of her age (8 years old). The pack's fall count remained at 2 wolves.

Spyglass (2 wolves)

Spyglass pack began the year with 3 wolves, but breeding male 2208GM died of unknown natural causes in early March, and the remaining pup from the summer of 2023 was not seen with 1918GF after that. There was no indication that 1918GF denned. In November 2024, we discovered the 1918GF had a new companion, a younger black male that we collared as 2408GM, for a fall pack size of 2. In early December, the Spyglass pair and local disperser 2402GF (originally from Glacier Creek pack) converged on Slippery Creek. All three wolves remained in a small area around a caribou kill for a week, at which time 1918GF died. Three days later, 2408BM and 2402GF left the area together. We consider 2402GF to have become a member of Spyglass at this time. The exact nature of the interactions that took place will remain a mystery.

Kotahino (10 wolves)

This pack kept surprising us. Despite ending 2023 with 2306GF seemingly alone, in March she had 2 companions for a pack count of 3. 2306GF denned on a birch knob, but the largely forested areas of her territory made obtaining visual counts challenging. She was seen once during the summer with 5 black pups on a riverbank. However, during November captures we found her to be part of a pack of 10, including 6 black pups. In November we collared adult black male 2407BM. In late December 2306GF's collar registered a mortality signal, but her cause of death remains unknown at this time.

Sesui (8 wolves)

In a great comeback story, this pack that seemed to be on the edge of dissolution by the end of 2023 apparently managed to pull through in 2024. Although we lost collar monitoring of Sesui in late 2023, snow tracking in early 2024 confirmed that several wolves remained in the traditional Sesui territory. In March 2024, we captured and collared a young adult female, 2405GF, who was traveling with two pups, a grouping which matched the expected remnants of Sesui. All three were in poor condition. Another grey was seen with them later in March, for a spring count

of 4. 2405GF's subsequent GPS locations were in former Sesui territory, and we consider them a continuation of the Sesui pack. 2405GF denned on the Foraker River, and recruited 5 pups, for a fall count of 8. In November we collared a large grey male, 2412GM, from this pack.

Packs No Longer Monitored

Grant Creek (0 wolves)

We suspected that a pack of 3-4 wolves remained from the Grant Creek pack in late winter 2024, following the loss of the three collared individuals in January 2024. However, we were unable to confirm or relocate the suspected remaining members during aerial tracking in March, and the pack was considered dissolved after spring.

Blanc (0 wolves)

The only animal remaining in this pack, 2211BF, had moved west from the original territory in 2023, and was residing too far outside the park for regular monitoring. Her collar stopped uploading GPS locations in mid-January of 2024, so little is known about her movements. We received a mortality signal from the collar far west of the park and south of Telida in late September 2024. That marked the end of monitoring of the Blanc pack.

Dispersers

Many wolves will “disperse” or leave their pack, typically on reaching adulthood. They do this in order to start their own pack and reproduce. They may find a mate and start a pack, or sometimes join an existing pack. Dispersals can be as short as the neighboring territory, or stretch hundreds of miles. Sometimes wolves collared in the Denali Wolf Project Study Area end up dispersing to areas far away beyond the boundaries of the Park. 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 they are traveling with other wolves or have started a new pack.

2305GM, from Kotahlno: 2305GM dispersed well to the west of the park in 2023. Due to his distance, no monitoring flights were able to reach him. In early summer of 2024 his GPS locations indicated that he was likely attending a den, so we presume he was with a pack. The GPS portion of his collar went offline in early June, ending our ability to monitor him. His fate is unknown.

2308GM, from Abbie: 2308GM began spending increasing amounts of time away from the pack and territory beginning in May. Eventually he separated from his pack completely, but remained largely within the park ranging widely around the entire eastern area of the park. He likely encountered other packs and other dispersers, including 2113GM, as indicated by their GPS location data. On December 15th he began traveling with 2410BF, who had departed from

the Riley Creek pack just two days prior. It remains to be seen if they will be able to maintain a territory and become a pack.

2113GM, from Serena: For the second time in his life, 2113GM became a roamer. Born in the North Face pack, he spent over six months in 2021 and 2022 as a local disperser after the dissolution of his natal pack. In spring of 2022, he joined 1915GF and other wolves from Grant Creek to form the Serena pack. The death of Serena's breeding female 2309GF at the time of whelping in May 2024 seemed to prompt his departure from other members of the Serena pack, and he left the territory and began moving independently from other Serena wolves in late June. We suspect that he was the dominant breeding male of the Serena pack, and thus the composition of the pack in 2024 following the death of 2309GF likely left only related females in the pack, meaning that he would need to leave to seek future breeding opportunities with other wolves. He ranged around the entire eastern area of the park. In early December, his collar stopped uploading GPS locations while in the Stampede corridor. When staff investigated, his last locations were at a site with evidence of trapping, and he is presumed to have been harvested.