



## WAYPOINT

SUCCESS STORIES FROM ABOVE

February 2010 Issue 37

LightHawk's monthly update, WayPoint, was created to highlight the impact of our work. Each edition covers one specific flight, or series of flights, and illustrates how LightHawk advances conservation efforts throughout North and Central America through the unique perspective of flight. We hope you enjoy WayPoint and will share with others our success stories from above.

### Beyond Priority Boarding Endangered Mexican Wolves Fly LightHawk to New Homes



Catella, an endangered Mexican wolf, was recently flown by LightHawk volunteer pilots Tom Haas and Janice Newman from the Smithsonian's National Zoo in Washington, DC to the Wildlife West Nature Park south of Albuquerque, New Mexico. Both facilities are part of the international Mexican Wolf Species Survival Plan breeding program.



Haas and Newman touch down in Albuquerque, New Mexico with wolves Catella, Nieta and Cheveya on board.

*When you get to the airport, there's no shuffling through security checkpoints or waiting for your boarding group to be called. And forget about multi-hour layovers and lost luggage. LightHawk volunteer pilots like Tom Haas (NH) and Janice Newman (NH) appreciate these little perks of private aviation. A few days before last Christmas, they shared this experience with some unconventional passengers: a pack of endangered wolves.*

In late December, LightHawk board member Tom Haas had just taken delivery of a new Pilatus PC-12 turbo prop. He was also scheduled by Kelley Tucker, Eastern Region Program Manager, to fly his first mission as a volunteer pilot. "We were flying back from Denver with the plane on Saturday and the next day, we were pulling out the seats to make room for the wolves," remembers Tom. That evening, Tom and co-pilot Janice Newman flew from their home base in Portsmouth, New Hampshire to Manassas, Virginia to meet representatives of the Smithsonian National Zoological Park and three animals who would fly to a new home at the Wildlife West Nature Park in Albuquerque, New Mexico the next morning.

The wolves on the outbound leg of this two-part mission are important members of the international Mexican Wolf Species Survival Plan (SSP) breeding program. An 11-year old male, Cheveya, suffers from chronic lameness in his right front leg. A large new pen, the mild climate and flat terrain in New Mexico are expected to benefit his condition. Four-year-old sisters, Catella and Nieta, are part of Cheveya's breeding group and keeping these animals together is important for wolf pack hierarchy and structure. With major renovations slated to begin near the wolves' enclosure at the Smithsonian National Zoo and their inability to tolerate stress, it was best to relocate this breeding group.

#### **The Plight of the Endangered Mexican Wolf**

Mexican wolves once roamed throughout Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Mexico. As human settlement increased



Volunteer pilot Jan Newman (in plane) helps unload the wolves from Haas' plane. Burlap was used to block the front grate and cardboard was affixed to the sides so the wolves would not be exposed to their surroundings until they were in their new enclosure.



Having been quickly and safely transferred from the Smithsonian's National Zoo, a Mexican wolf is released in its new home at Wildlife West Nature Park.

in the late 1880s, wolves came into conflict with livestock operations and an eradication program began to take its toll. By 1970, Mexican wolves were gone from the southwest US, and only a few remained in Mexico. In 1976, they were assigned endangered status. Over the next three years, the 5 remaining wolves they could find in Mexico were live trapped and placed in captive situations. Along with two pairs of wolves already in captivity, they became the basis of a captive breeding/reintroduction program that continues to this day. Given their small numbers, combined with the steady success of the animals that have been returned to the wild, every wolf in the program is very important to the success of the reintroduction effort.

Linda Moore, former senior biologist at National Zoological Park, and member of the Mexican Wolf SSP, flew on the westbound journey and talked about the significance of the relationship between LightHawk and the SSP, "Without LightHawk, our wolves would have been transported by FedEx, which would have meant a layover in Memphis of at least 6 hours. We also would have been forced to capture and crate the wolves either the day before, meaning a total time in crates of well over 24 hours, or risk everyone's safety by doing it in the dark the morning of the flight. With LightHawk, we were able to capture and crate the wolves in the morning, meet the plane on the tarmac... and load the crates directly from the van onto the plane. Wolves are very shy creatures, and are greatly affected by anything out of their routine. Transporting these animals is stressful on them and their caregivers. LightHawk understood this and made the entire process run smoothly and efficiently."

#### **Westbound Wolf Pack, Eastbound Bachelorette**

Monday morning, as Tom and Janice were performing their routine safety checks and getting the plane ready for flight, the wolves arrived. "The handlers came out onto the tarmac with three large dog crates," remembers Tom. "The windows were covered with burlap so the wolves couldn't see out and become scared by their new surroundings. They weren't drugged; they were just calmly sitting in the back of their crates. We didn't hear a peep or a yip out of them the entire flight."

After the six-hour flight, the team landed in Albuquerque to a crowd of wolf greeters. "The folks who met us at the airport were so excited to see us. There were lots of smiles and photos," said Tom. Making the eastbound return trip was a lone nine-year-old female known as #749 who had suffered the unexpected loss of her mate and then pups just months before their scheduled release back into the wild. With perhaps the longest trip for a blind date, 749 was successfully delivered to the Wolf Conservation Center in New York to find a new mate. Recent updates suggest she has sprung back to health and will be paired soon with one of three new potential suitors.

"The Mexican wolf Species Survival Program needs to transport wolves on a routine basis in order to accommodate breeding... and transfers of wolves from one facility to another...It is [our] hope that a partnership with



Volunteer pilot Tom Haas with Roger Alink, Founder of Wildlife West Nature Park after delivering the wolves, Catella, Nieta and Cheveya, to their new home just in time for Christmas.

LightHawk would help alleviate many of the problems associated with our transports," explains Linda Moore.

LightHawk will attend the SSP gathering this July to explore a partnership that will ensure wolves in the program can continue to fly LightHawk and be treated more like first class passengers rather than cargo.

## About LightHawk

What started in 1979 with one man and a vision has grown to over 170 volunteer pilots flying missions across the U.S., into Canada, through Mexico and down to Panama. Today, LightHawk is the oldest and largest nonprofit, volunteer pilot-based organization flying environmental missions in collaboration with hundreds of partner organizations.

At LightHawk we believe the view from the window of a small airplane provides a powerful and effective platform for research, ground-truthing, environmental awareness, and education.

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