

## **Letter to Idaho State Senate: Do wolves really need to be managed?**

The Honorable Senator Monty Pearce, Chairman;  
The Honorable Senator Dean Cameron;  
The Honorable Senator Bert Brackett;  
The Honorable Senator Lee Heider ;  
The Honorable Senator Jeff Siddoway;  
The Honorable Senator Michelle Stennett;  
The Honorable Senator John Tippetts;  
The Honorable Senator Elliot Werk;  
Juanita Budell, Secretary;

Do wolves really need to be managed? Society has determined that hunting cougars and bears serves appropriate human purposes. Those purposes could be management of cougar and bear numbers to avoid loss of livestock, predation of other wildlife resources, concern for human safety and also – the desire by humans to hunt cougars and bears.

So why not wolves also ? I'd also like to mention to you that cougars and bears have been put under tremendous stress due to the over abundance of the over protected wolves in Idaho. When we wonder about what is really happening in our forests we should be concerned for all of our wild life, not just that wild life which we personally favor or use. In my many travels through many sections of the Sawtooth hunt units I have observed amazing changes of our wild life which in my opinion are far from healthy, severe wild life losses are occurring, which includes the lower Frank Church, as well as the Boise River country, I use several surrounding units also. You see folks, I don't work, I ride my horses, and pack my mules, and I travel miles through those lands admiring them.

During the last four decades I accumulated 28,000 hours, exploring, scouting, fishing, hunting, and antler shed harvesting, and gold nugget hunting. I've learned in those years how the elk and deer migrated along the same routes annually, consistently. This knowledge of my surroundings gave me a keen insight into where the ungulates were, according to early archery hunting pressure, the weather, and the rifle hunting pressure. You know a migration route, you will harvest and fill your freezer with elk. All you need is patience. So the point I wish to make is this, the Sawtooth Zone contains units 33-34-35-36, below this Zone is the Boise River Zone, unit 39, which extends well into the Sawtooth Wilderness. And of course the Sawtooth Zone extends into the Frank Church Wilderness, and north of that Zone are the units 25-26-27- So we have a massive migration of ungulates that move down from units 25-26-27- into 33-34-35-36.

And to the southern end of these Sawtooth Units we have more migrations which occur, ungulates leaving the units 33-34-35-36, move into Units 39-48-49-44-and 43. Elk from 39 move into unit 45. So for the state I.D.F.G. to helpfully confess that the Sawtooth Zone has suffered over predation by wolves is correct, and they should have explained to you and the unknowing public that this should include the surrounding hunt units, which have also seen available hunting tag opportunity reductions. Let me point out that the units 43-44-48-49 to the

south of the Sawtooth and Boise hunt Zones are controlled elk, draw only, while the units to the north are general season units.

All are effected. Now while I do spend a lot of time in these places, traveling 2 to 3 thousand miles annually on horse back spring to fall snows, the really truly defining aspect of this personal study and observation of many years to compare with what I was used to seeing and what I am not seeing now, is the winter ranges those ungulates frequented for the majority of my life time, and the amazing declines from 1994 to 2011. In 1990 at the Bennett Hills Wintering grounds to the South of Bennett Mountain, elk and deer from the northern unit 39 were pushing ten thousand elk, and 6 to 8 thousand deer. This winter we might have had 1500 elk in that area, and 1000 or less deer. Lets go to Trapper flats at the upper end of the South Fork Boise River, elk wintering here once were 2500-4500, this winter you had less than 100 elk. In the Middle Fork Boise Country this winter we found a couple thousand elk, in 60 miles of river bottom, on the side hills, where I often in the past have seen 7,000 to 9,000 wintering elk.

The South Fork Payette River Drainage shows the same thing, where we have a couple thousand elk, we should have five thousand plus. The Stanley Basin itself is a shining example of our damaged elk herds also, I would ask, what of the Decker flat elk ? Two hundred head gone missing, what of the 150 elk that once wintered near Smiley Creek and called the Beaver Creek Drainage their home ? Gone missing.. Those two herds wintered in those places, now gone. So Senators, we don't just have an emergency on our hands, if you are concerned about wild life in general, we have a disaster. In fact folks it's bad enough to cause me to stop pulling the trigger in that country on anything. Now i could cover several more wintering grounds where I seek shed antlers, but I hope this is giving you the idea.

Let me just remind you that if a corporation cannot manage its funds, and is constantly in the red, how then can we expect it to manage anything else ? What else are we going to let them destroy ? Us perhaps ? Keep in mind my friends at the state house, all of us are going someplace, and you most certainly are going there with us. I hope we all like that place once we arrive there together.

Two quotes for you to ponder.

Elk numbers in the Lolo and Sawtooth elk management zones are seriously depressed -- by wolf predation. The science (years of high quality elk and wolf population radio-telemetry data) is clear. Wolf predation is depressing elk production well below what we should expect for the habitat quality in those zones. Elk habitat quality was following a natural, declining trend after the 1910 fires. The depressed elk production and the factors contributing to that depression is a combination of habitat quality AND substantial wolf predation on productive cow and calf elk. ---Mark Gamblin--South West Director Idaho Fish and Game..August 15, 2009, 2:40 pm

The Lolo and Sawtooth Zones the recent, sharp decline in elk productivity and recruitment I referred to is due to wolf predation of productive cows and their calves, not hunting mortality. The radio-telemetry data we have for cows and calves in those zones gives us the fate of each collared elk and allows us to accurately estimate the wolf predation rate of cows and calves.

Having good baseline data for these elk populations from previous years, including hunting harvest data, we can say with certainty that wolf predation has pushed elk production and recruitment in these two zones below levels that have required substantial reductions in the elk hunting opportunity that was allowable with essentially the same habitat when wolves were introduced. HOW we manage this new wildlife population dynamic (elk-wolf) and the necessary changes in public uses and benefits of those resources is of course our challenge.--- Mark Gamblin -----South West Director Idaho Fish and Game..August 15, 2009 4:08 pm

Because wolf predation has driven elk production and recruitment significantly below what we would have with lower wolf predation, we are not meeting our elk management objectives. Consequently we have reduced elk hunting opportunity for the public below what habitat is capable of supporting. The wolf hunt has multiple objectives. Reducing the number of wolves in those areas (Lolo and Sawtooth Zones) to increase elk production and recruitment is one objective. Another legitimate management objective for this public wildlife resource (Idaho wolves) is offering hunting opportunity consistent with the state wolf management plan that is committed to a healthy and viable (sustainable) distribution of wolves across Idaho. Those are the primary objectives of the wolf hunting season that will start tomorrow morning in the Lolo and Sawtooth Zones. Mark Gamblin (IDFG) Says: August 31, 2009 at 10:20 PM

Thanks for your time;

Ponder this also; Some folks among us like to claim, " Well the Bible was written by men" And I like to remind folks that science and university text books and laws are also written by men. I'm still waiting for and infallible perfect human man to show up on the scene and proclaim perfection of any kind.

I hope you folks remember to laugh daily whether you need it or not.

(Just to answer a possible question as to my survival, I worked as an independent business owner, 7-8 months annually and spent the obvious months living like a 19th century wandering explorer, because these here Idaho Mountains are some of the God of Heavens finest carvings and a lifetime is not enough time to touch all of it. But I'm trying.)

Greg Farber