

Idaho Wolf Management Progress Report January 2010

Wolves are being managed as a big game animal in Idaho. They are protected by state laws approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Idaho Legislature, and the Idaho Fish and Game Commission. The commission set a statewide harvest limit of 220 wolves for the 2009-2010 hunting season. Nez Perce Tribe members may take up to 35 additional wolves within the Nez Perce Tribal Treaty Area.

Wolf Hunting Seasons

Wolf seasons have closed in six wolf management zones when harvest limits were met: Upper Snake zone on November 2, McCall-Weiser zone on November 9, Dworshak-Elk City zone on November 17, Palouse-Hells Canyon zone on December 18, the Southern Mountains zone on December 31 and the Middle Fork Zone on January 31. The six remaining zones are open until March 31, or until harvest limits for individual zones are met, whichever comes first.

Idaho Department of Fish and Game sold 26,428 wolf tags – 25,744 resident, 684 nonresident – in 2009. Hunters must purchase a 2010 hunting license and new 2010 wolf tag to hunt wolves during the remaining open seasons.

Hunters are required to call 877-872-3190 within 24 hours of killing a wolf. They must have the skull and hide checked in by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game within five days of kill.

Idaho wolf hunting seasons and rules are available on our website:

<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/hunt/wolf/wolfrules.pdf>

Hunters are required to confirm the season remains open in the zone they are hunting by calling 877-872-3190 or by checking status on-line:

<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/hunt/wolf/quota.cfm>

Harvest – From September 1 through December 31, 135 wolves were legally harvested. During this period three additional wolves were documented to have been either shot illegally or wounded and not retrieved. Another wolf was killed in a closed area, and one wolf was accidentally killed in a snare legally set by a trapper. These wolves were all counted against the harvest limit for the zone in which they were killed. The heaviest harvest occurred October 10-12 when 16 wolves were taken by hunters over the three-day weekend when deer season opened in most of the state. Hunters harvested 21 wolves in December 2009 and six during January (Table 1.). At the end of January, 147 wolves had been counted against the statewide harvest limit of 220 wolves.

Monitoring

Fish and Game's 2008 annual report on Wolf Conservation and Management in Idaho is available on our website at: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/wildlife/wolves/manage/>. The year-end population estimate for 2008 was a minimum of 846 wolves, 88 packs, with 39 documented breeding pairs. The 2009 annual report is being prepared and will be available in March. Preliminary year-end minimum estimates for 2009 are very close to year-end figures for 2008.

The following year-end numbers for 2009 are still considered preliminary. Idaho Fish and Game and Nez Perce Tribe biologists documented 94 packs present in Idaho at the end of December 2009.

Reproduction was confirmed in 65 packs, and 49 packs met breeding-pair criteria of at least two 2 pups produced and survived through December 31, 2009. Biologists documented 15 new packs during 2009. Three Idaho packs were eliminated by control actions in response to livestock depredations, and five previously documented packs were dropped from the count due to lack of confirmed activity during the year.

In December, Fish and Game received authorization from the U.S. Forest Service to land a helicopter in the Frank Church River-of-No-Return Wilderness as an aid to capture and radio-collar wolves that may be encountered incidental to routine elk surveys scheduled for February - March. The Wolf Recovery Foundation, Western Watersheds Project, and six other groups filed a motion in federal district court on February 3, requesting a temporary restraining order and/or preliminary injunction to prevent the project. A hearing on the motion has been set for Thursday, February 18 in Boise.

Management and Control Actions

During January, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services confirmed that wolves killed five calves, three sheep, one mare and one foal, injured one sheep, and probably killed a stock dog. In response to these and previous depredations, Wildlife Services killed six wolves.

Confirmed wolf depredations from 2003–2010 are reported in Table 2.

Research

Idaho Fish and Game research biologists began capturing and radio-collaring elk, moose and wolves in January as part of its on-going elk/wolf interaction study in the North Fork Clearwater and Lowman study areas. Progress has been delayed by a helicopter accident on January 8. Alternative capture plans are being implemented. The research team and regional wildlife and enforcement staff plans to radio-collar 20 six-month old elk calves and enough bulls and cows to maintain 20 bulls and 20 cows in each of the two study areas. Four or more wolves will be radio-collared in two to four packs in each study area. Moose will also be radio-collared in the North Fork study area.

Nez Perce Tribe wolf project personnel and Idaho Fish and Game wolf project and wildlife research personnel met with the University of Montana Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit staff on January 22 to discuss progress on their research and plans for the coming year. Biologists from the Montana Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit at The University of Montana are conducting research to develop wolf population monitoring techniques. Analyses of DNA from wolf scats and hairs collected at rendezvous sites in three Idaho study areas are underway in Dr. Lisette Waits' lab at The University of Idaho. In addition, DNA analyses of hair samples obtained at rub stations deployed last summer were recently completed. Full results and a summary report describing this technique are forthcoming. A 2009 research progress report and information is available at:

<http://www.umt.edu/mcwru/PERSONNELPROFILES08/PPDaveAusband2008.htm>

The University of Montana is hiring 14 technicians for wolf research in Idaho this coming summer. Position descriptions can be viewed at: <http://www.umt.edu/mcwru/jobopenings.htm>

Information and Education

Idaho Fish and Game and Nez Perce Tribe wolf staff members are completing the 2009 annual report. Final data tabulation, map preparation, and report writing and editing is nearing completion. The report will be available in March.

Information and updates can be viewed at: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/wildlife/wolves/>

Please help us manage wolves by reporting wolf sightings on our Fish and Game wolf observation form: http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/apps/wolf_report/

Litigation Status

In June 2009, a coalition of 13 interest groups filed a legal challenge to the wolf delisting in U.S. District Court in Missoula, Montana. The Greater Yellowstone Coalition brought a separate lawsuit, and the cases were consolidated. Their complaints allege the Northern Rocky Mountain wolf population is not recovered and that the delisting violates the Endangered Species Act for several reasons, including challenges to Montana and Idaho's regulatory frameworks and the assertion that it is not legal to delist only a portion of this distinct population. U.S. District Judge Donald Molloy denied the plaintiffs' motion for a preliminary injunction to stop wolf hunts in Idaho and Montana on grounds that the plaintiffs failed to show a likelihood of irreparable harm to the wolf population. The final legal briefs were filed by January 28. A hearing date for oral arguments has not been set, but is expected within a few months. The state of Wyoming and other parties filed another lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Cheyenne, Wyoming, challenging the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's rejection of Wyoming's regulatory framework and wolf management plan. The federal District Court in Montana is in the 9th Circuit of the U.S. Court of Appeals and the District Court in Wyoming is in the 10th Circuit, so there could be conflicting rulings at both the district and appellate levels.

Table 1. Total known wolf mortality by cause, January 1 – 31, 2010.

Wolf Mgt Zone	Control	Harvest	Illegal	Legal (protection of livestock or pets)	Other	Unk	Total
Dworshak-Elk City	2						2
Lolo		1					1
McCall-Weiser	4						4
Middle Fork		2					2
Palouse-Hells Canyon							
Panhandle			1 ¹	1	1		3
Salmon		1					1
Sawtooth		1					1
Selway		1					1
South Idaho							
Southern Mountains							
Upper Snake							
Total	6	6	1	1	1		15

1 – Non-target capture. Wolf accidentally captured and killed in a snare legally set for a coyote.

Table 2. Confirmed wolf depredations and mortalities in Idaho, 2003 to January 31, 2010.

YEAR	Depredations ¹				WS ²	Wolf Mortality			
	Cattle	Sheep	Dogs	Total		10j / 36-1107 ³	Other ⁴	Hunter Harvest	Total
2003	7	130	3	140	7	0	8		15
2004	19	176	4	199	17	0	21		38
2005	29	166	12	207	24	3	16		43
2006	41	237	4	282	35	7	19		61
2007	57	211	10	278	43	7	27		77
2008	104	215	14	333	94	14	45		153
2009	76	295	14	385	87	6	45	135	273
2010	5	4	0	9	6	1	2	6	15

¹ Includes only confirmed wolf depredations of cattle, sheep, and dogs that resulted in death or injury.

² Wolves taken by USDA Wildlife Services in response to depredation on livestock.

³ Authorized take under 10j, or legal take after delisting under state law for protection of stock and dogs (Idaho Code 36-1107).

⁴ Other includes of mortalities of unknown cause, documented natural mortality, collisions with automobiles, and illegal take.