

Party's over for Idaho County wolf pack

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By Eric Barker of the Tribune

Alarmed at predators' audacity near Elk City, Fish and Game officials say they will issue kill permits to sheriff's deputies



Dave Cadwallader...

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game will authorize Idaho County sheriff's deputies to kill wolves causing problems and fraying nerves at Elk City.

Dave Cadwallader, supervisor of the department's Clearwater Region, said a pack of about seven wolves frequenting the remote mountain town for months has killed dogs, attacked livestock and become habituated to people.

"They are just hanging in and around town and they are there frequently," he said. "It's just getting too close for comfort and I am going to go ahead and issue kill permits and the agents are going to be two deputies that live there and a couple of Fish and Game officers."

It is believed to be the first time the department has given local law enforcement agents the permission to kill wolves. The department itself lacked the ability to unilaterally control wolves until Endangered Species Act protections were dropped last month by an act of Congress. The department has since moved quickly to try to reduce wolf numbers.

Last week, five wolves were shot and killed from a helicopter in the Lolo Hunting Zone. That control effort was initiated as part of the department's plan to aid elk herds. The aerial gunning was suspended Friday because of a lack of snow at lower elevations that makes it easier to locate wolves.

The department also authorized hunting outfitters who operate in the Lolo Zone to kill wolves during the black bear hunting season and has authorized six other wolf-kill permits across the state to remove wolves preying on livestock.

At Elk City, Idaho County Deputy Stan Denham said some people have begun carrying guns with them when they go outdoors and others have talked about taking the law into their own hands. Denham himself had a bad experience with wolves.

"I had a female hound that had seven puppies - she was killed right in my yard about a month and a half ago. There was one other dog that was attacked right in front of a guy when walking between his house and his shop."

Denham said the wolves are attracted to elk that moved into town and seem content to stay. But he speculated it will be difficult to shoot the wolves that typically come into town at night to hunt and then return to the surrounding forest during the day. He would like the ability to trap the predators.

"It's just tough to see one and get a chance to shoot. I've seen a lot of wolves, probably 40 or more wolves since they were introduced but the number I could have shot is pretty minimal and I get out a lot."

Idaho County Undersheriff Jim Jorges said it's not yet clear how much time the deputies stationed at Elk City will be able to devote to tracking wolves. But he said the kill permits will allow them to respond when there is a problem.

"If they have reports of wolves in town or close to town they will have the ability to go take care of them."

Cadwallader said Fish and Game officers who work in the area would control wolves incidental to other work and he expects the animals will leave once a few of them have been shot. He said the kill permits would be active for about 60 days and that all kills have to be reported to the department.

There are believed to be at least 700 wolves in Idaho. The state must maintain at least 150 to prevent the animals from being reconsidered for federal protection. Fish and Game Director Virgil Moore has said he wants to manage for more than 150 so that normal population swings don't result in wolves being returned to the list of threatened and endangered animals. The Idaho Fish and Game Commission is expected to begin talking about a wolf population target and hunting quotas at its meeting in Lewiston Thursday.

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