

Idaho Wolf Management Progress Report

April 20, 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 Fish and Game Commission set a statewide harvest limit of 220 wolves for the 2009-2010 hunting season which ended March 31, 2010 with 188 wolves taken.

Wolf Hunting Seasons

Wolf harvest seasons closed in seven wolf management zones when harvest limits were met: Upper Snake zone on November 2, McCall-Weiser zone November 9, Dworshak-Elk City zone November 17, Palouse-Hells Canyon zone December 18, the Southern Mountains zone December 31, the Middle Fork Zone January 31, and the Salmon Zone March 15. The five remaining zones closed March 31.

Idaho Department of Fish and Game sold 26,428 wolf tags (25,744 resident, 684 nonresident) for the 2009 hunting season and, as of March 31, had sold 4,972 tags (4,875 resident, 97 nonresident) for the 2010 season.

Hunters were required to call and report within 24 hours of killing a wolf. Successful hunters were required to have the skull and pelt checked in by Idaho Fish and Game within five days of kill. Idaho wolf hunting seasons and rules for the recently closed 2009-2010 season are available on our website: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/hunt/wolf/wolfrules.pdf>.

Harvest — From September 1 through December 31, 2009, 135 wolves were harvested legally. Hunters took 46 wolves between January 1 and March 31, 2010 (Table 1). At the close of the hunting season on March 13, 188 wolves had been counted against the statewide harvest limit of 220 wolves; 181 were harvested legally, and an additional seven were either killed illegally during the season, were wounded but not recovered, or were accidentally killed as nontarget captures in snares legally set for bobcats or coyotes.

A detailed summary of the 2009-2010 wolf hunting season is being prepared and will be circulated and posted to the website along with the April monthly wolf update.

Monitoring

Our 2009 annual report on Wolf Conservation and Management in Idaho is available on our website at: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/wildlife/wolves/manage/>. The corrected year-end minimum population estimate for 2009 was 835 wolves in 94 packs with 49 breeding pairs confirmed – a breeding pair is defined as an adult male and female with at least two pups that survived to December 31. The previously reported year-end figure was incorrect. The annual report has been corrected and reposted on the Web site. The 2009 year-end estimate of 835 wolves compares to the 2008 year-end minimum population estimate of 856 wolves in 88 packs, with 39 documented breeding pairs.

Nez Perce Tribe and Idaho Fish and Game wolf crews will be gearing up in April to prioritize spring and summer field work and will increase frequency of telemetry flights to help begin identifying denning areas.

Management and Control Actions

USDA Wildlife Services confirmed wolves killed eight calves, injured one calf and probably killed another calf during March. In response to these and previous depredations, Wildlife Services killed 10

wolves. No depredations from black bears or mountain lions were reported to Wildlife Services during March. Confirmed wolf depredations and mortalities from 2003–2010 are reported in Table 2.

Research

Idaho Fish and Game research biologists captured and radio-marking elk, moose, and wolves in January through March as part of Fish and Game's on-going elk-wolf interaction study in the North Fork Clearwater and Lowman study areas. Additional capture efforts are planned through April.

Fish and Game research has documented that wolf predation is the leading cause of mortality of female and calf elk in some elk management zones. As a result, calf recruitment is insufficient to offset adult cow mortality, causing these elk populations to continue to decline. In addition, the intensive radio-collaring of elk and wolves with GPS collars, and in some cases GPS/ARGOS collars, is providing Fish and Game with important survival and movement data. Fish and Game continues to collaborate with the University of Montana to develop wolf population monitoring techniques, and wolves collared by Fish and Game are playing an important role in university's efforts to test "bio-fences."

Researchers at the University of Montana have been collecting wolf scats for use this summer when they will construct "bio-fences" in four wolf pack territories in Idaho. A bio-fence exploits wolves' innate territorial behavior by using human-deployed scats and urine (scent-marks) to manipulate wolf pack movements. If proven effective, bio-fencing may be an additional tool to mitigate wolf/livestock conflict. The University of Montana crew will also continue work on their wolf population monitoring techniques project. The crew plans to collect hair samples from wolves using rub stations throughout Idaho this coming summer. This is the first year they will sample with rub stations across a broad geographic area. In addition to rub stations, they will continue to survey and collect scats and hairs at predicted rendezvous sites, further test and refine the howl box, and survey hunters statewide once again about their observations during the big game hunting season. Survey forms will be mailed to hunters during April. More information on the University of Montana's research project can be found at: <http://www.umt.edu/mewru/PERSONNELPROFILES08/PPDaveAusband2008.htm>

Information and Education

Idaho Fish and Game wolf program staff members gave a presentation on wolf management to about 200 wildlife professionals at the annual meeting of the Idaho Chapter of The Wildlife Society in Boise on March 10.

Fish and Game wolf program staff members also gave a presentation and answered questions to a group of 22 students at the Treasure Valley Community College in Ontario, Oregon. Students were enthusiastic and some expressed strong opinions about wolves. Questions covered a broad range of topics, including brucellosis, game farms, bighorn sheep, big-game feeding stations, biological and social carrying capacity, compensation for livestock losses, hybrids, DNA, wolf hunting, and wolf control action for depredations.

At a Fish and Game news conference on the close of the wolf season on March 31, participants included newspaper reporters from throughout the state and Pacific Northwest, National Public Radio, several local TV stations as well as the National Rifle Association and interested members of the public. A video news summary is available through our wolf site and on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9v6Nn5K65Ek&feature=player_embedded

Additional 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 online wolf observation form: http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/apps/wolf_report/

Litigation Status

In June 2009 a coalition of 13 special 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. 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 US Fish & Wildlife Service's rejection of Wyoming's regulatory framework and wolf management plan. The District Court in Montana is in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals and the 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, 2010 – March 31, 2010.

Wolf Mgt Zone	Control	Harvest	Illegal	Legal (protection of livestock or pets)	Other	Unk	Total
Dworshak-Elk City	7			2			9
Lolo		6					6
McCall-Weiser	13					1	14
Middle Fork		2					2
Palouse-Hells Canyon				1			1
Panhandle		11	2 ¹	1	1 ²	1	16
Salmon		6					6
Sawtooth	2	15					17
Selway		5					5
Southern Idaho		1					1
Southern Mountains	2						2
Upper Snake							0
Total	24	46	2	4	1	2	79

¹ One wolf was a nontarget capture (accidentally captured and killed) in a snare legally set for a coyote, another wolf mortality is under investigation.

² Vehicle collision.

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

YEAR	Depredations ¹				Wolf Mortality				
	Cattle	Sheep	Dogs	Total	WS ²	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 (1/1 – 3/31)	10	4	0	14	24	4	5	46	79

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.