

Meeting Date: May 16, 2024

Agenda Item No. 5B

Agenda Item: Commission Direction for the Wolf Depredation Control Board Funds
(**Action**)

Bureau Chief Approval: SR

Prepared by: Tricia Hebdon, Assistant Wildlife Bureau Chief

Background:

The Idaho Wolf Depredation Control Board is responsible for administering the wolf control fund established in Idaho Code 22-5305. The WDCB was legislatively created to administer funding so the level of wolf depredation control service in Idaho functionally remained unchanged following federal Endangered Species Act delisting and associated loss of federal funding for USDA Wildlife Services wolf depredation control activities. The Board does not have management authority for wolves but is responsible for allocating funding for wolf depredation control actions authorized by the Fish and Game Commission and Department. The Commission and Department maintain authority for management and control of wolves.

Idaho Code 22-5306 directs the annual transfer of \$300,000 of fish and game license funds to the Wolf Depredation Control Board for response to, and control of, wolf depredations. The Board also receives an appropriation from the state general fund (\$392,000 in FY24) and from assessments collected by the state livestock brand inspector and the Idaho Sheep and Goat Health Board.

Previous Commission direction has been to use these funds to prioritize management and control of wolves where ungulate management objectives are not being achieved and in chronic livestock depredation areas.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:

Idaho Code Title 22, Chapter 53 identifies the responsibilities of the Idaho Wolf Depredation Control Board, related responsibilities of the Commission, and funding for administration of wolf depredation control. To maintain eligibility for Idaho's receipt of federal excise tax funds for wildlife conservation, fish management and restoration, and public shooting ranges (such as the Pittman-Robertson Act excise tax on firearms, ammunition, and hunting equipment), the Fish and Game Commission must maintain control of its license funds. Idaho Code 22-5306 maintains this control by authorizing the Commission to direct the Board's use of fish game funds and requiring the Board to comply with Commission direction for funding wolf depredation control activities.

Idaho Code 22-5306 directs, as soon after July 1 of each year as practical, the transfer of three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000) from the fish and game fund to the wolf control fund (fish and game fund transfer subaccount).

Public Involvement Process:

The Department and Commission routinely solicit and receive public input on wolf management issues throughout the year. Additionally, the public may comment on this topic at the hearing prior to the Commission meeting. Like the Commission, the Idaho Wolf Depredation Control Board conducts its meetings under Idaho's Open Meeting Law and provides the public an opportunity to comment.

Justification:

Idaho law requires Commission direction to the Idaho Wolf Depredation Control Board for expenditure of fish and game license funds.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends directing the expenditure of up to \$300,000 of fish and game funds for management and control of wolves for the protection of ungulates in management units/zones with predation management plans or where management objectives are not otherwise being achieved, and in units where wolf depredations on livestock or other domestic animals are chronic.

Expenditure of fish and game funds would include up to \$100,000 for Department-directed control and related actions for the protection of ungulates in units/zones with predation management plans or where management objectives for ungulates are not otherwise being achieved. Expenditure of fish and game funds would also include providing up to \$200,000 via Department cooperative agreement for nonprofit organization reimbursement of hunters and trappers for expenses incurred during the harvest of wolves in units/zones with predation management plans or where management objectives for ungulates are not otherwise being achieved, and in units where wolf depredations on livestock or other domestic animals are chronic.

Staff will prepare a letter for the Chair's signature reflecting the Commission's direction to the Wolf Depredation Control Board.

Suggested Motion: I move the Commission adopt staff recommendation for direction to the Idaho Wolf Depredation Control Board to expend up to \$300,000 in management units/ zones for the protection of ungulates and to address chronic livestock depredation.