

Meeting Date: July 27, 2023

Agenda Item No. 5.J.

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 (Board) is responsible for administering the wolf control fund established in Idaho Code 22-5305. Legislation created the Board in 2014, largely in response to the loss of federal funding for wolf depredation control. The Board does not have management authority for wolves but is responsible for allocating funding for wolf depredation control actions authorized by the Idaho Fish and Game Commission and Department. The Commission and Department maintain authority for the management and control of wolves.

Idaho Code 22-5306 directs the annual transfer of \$300,000 of Fish and Game license funds to the Board for response to, and control of, wolf depredations. The Board also receives an appropriation from the state general fund (\$392,000 in FY23) and from assessments collected by the state livestock brand inspector and the Idaho Sheep and Goat Health Board. If the Fish and Game license funds are not fully expended in a calendar year, those funds will grow and accumulate in the subaccount. At present, the Fish and Game subaccount excess funds are more than \$100,000.

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 the 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 and 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 the expenditure of Fish and Game license funds.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends directing the expenditure of \$100,000 of unused Fish and Game funds previously transferred to the Wolf Depredation Control Board, which are held in the fish and game sub-account, to be used 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.

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

Suggested Motion: That the Commission adopt the staff recommendation to direct the Idaho Wolf Depredation Control Board to expend \$100,000 of unused fish and game funds held in the Wolf Depredation Control Board fish and game subaccount on the 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.