



Idaho Fish and Game – 75 going on 115

In his biennial report of 1930, State Game Warden Richard E. Thomas referred to Idaho as the happy hunting ground of sportsmen, with its mountains, forests and crystal clear lakes and streams.

Indeed, one doesn't have to go far anywhere in Idaho to understand what he meant. And the people of the state have long been active in keeping it that way.

This month, Idaho Fish and Game celebrates the 75th anniversary of the state's first successful voter initiative, which created the Idaho Fish and Game Commission and a civil service system for employees hired on the basis of merit.

In the coming months, Fish and Game will highlight some of the events and progress that have shaped the agency since 1938.

The wildlife conservation movement in Idaho and the rest of the nation rose out of concern for the steep decline in wildlife populations in the late 19th century. Idaho's first game laws, among the earliest in the country, were adopted by the Territorial Legislature on January 16, 1864. Lawmakers set seasons on big game animals to protect dwindling populations.

"... (A)fter the first day of February and before the first day of July in each year, to catch, kill, or destroy, or pursue with such intention, any buffalo, deer, antelope, elk, mountain sheep, or goat, or to have in his possession or expose for sale, any of the wild game, or animals mentioned in this section during the season when the killing, injuring, or pursuing is herein prohibited."

Early game laws – skeptics said – weren't worth much if they weren't enforced. The laws gave county commissioners authority to appoint a game warden in each county. They got no pay, but they could keep half of any fines that were collected. In 1895 the law was changed giving county sheriffs the authority

to enforce state game laws. But enforcement was uneven, and critics called for a state game warden.

A December 1898 newspaper headline declared, "Flagrant Violation of the Law in Eastern Idaho – Streams Being Rapidly Depleted of their Speckled Treasures." The article noted, "... if a man were stationed there whose business it would be to enforce the law, he would be able to collect evidence to convict some of these fellows, which would have a salutary effect. If the business is not stopped, the streams will shortly be depleted of their sparkling treasures..."

Within two months, a new game law was introduced in the Idaho legislature. In 1899, the Idaho Fifth State Legislature passed the law, establishing the Fish and Game Department and created the office of state game warden. Gov. Frank Steunenberg appointed 37-year-old Charles Arbuckle as the first game warden. Arbuckle in turn, hired deputy wardens in most counties – except Ada, Custer and Shoshone.

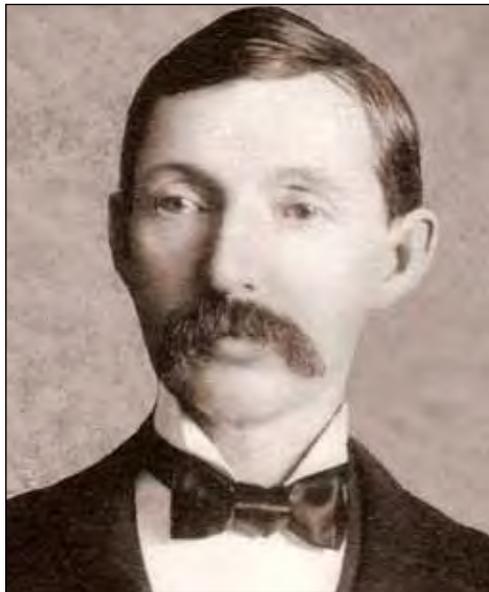
The first arrest under the new law came in June 1899, when two brothers were arrested for having 400 to 500 pounds of trout intended for commercial markets. A \$50 fine was imposed.

For nearly 40 years, state game wardens served at the pleasure of the governor, and many were active in party politics of the day. Hunters, anglers and some state game wardens began pushing for reform in state game management as early as 1911.

Though unsuccessful, the first formal proposal to reform wildlife management came in 1913. In the following years, subsequent bills were brought to the legislature, but they got little political support and interest waned.

In the early 1930s, fanned by a renewed national interest in wildlife conservation, the idea of fish and game management reform rekindled in Idaho.

The effort finally succeeded in 1938.



State Game Warden Charles Arbuckle

Inside this issue

Page 2:

'Poachers' Create Better System

Page 3:

Looking Ahead to the Next 75 Years

'Poachers' Create Better System of Game Management

Legend has it that an Idaho game warden in 1938 complained that a bunch of poachers from Boise were trying to take away his job.

At the time, a group of sportsmen, who met regularly at Kelly's Club Café in Boise, had been working on the initiative that would do just that. Since then, the group has referred to itself as the Poachers' Club.

Their work was the culmination of nearly three decades of effort. And the club still exists today.

In 1911, Game Warden Frank M. Kendall recommended "placing the fish and game department of Idaho on a scientific basis and in order to do so we must have men who have made this a study and are familiar with the needs and requirements of this line of work, regardless of political affiliations, and to this end I would recommend ... we place the men who are directly in the fish and game department under a civil service ruling and retain them as long as they do good work."

Between 1899 and 1913, Idaho had six governors and seven game wardens – all of them political appointees. No knowledge of wildlife or game management was required to be appointed. And new wardens often replaced the deputies, regardless of their qualifications.

Kendall noted that hunters and anglers supported the department with their license fees, but they had no choice about who would fill the office nor any assurance that they were qualified. The office of state warden was political patronage.

Meanwhile hunters and anglers were getting organized. By 1912, the Idaho Sportsmen's Association counted 10,000 members. They too wanted to reform the



Photo by Otto M. Jones, courtesy Library of Congress

way the state's game was managed.

In 1913, the association presented the first formal proposal for game management reform. The legislation calling for a nonpartisan fish and game commission passed in the House but died in the Senate.

In 1914, Idaho Sportsmen's Association president again proposed reform legislation to remove game management from partisan politics to prevent license revenue from being diverted to other uses.

And in his 1914 report, Game Warden J.B. Gowen recommended placing employees on a civil service basis. He said "when we get men who are competent, who understand the business, they should be retained regardless of politics."

In 1915, the association proposed legislation that called for three commissioners who would serve staggered six-year terms and with the authority to appoint a game warden and regional deputies. It passed both the House and the Senate.

But the victory celebration was short lived; the legislation was vetoed by Gov.

Moses Alexander.

The idea lay dormant for the next 18 years.

By 1925, most large communities in Idaho had a sportsmen's club that promoted ethical behavior and wildlife conservation. In 1926, a regional coalition of clubs in southern Idaho formed the Southwestern Idaho Sportsmen's Association. Its agenda included fish and game management reform.

The association drafted a plan for the 1933 Legislature that called for a five-member commission appointed to staggered terms, with no more than three from any one political party, and for a civil service system for employees hired on the basis of examination scores.

In 1932, Gov. C. Ben Ross, expressed support for such a plan. But it died in the Senate.

In February 1935, sportsmen formed the statewide United Fish and Game Associations of Idaho. They returned with

(Continued on Page 3)

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Looking Ahead to the Next 75 Years of Wildlife Conservation

Simply put, Idahoans love their wildlife.

A 2012 survey of Idahoans indicated that 90 percent of residents are personally interested in wildlife, with almost two-thirds being very interested.

In 2012, Idaho Fish and Game turned a corner by convening the Idaho Wildlife Summit. The Summit was a watershed event, beginning a conversation among Idahoans about how best to care for their wildlife in these modern times.

“We all impact wildlife. And, we are all responsible for it,” Fish and Game Director Virgil Moore said.

Shane Mahoney, the keynote speaker at the Summit, noted that with the challenges of human population growth, climate change, energy development, urbanization, loss of habitat, and social changes,



we cannot succeed – even in Idaho – in leaving a legacy of abundant wildlife without building a coalition of people who care about wildlife, who will work hard to engage every citizen as to why wildlife conservation is a vital responsibility of being an American.

“We need all citizens to care, we need

all citizens to believe, we need all citizens to engage, and we need to again make it understood that to be concerned about conservation is an act of citizenship,” Mahoney said at the end of his presentation.

During the Summit, participants were asked what they can do both individually and collectively to leave the wildlife legacy they thought was important.

As we celebrate the 75th anniversary of Idaho’s first successful voter initiative, we should take some time and decide what we can do for wildlife – whether it is helping to plant bitterbrush for elk and mule deer, taking a child fishing, or purchasing an elk, bluebird or trout vehicle license plate. After all, Idaho’s wildlife belongs to all of us.

(Continued from Page 2)

essentially the same proposal. Despite the support of this group, it got no help from Gov. Ross, and it failed in the Legislature.

Meanwhile, interest in wildlife conservation was growing across the country.

In 1936, the Idaho Conservation Council – a newly formed coalition of sportsmen’s groups – changed its name to the Idaho Wildlife Federation and joined the national federation, which was renamed the National Wildlife Federation.

Using a 1912 amendment to the Idaho constitution that allowed voters to put a proposed law on the ballot and enact it by majority vote, the federation pushed a petition to put the proposed commission bill on the ballot as an initiative in the 1936 election. It did not get enough signatures.

With fish and game management still on their minds, several Ada County Fish and Game League members gathered regularly at Kelly’s Club Café in Boise. They drafted a plan based on an initiative adopted by Missouri voters and the 1935 Idaho commission legislation. The plan called for a five-member commission of people with a demonstrated interest in wildlife and no more than three from any political party. The commission would

hire a fish and game director and would have the authority to determine season and bag limits. Employees would be hired on merit and could be fired only for cause. It included the policy that wildlife would be preserved, protected, perpetuated and managed.

The Idaho Wildlife Federation with about 10,000 members endorsed the proposed legislation, which was introduced in the Legislature in February 1937. The house passed it 38-21, but it failed in the senate 28-14.

Opponents said it would be too expensive for hunters and anglers, even though it was clear that the commissioners would serve without pay and with limited annual expenses.

Sportsmen felt betrayed, but they took the defeat as a challenge and vowed to be back the following year. League members continued to meet at Kelly’s Club.

In 1938, sportsmen were better organized. The initiative process was their weapon of choice to bring back the failed legislative proposal from 1937.

They had seven weeks to gather at least 21,000 certified signatures of registered voters needed to get the petition on the November ballot. On July 7, R.G. Cole,

Homer Martin and Dan McGrath delivered petitions with 24,000 signatures from around the state to Secretary of State Ira H. Masters. Another 4,000 local signatures were delivered by the deadline.

But signatures were not enough. To win, the initiative also must have a majority of the total votes cast for governor. Supporters launched publicity campaigns leading up to the election. They organized rallies and parades and handed out fliers.

Three days after the election, the results were still uncertain. Some thought the initiative might have barely passed.

The final count on November 29 was overwhelming. The initiative passed with 118,000 votes to 37,442 – 76 percent of the total votes cast. The results included a majority in every county.

On December 10, 1938, Lt. Gov. Charles Gossett appointed Walter Fiskus of Potlatch, Bird Hawley of Melba, George Booth of Burley, Stanley Easton of Kellogg and Alton R. Howell of Idaho Falls as the first Idaho Fish and Game Commissioners.

The voters of Idaho, 25 years after the defeat of the first reform proposal, had transformed the way the state would manage fish and wildlife in the future.

History at a Glance: 150 Years of Wildlife Conservation

1864: Idaho Territory's first game laws signed by acting territorial Gov. William B. Daniels, to protect buffalo, deer, antelope, elk, sheep, and goat; provided for the taking of said animals for scientific purposes.

1899: The Idaho Legislature established the Fish and Game Department, with a state game warden.

1903: License fees set at \$1 for resident males; women did not have to have a license. They were \$25 for nonresident big game, and \$5 for a nonresident bird license.

1905: Season established on grouse, partridge, "prairie chicken" (sharp-tailed grouse) and fool hens (spruce grouse). The sagehen season ran from July 15 to December 1 – limit was 18 per day. The fishing season was opened year around.

1907: First fish hatchery built at Hay Spur in Blaine County.

1908: First ring-necked pheasant rearing facilities built in Ada County.

1909: First game preserve established in Payette River drainage west of Sawtooths.

1911: Game Warden Frank M. Kendall asked for protection for the red fish of Stanley, Pettit, Alturas and Redfish lakes.

1913: Mabel Avery, first woman deputy game warden.

1915: First elk transplant from Yellowstone National Park.

1919: Fish and game bureau established in the department of law enforcement. Deputy game wardens were given a regular salary of \$125 per month. The resident license was raised to \$1.50. Game was declared the property of the state. State Fish Commissioner established; requires professional background in fish culture.

1921: Women required to have a license; increased to \$2. First extensive campaign to stock fish in high mountain lakes.

1923: Bullfrogs declared game fish, bears declared game animals, and 419 Hungarian partridges imported from England at \$3,500. Fish and Game made a separate department, directly under the governor.

1924: The law requiring women to have a license repealed – reinstated in 1927.

1925: A predatory animal fund of \$6,000 was set aside in the game fund.

1927: The first state game bird farm was



established at Lapwai.

1932: First Idaho check station. Jerome game bird farm built at a cost of \$700.

1933: First release of 100 chukar in Idaho, with birds from the Lapwai bird farm.

1938: Voter initiative passes, creating commission-led wildlife management. First aerial fish stocking in Idaho.

1940: First wildlife management area established in Hagerman.

1947: Controlled hunts used to limit the number of hunters in an area. Game preserves opened to hunting.

1945: First archery-only season for deer.

1946: First archery-only elk season.

1948: Beavers transplanted via parachute.

1953: First season opened on chukar.

1954: Hunter safety training begun.

1955: The first fish stocked by helicopter in Callahan Lake near Bonners Ferry.

1958: First helicopter surveys of bighorns.

1960: Mountain goat transplants began.

1961: Merriam's wild turkeys introduced.

1963: Bighorn sheep re-established on historic range in Owyhee County. Idaho developed special rules to conserve and improve fisheries for cutthroat trout.

1965: No salmon seasons statewide.

1971: Legislation allows Fish and Game to limit number of nonresident hunters.

1972: Mountain lion made a game animal.

1974: Legislation allows part of license fees to be earmarked for wildlife habitat.

1975: Fish and Game becomes executive department of state government.

1976: First general bucks-only deer and bulls-only elk hunting seasons.

1979: No salmon seasons statewide from 1979 through 1984.

1980: Hunter education mandatory for

hunters born after January 1, 1975.

1982: Tax return check-off established to fund nongame conservation and education programs.

1983: Project WILD education outreach to schools begins.

1986: Lifetime certificate and license system for Idaho residents established. Jerome bird farm closed.

1987: Woodland caribou relocated from Canada to historic range in North Idaho. First upland game bird and waterfowl stamps issued.

1988: Idaho Wildlife Congress attended by 900 delegates. Five peregrines released from a building in downtown Boise.

1991: "Wildlife License Plate" bill passed, proceeds support nongame program.

1992: A lone Sockeye salmon, dubbed "Lonesome Larry," returns from the ocean to Redfish Lake; efforts to save Snake River sockeye from extinction begin.

1994: About 1,000 Idaho hunters participated in a "Idaho Hunters' Rally" – the first statewide use of teleconferencing.

1995: Wolves reintroduced in central Idaho. Point-of-Sale machines go into use.

1996: Fish and Game website launched.

1997: Nancy Hadley of Sandpoint first female Fish and Game commissioner. First "Salmon and Steelhead Days" attended by more than 2,600 school children.

2001: The large return of Chinook salmon allowed anglers to spend more than half a million hours fishing for salmon.

2003: Access Yes! program launched to give access on and through private lands.

2005: Mule Deer Initiative launched to improve mule deer numbers and habitat. Upper Salmon River opened to Chinook fishing for the first time in 27 years.

2010: Nation's first regulated wolf hunt.

2012: Convened Idaho Wildlife Summit with more than 3,000 participants.

2013: Opened the new Springfield Fish Hatchery for Snake River sockeye.

Starting

November 8,

see more at:

<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/>

