

Idaho Wolf Management Update May, 2011

Wolves Relisted, Re-delisted...again.

Management authority returns to Idaho Fish and Game.

Wolves were delisted from the Endangered Species Act in Idaho and Montana in May 2009. Idaho held a successful hunting season for wolves in fall and winter 2009-2010, but following a U.S. District Court decision, wolves were relisted under the ESA.

On August 5, 2010, U.S. District Judge Donald Molloy vacated the rule that delisted wolves in Montana and Idaho and returned them to protections of the ESA, effectively restricting state management and eliminating the possibility of a state-regulated wolf hunt. Idaho Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter informed the Secretary of Interior on October 18, 2010 that Idaho would no longer manage wolves as the designated agent of the federal government until wolves were again delisted.

At that time Idaho Fish and Game staff ceased involvement in wolf monitoring, and stopped responding to wolf depredations on livestock, or investigation of violations of the Endangered Species Act. Fish and Game focused efforts on its research project and assessing impacts of wolves on ungulates in the Lolo and Sawtooth study areas.

On April 15, 2011, President Barack Obama signed the 2011 federal budget bill that included the following language:

"Before the end of the 60-day period beginning on the date of enactment of this division, the Secretary of the Interior shall reissue the final rule published on April 2, 2009 (74 Fed. Reg. 15123 et seq.) without regard to any other provision of statute or regulation that applies to issuance of such rule. Such reissuance (including this section) shall not be subject to judicial review and shall not abrogate or otherwise have any effect on the Order and Judgment issued by the United States District Court for the District of Wyoming in Case Numbers 09-CV-118J and 09-CV-138J on November 18, 2010."

The 2009 rule determined that the Northern Rocky Mountain wolf population was biologically recovered, and that management by the states, except for Wyoming, would ensure it remained recovered. The 2009 rule contains mandatory post-delisting monitoring and public reporting requirements, and triggers and safeguards that would cause wolves to be considered for relisting under the Endangered Species Act.

As a result of this action, on May 5, 2011, wolf management responsibility was returned to the states of Montana and Idaho. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will continue to manage wolves in Wyoming until the state has a Fish and Wildlife Service-approved regulatory framework for wolf management.

Idaho Fish and Game immediately resumed lead responsibility for resolving livestock depredations by authorizing control actions and issuing kill permits when appropriate, responsibility for wolf monitoring, and continued preparation for a fall hunting season. Fish and Game initiated its predation management plan in the Lolo elk management zone, days after management authority was returned to the state. Fish and Game staff continues to focus on

research on the impacts of wolf predation on ungulates and is updating and developing additional predation management plans.

Nez Perce Tribe wolf program staff conducted wolf monitoring statewide during the state's absence, and continues its wolf monitoring responsibilities in central Idaho through Memorandums of Agreement with the Fish and Wildlife Service and the state of Idaho, as they have done in the past.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services division will continue to respond to suspected depredations on livestock or pets. Calls about depredations should be directed to Wildlife Services at 866-487-3297 or 208-378-5077.

Additional information is available on the Fish and Game website:
<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/wildlife/wolves/>

Monitoring

The 2010 annual report on Wolf Conservation and Management in Idaho was prepared by the Nez Perce Tribe wolf program staff. It is available through the Fish and Game website at: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/wildlife/wolves/manage/>.

Nez Perce Tribe and Fish and Game staff are back in the field working throughout the state to confirm reproduction and breeding pair status (at least two pups produced and still alive) and capture and radio-collar additional wolves to aid in monitoring and completing year-end counts. Telemetry flights are conducted about once a month.

Nez Perce Tribe wolf program staff captured and released one previously radio-collared wolf, and Idaho Fish and Game wildlife researchers captured and radio-collared two new wolves during May.

During May, Nez Perce Tribe and Fish and Game staff documented successful reproduction in six packs and confirmed a minimum of 24 pups.

Management and Control Actions

In response to the court ruling to relist wolves, Fish and Game completed a proposal to reduce wolf numbers in the Lolo elk management zone in north-central Idaho under provisions Section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act to address unacceptable impacts of wolf predation to the elk population. About 2,000 comments were received on the proposal. A final proposal was submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in September. After wolves were again delisted and management authority was returned to the state on May 5, Idaho Fish and Game began implementation of our predation management plan to reduce the wolf population in the Lolo Elk Management Zone (Game Management Units 10 and 12) under state authority.

At the request of Fish and Game, USDA Wildlife Services agents killed five wolves from a helicopter from May 12-13. After two days the helicopter operation was discontinued because lack of snow cover and heavy canopy cover made the operation too inefficient and costly. Fish and Game also entered into agreements with several licensed outfitters and their guides to kill any wolves they encountered during their spring bear hunts in Units 10 and 12. As of May 31, no wolves had been reported taken. Further, Fish and Game authorized conservation officers to take wolves encountered during performance of their regular duties in those units.

In May, in response to recurring sightings of wolves and depredation of pets and livestock in the town of Elk City, Fish and Game authorized the Idaho County Sheriff and two deputies and local Fish and Game conservation officers to kill wolves encountered in Elk City township. No wolves had been taken under this control authorization through the end of May.

Defenders of Wildlife ended their program to compensate ranchers for livestock losses confirmed to have been caused by wolves last fall. The Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation manages the state wolf compensation program.

Idaho, USDA Wildlife Services personnel confirmed that wolves killed 10 calves, one cow, two sheep and one foal during May. In response to these and previous depredations, WS killed two wolves. In May 2010, Wildlife Services confirmed that wolves killed five calves and 13 sheep.

Confirmed wolf depredations and mortalities from 2003–2011 are reported in Table 2.

Research

Idaho Fish and Game wildlife research biologists continue to monitor wolves, elk, and moose in the North Fork Clearwater study area and wolves and elk in the Lowman study area. Fish and Game research efforts have documented that wolf predation is the leading cause of mortality of cow 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.

During February, Fish and Game biologists captured and radio-collared 45 more elk (12 adult bulls, 13 adult cows, and 20 calves) and 13 wolves from the five packs that occupy the Lowman study area along the South Fork Payette River. On the North Fork Clearwater study area in the Lolo Elk Management Zone, researchers captured and radio-collared 30 elk (10 bulls, one cow, and 19 calves), 22 moose (two bulls, eight cows, and 12 calves), and 10 wolves from three packs.

The Montana Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit at The University of Montana is continuing its test of "biofencing." A biofence uses human-distributed wolf scats and urine to attempt to manipulate wolf pack movements. A pilot test on three wolf packs in 2010 suggested biofencing may be effective. A crew is working in the Sawtooth Zone and will finish work in late August. As time permits, this crew is also field-testing howl boxes (automated devices that broadcast and record wolf howls) which may be useful for wolf population monitoring. In mid-June, the 2010 big game hunter survey will be mailed out to about 12,000 randomly selected deer and elk hunters all across Idaho to query them about wolf observations during the 2010 hunting season. The resulting data (as well as other survey techniques) are being used to populate a patch occupancy model and estimate wolf population size. For more information on University of Montana research please visit: <http://www.umt.edu/mcwru/personnel/ausband/default.aspx>.

Information and Education

Idaho Fish and Game staff discussed wolf monitoring, management, delisting, and the upcoming hunting season setting process with attendees at the Idaho Conservation League's annual Wild Idaho! workshop at Redfish Lake on May 22.

Additional information and updates can be viewed at:
<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/wildlife/wolves/>.

Table 1. Total known wolf mortality by cause, Jan. 1, 2011 – May 31, 2011.

Wolf Mgt Zone	WS Control	IDFG Control	Harvest	Illegal	Legal (protection of livestock or pets)	Other	Unk	Total
Dworshak-Elk City	1						1	2
Lolo								
McCall-Weiser					3			3
Middle Fork								
Palouse-Hells Canyon								
Panhandle								
Salmon							4	4
Sawtooth	3			1	2		1	7
Selway								
Southern Idaho					1			1
Southern Mountains					1			1
Island Park								
Total	4			1	7		6	18

Table 2. Confirmed wolf depredations and mortalities in Idaho, 2003 to May 31, 2011.

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	75	148	0	223	67	13	18	46	144
2011 (1/1 – 5/31)	30	16	1	47	4	7	7	0	18

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 under state law for protection of stock and dogs (Idaho Code 36-1107) while wolves were delisted, or authorized by kill permit while wolves were delisted..

⁴ Other includes of mortalities of unknown cause, documented natural mortality, collisions with automobiles, and illegal take.