

Meeting Date: May 11, 2023

Agenda Item No. 5E

Agenda Item: Wolf Management Plan (ACTION)

Bureau Chief Approval: JR

Prepared by: Katie Oelrich, Wildlife Staff Biologist

Background:

Consistent with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2009 delisting decision, the Department is committed to maintaining a viable, self-sustaining wolf population that is well-distributed in suitable habitat. The Department is also committed to managing the population at a level that minimizes conflicts with both livestock and ungulate populations, while remaining connected with wolf populations in Montana, Wyoming, Oregon, Washington, and Canada. Over the last decade, the Fish and Game Commission has expanded wolf harvest seasons incrementally in response to continued depredations on livestock and impacts to big game species. The Department continues to focus wolf management actions to deliberately address resolution of wolf conflicts with livestock and negative impacts on big game populations, while ensuring a self-sustaining wolf population.

Staff presented an overview of the draft *Idaho Gray Wolf Management Plan 2023-2028* at the Commission's January 2023 meeting. This management plan is intended to set direction and guide management activities through 2028. Management direction in the proposed plan is based on biological data, a need to resolve wolf depredations on livestock and negative impacts on big game populations, previous policy direction from the Commission, and direction in the 2002 *Idaho Wolf Conservation and Management Plan*. The proposed plan provides needed updates and incorporates knowledge gained from nearly three decades of wolf monitoring and management about how wolves use Idaho's landscape, interact with native ungulates and livestock, and react to different levels and types of harvest.

Staff will provide a review of public comments received on the draft plan and revisions made to the final draft in response to public input.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission administers state wildlife policy through supervision and management of the Department (Idaho Code 36-104). Species management plans are the guiding documents to manage wildlife and are a direct reflection of the Department's strategic plan. The *Idaho Gray Wolf Management Plan 2023-2028* will function as the action plan for gray wolf management in Idaho.

Public Involvement Process:

The draft *Idaho Gray Wolf Management Plan 2023-2028* was posted on the Department website for public review and comment for 32 days from February 3 - March 6, 2023.

The Department received ~2,550 individual comments submitted through online webform, email, phone call, or letter from a wide variety of groups including the public, tribal governments, agricultural organizations, environmental groups, livestock producers, sportsmen's groups, and outfitters. In addition to comments from individuals, the following groups and organizations submitted comments: Boone & Crockett Club, Center for a Humane Economy, Center for Biological Diversity, Coeur d'Alene Tribe, Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, Defenders of Wildlife, Environmental Action, Friends of Clearwater, Gallatin Wildlife Assoc., Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Human Society of the United States, Idaho Conservation League, Idaho Cattlemen's Assoc., Idaho Farm Bureau, Idaho Sportsman Alliance, Idaho Wildlife Federation, International Wildlife Coexistence Network, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho,

National Resources Defense Council, Nez Perce Tribe, Safari Club International, Western Landowners Alliance, Western Watersheds Project, Wild Earth Guardians, Wilderness Watch, and Wood River Wolf Project.

Nonresidents provided 62% of the comments vs. 38% from residents. Staff will provide a more in-depth review and summary of public input at the meeting.

Staff reviewed and considered all comments received. This input was used to make improvements to the draft plan, and a revised final plan has been prepared for Commission review and consideration for adoption.

Justification:

The Commission sets policy and provides direction, considers input from the public, and has the authority to adopt, amend, or reject Department-recommended plans. This plan will guide management actions and monitoring activities for gray wolves through 2028.

Staff Recommendation:

The staff recommendation is for the Commission to adopt the *Idaho Gray Wolf Management Plan 2023-2028*.

Suggested Motion: That the Commission adopt the staff recommendation to adopt the *Idaho Gray Wolf Management Plan 2023-2028*.