

Idaho Wolf Management Update September - October, 2010

Wolves Relisted

On August 5, U.S. District Judge Donald Molloy returned wolves in Montana and Idaho to federal protection under the Endangered Species Act, effectively restricting state management and ending plans for state-regulated fall wolf hunts in Idaho and Montana.

Wolves north of Interstate 90 are once again fully protected as endangered. Though people may still harass or kill wolves posing a direct, immediate threat to human safety, private individuals may not shoot endangered wolves to protect their stock on public or private land. Wolves south of I-90 are returned to their prior classification as a nonessential, experimental population. South of I-90, livestock and pet owners/operators may kill wolves in the act of attacking their animals and can be provided shoot-on-sight permits following confirmed losses. Additional information is available on our website: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/wildlife/wolves/>

On September 30, Idaho filed a notice of appeal with the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, seeking to overturn Molloy's decision to relist wolves. Montana and the U.S. Department of Interior filed similar notices on October 1. Legislation has also been introduced in Congress with the intent of delisting wolves in Idaho and Montana.

Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar attempted to negotiate a renewal of a Memorandum of Agreement for Idaho to continue to act as the lead wolf management authority in Idaho. However, these efforts were not successful. On October 18, Otter terminated Idaho's status as a designated agent of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Regardless of designated agent status, federal rules allow states with wolf management plans approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to submit proposals for control actions where wolves are having an unacceptable impact on ungulates, such as elk, deer and moose. Idaho will continue to seek approval of its pending proposal for wolf control in the Lolo Zone, and will consider submitting other such proposals as appropriate.

As of October 18, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has resumed the lead role for other wolf management activities in Idaho. The USDA APHIS 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.

Monitoring

Our 2009 annual report on Wolf Conservation and Management in Idaho is available on our website at: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/wildlife/wolves/manage/>. The year-end minimum population estimate for 2009 was 835 wolves in 94 packs with 49 breeding pairs confirmed (breeding pair is defined as an adult male and female with at least two pups that survived to December 31). The 2009 year-end minimum estimate of 835 wolves compares to the 2008 year-end minimum population estimate of 856 wolves in 88 packs, with 39 documented breeding pairs.

At the end of September, there were 97 known packs in Idaho, including four packs newly documented this year. Nez Perce Tribe and Idaho Fish and Game wolf crews confirmed breeding pair status (more than two pups still alive) in 38 packs and presence of at least one pup was confirmed in 47 packs. A minimum of 166 pups had been confirmed by observation by September 30. Nez Perce Tribe, Fish and Game, The University of Montana, and Idaho USDA Wildlife Services trappers caught and radio-collared six wolves during September.

Management and Control Actions

In response to the court ruling to relist wolves, Idaho 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 on September 24. The proposal is available at:

<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/wildlife/wolves/manage/reduceProposal.cfm>.

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

Idaho USDA Wildlife Services reported their personnel confirmed that wolves killed nine calves and seven sheep and injured a guard dog in September. Probable wolf depredations included two calves killed, two calves injured and one sheep injured. In response to these and previous depredations, Wildlife Services killed six wolves and radio-collared and released one wolf. Confirmed year-to-date depredations through September 30 were 49 percent lower in 2010 than during the same period in 2009. The reduction in depredation activity is likely the result of wolves removed during the 2009-2010 hunting season combined with increased efforts to remove wolves in packs with a chronic history of depredations.

In early October, results came back on the suspected wolf-dog hybrid reported killed on July 6 for depredation on domestic sheep in Franklin Basin (see July wolf management update). DNA analysis confirmed that one parent of that animal was a purebred German shepherd dog.

Confirmed wolf depredations and mortalities from 2003–2010 are reported in Table 2.

Research

Idaho Fish and Game 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, not enough calves survive to offset adult cow mortality, causing these elk populations to continue to decline.

University of Montana researchers wrapped up field work on "biofences" in three wolf pack territories in Idaho this summer. Preliminary results have shown wolves investigating the scent-marks along the biofence and sign surveys have found little wolf use of areas where the biofence is attempting to exclude wolves. Sign survey data and satellite data from collared wolves in these packs will be analyzed in the fall to determine whether the biofence was effective. If proven effective, biofencing may be an additional tool to mitigate wolf/livestock conflict.

University of Montana crews continued their work on their wolf population monitoring techniques project. More information on the University of Montana's research project can be found at:

<http://www.umt.edu/mcwru/personnel/ausband/default.aspx>.

Information and Education

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, 2010 – Sep. 30, 2010.

| Wolf Mgt Zone | WS Control | IDFG Control | Harvest | Illegal | Legal (protection of livestock or pets) | Other | Unk | Total |
|----------------------|------------|--------------|-----------|----------------|---|----------|----------|------------|
| Dworshak-Elk City | 7 | | | | 3 | | 2 | 12 |
| Lolo | | 2 | 6 | | | | | 8 |
| McCall-Weiser | 21 | | | | 3 | | 2 | 26 |
| Middle Fork | | | 2 | | | | | 2 |
| Palouse-Hells Canyon | 4 | | | | 1 | | | 5 |
| Panhandle | | | 11 | 2 ¹ | 1 | 4 | | 18 |
| Salmon | 4 | | 6 | | | | | 10 |
| Sawtooth | 14 | | 15 | | 2 | | 1 | 32 |
| Selway | | | 5 | 1 | | | | 6 |
| Southern Idaho | | | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| Southern Mountains | 14 | | | | | | 1 | 15 |
| Island Park | 1 | | | | 1 | | | 2 |
| Total | 65 | 2 | 46 | 3 | 11 | 4 | 6 | 137 |

¹ One wolf was a non-target capture (accidentally captured and killed) in a snare legally set for a coyote. WS = Wildlife Services

Table 2. Confirmed wolf depredations and mortalities in Idaho, 2003 to Sep. 30, 2010.

| 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 (1/1 – 9/30) | 65 | 121 | 1 | 187 | 65 | 13 | 13 | 46 | 137 |

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 after delisting under state law for protection of stock and dogs (Idaho Code 36-1107).

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