

Idaho Fish & Game News

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Idaho Wolves Are Back Under State Management

Idaho has resumed management of gray wolves within the state's boundaries.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's rule delisting gray wolves in the Northern Rockies and Western Great Lakes took effect Thursday, May 5. The rule affects wolves in Idaho, Montana, and parts of Washington, Oregon and Utah, but not in Wyoming.

Wolf hunting tags went on sale May 5 in Idaho.

Wolves are reclassified under Idaho law and managed as a big game species statewide. They can be killed legally:

- During a legal hunting season set by the Idaho Fish and Game Commission.
- If seen molesting or attacking livestock or domestic animals.
- To protect human life.
- As authorized by Idaho Fish and Game to resolve wolf-livestock conflicts.

Under state law, all Idaho landowners and livestock producers may haze, harass or kill a wolf that is molesting or attacking livestock or domestic animals on public or private land. Such incidents, however, must be reported to Fish and Game within 72 hours. The law also pertains to mountain lions or black bears caught damaging private property.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services will continue to investigate reports of injured or dead livestock to determine whether they are wolf related. Wildlife Services also will continue to assist Idaho Fish and Game with resolving

wolf-livestock conflicts through lethal and nonlethal methods.

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission will establish a 2011 fall wolf hunting season according to the state's wolf management plan. Hunt rules and limits will be set later this summer.



Idaho Fish and Game biologists dart and radio-collar wolves in Garden Valley in 2008.

IDFG photo

Idaho's wolf conservation and management program is expected to cost between \$900,000 and \$1.2 million a year. No single source of funding has been identified and Idaho expects to use a combination of sources, including wolf hunting tag sales and federal funding.

National interest in conserving popular species like wolves and grizzly bears

also brings with it a national responsibility to help fund their management.

Idaho maintains the continuation of federal funding is critical to the long term success of recovery efforts.

Idaho must monitor the wolf population and annually submit population status reports to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for at least five years.

Fish and Game will apply the same professional wildlife management practices to wolves that it has applied to all big game species, which have recovered from low populations during the early 1900s.

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Gray Wolves Meet Federal Recovery Goals in Idaho

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service set three recovery criteria for the Northern Rockies wolf population. The criteria have been met in Idaho and Montana, but not in Wyoming.

The numeric recovery criteria was set at a minimum of 10 breeding pairs and 100 wolves in each of the three states for three consecutive years. At the end of 2010, there were about 1,500 wolves and more than 100 breeding pairs in the three states combined.

A second criteria was that the wolf populations in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming make up a larger regional population where wolves have the ability to disperse and travel throughout the region to join existing packs or start new packs to assure genetic diversity in the future. Wolf populations in Idaho and Montana connect with much larger wolf populations in Canada and Alaska and with wolves in Wyoming.

The third criteria required each of the three states adopt a wolf management plan approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Wyoming doesn't yet have an approved wolf management plan.

The delisting rule released May 5 affects wolves in Idaho, Montana, eastern Oregon, eastern Washington, and a small portion of northwest Utah. Wolves in the entire state of Wyoming, however, remain under federal Endangered Species Act protection.

After delisting, U.S. Fish and Wildlife will review any significant changes to state laws, administrative rules or wolf management plans to determine whether such changes would trigger a "status review."

In general, three scenarios would lead U.S. Fish and Wildlife to review the status of wolves to determine whether delisting is warranted:

1. If the wolf population falls below recovery levels of 100 wolves and 10 breeding pairs in any of the three states.
2. If the wolf population falls below 150 wolves or 15 breeding pairs in any of the states for three consecutive years.
3. If a change in state law or management objectives would significantly increase the threat to the wolf population.

Each state is required to report the population status annually to U.S. Fish and Wildlife for at least five years. The federal agency will also examine how each state carries out its management plan and implements its respective state laws and regulations.



Commission Sets Wolf Plan

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission on May 19 directed the Fish and Game Department to:

1. Manage wolves in a manner that will ensure wolves remain under responsible state management in conjunction with the rest of Idaho's wildlife.
2. Manage wolves as big game animals consistent with the goals and objectives of the 2002 Idaho Wolf Conservation and Management plan approved by the Idaho Legislature and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to keep wolves off the Endangered Species List.
3. Control wolves where they depredate on livestock and other domestic animals or threaten human safety.
4. Control the population of wolves and other predators as needed to address areas where elk or other prey populations are below management objectives.
5. Develop wolf hunting season recommendations for consideration at the Commission's July 2011 meeting and develop trapping recommendations.
6. Conduct additional species management planning as appropriate.

Commissioners also agreed to support the state of Idaho's legal defense of challenges to state management, such as those lawsuits challenging the 2011 congressional action for wolf delisting, and to urge Congress to continue to provide funding for monitoring, control and depredation compensation related to the wolf population introduced by the federal government into Idaho.



Fish and Game biologists check a tranquilized wolf for health and disease.

IDFG photo

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Lolo Zone Wolf Control Action Under Way

Elk numbers in the Lolo elk management zone have been declining for more than 20 years – more sharply recently.

At current calf and cow mortality rates, the elk herd can't sustain itself. Fish and Game research has identified wolves as the primary cause of mortality among female elk and calves more than six months old.

Idaho Fish and Game has authorized a handful of licensed outfitters to act as designated agents of Fish and Game to kill any wolves they encounter in big game units 10 and 12. The agency also has contracted with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services to remove wolves where they are having an unacceptable impact on big game herds.

Wildlife Services agents, using helicopters, have removed five wolves. Their effort stopped because the snowpack is gone, and continuing the effort would be an inefficient use of funds.

Fish and Game wants to reduce the population in the Lolo zone to 20 to 30 wolves in three to five packs over the next year. The main effort will come next winter, when snow cover makes



IDFG photo

it easier to see wolves. A minimum of 40 to 50 wolves would be removed during the first year.

Removal during subsequent years would be lower, but variable, depending on wolf abundance.

Fish and Game will maintain a reduced population over the next five years, while tracking the effects on the elk population and on wolves.

Examples of wolf control efforts in Alaska and Canada have shown that five years may not be long enough.

After five years, Fish and Game will assess the removal effort and provide recommendations for future management actions.

Idaho Fish and Game Policy

Idaho wildlife management policy is set by seven volunteer commissioners. The Idaho Fish and Game Commission's policy decisions are based on research and recommendations by the professional staff of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and with input from the governor's office, the state Legislature, hunters, anglers and the public.

Wolves at a Glance:

Numbers

- Fish and Game estimates the wolf population in Idaho to be about 1,000 with last year's pups. More than 1,500 are estimated to be in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming.

Distribution

- Wolves are found from the Canadian border to near Interstate 84 in southern Idaho, with most in the national forests of the central part of the state.
- The population spans the state from Washington and Oregon to Montana and Wyoming.

Characteristics

- Wolf packs typically include a breeding pair, their offspring, and other non-breeding adults. The average pack size is about eight animals.
- Wolves are capable of mating by age two or three.
- Wolves can live 13 years and reproduce past 10 years.
- An average of five pups are born in early spring. They and are cared for by the entire pack. For the first six weeks, pups are reared in dens.
- Dens are often used year after year.
- Pups depend on mother's milk for the first month, then weaned and fed regurgitated meat brought by pack members.
- By seven to eight months, pups begin traveling with the adults.
- After a year or two, wolves may leave and try to find a mate and form a pack.
- Lone, dispersing wolves have traveled as far as 600 miles in search of a new home.
- Wolf packs live within territories that they defend from other wolves.
- Territories range from 50 square miles to more than 1,000 square miles.
- Wolves travel as far as 30 miles in a day to hunt.
- They trot at about 5 miles per hour, but they can run as fast as 40 miles per hour for short distances.

Current Status

- Wolves were removed from the federal endangered species list in May 2011.
- Idaho manages wolves as a big game animal.
- The first hunting seasons was set by the Idaho Fish and Game Commission during 2009. Hunters took 181 wolves during the season that ended March 31, 2010.

Idaho's First Wolf Hunt



Robert Millage of Kamiah killed the first wolf in Idaho's first regulated wolf hunt in 2009.

Photo courtesy of Robert Millage

Hunters Score in Idaho's First Regulated, Orderly Wolf Hunt

When Idaho's first regulated wolf hunt closed at the end of the day March 31, 2010, hunters had taken 188 wolves.

The hunt, which opened September 1, 2009, demonstrated that Idaho Fish and Game could run an orderly wolf hunt and monitor hunter harvest effectively.

Until they were returned to federal protection August 5, 2010, wolves were classified as big game animals and managed in 12 wolf management zones based on prey species distribution and management, potential for conflicts with livestock, and ecological similarity.

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission set a statewide limit of 220 wolves for

the season and provided for an additional take of 35 wolves for members of the Nez Perce Tribe in their Tribal Treaty Area in north-central Idaho. The total statewide limit represented about 25 percent of the projected 2009 summer wolf population.

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission objective at the time was to reduce wolf numbers and manage the population at the 2005 level of just over 500 wolves.

Season dates and limits were set for individual wolf management zones, based on the estimated wolf population within each zone, level of wolf predation on elk populations, history of depredation on livestock, and interbreeding among wolf

populations across state borders.

Fish and Game sold 31,400 wolf tags for the September 1, 2009, through March 31, 2010, hunting season – most of them to resident hunters.

At the close of the hunting season on March 31, 188 wolves had been counted against the statewide harvest limit of 220 wolves. Hunters killed 181 wolves. Another five were either killed illegally during the season or were wounded but not recovered, and two were killed in snares legally set for bobcats or coyotes.

Fish and Game issued only two citations for wolf hunt violations.

