

IDAHO FISH AND GAME
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Idaho Fish & Game Commission Sets Wolf Hunt Limits

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission, Monday, August 17, set harvest limits for Idaho's first public wolf hunting season this fall.

Fish and Game models indicate Idaho now has at least 1,000 wolves. The population increases at a rate of about 20 percent a year, without hunting.

The commissioners adopted a strategy that would help meet the state's wolf population objective, as outlined in the 2008 Idaho Wolf Population Management Plan.

Hunters will be allowed to take up to 220 wolves this fall and winter. Wolf tags go on sale at 10 a.m. August 24, at all license vendors. A resident tag costs \$11.75, and a nonresident tag costs \$186.

One of the commission's top considerations is retaining state management of Idaho's growing wolf population. Idaho has an approved wolf management plan, developed with public involvement. The plan was approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and found acceptable by a federal judge.

The commissioners' decision is consistent with the population goals set out in the plan.

In 1995 and 1996, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service introduced 35 wolves to central Idaho. Since then they have increased in numbers and expanded their distribution.

Fish and Game has a responsibility to manage those wolves in balance with their prey and their habitat - just as the agency manages other fish and wildlife species. As with other species, hunting seasons on wolves would be part of managing the population.

A wolf hunting season gives Idaho Fish and Game an opportunity to learn how public hunting fits into managing wolves. As Fish and Game learns how effective regulated hunting is, seasons can be adjusted in areas where wolves are causing unacceptable problems for big game herds or domestic livestock.

Wolf managers will use the harvest limits the same way already used effectively with other species that Fish and Game manages. When limits are reached, the season ends.

The commissioners set harvest limits for each of the state's 12 wolf management zones. When the limit is reached in a zone, the season would close in that zone.

Commissioners want to manage the wolf population toward the 2005 level of 520 wolves through regulated hunting (five-times higher than the federal recovery goal). The 2005 wolf population figure was used as a target number because wolf conflicts both with wildlife and livestock increased significantly that year.

Wolves in Idaho and Montana were removed from the endangered species list in May and have been managed under state law since then. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's rule delisting wolves, however, faces challenges in federal court. The outcome of those challenges could affect Idaho wolf hunting season.

A printed brochure will be available at license vendors when tags go on sale August 24.