

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January 2005, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) published and adopted new regulations (10(j) Rule) governing wolf management within the Nonessential Experimental Population Areas of Idaho south of Interstate Highway 90 (Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Regulation for Nonessential Experimental Populations of the Western Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of the Gray Wolf [50 CFR Part 17.84]). The new 10(j) Rule allowed states with USFWS-approved wolf management plans to petition the Secretary of Interior for certain wolf management authorities as an interim measure to delisting. In January 2006, the Secretary of Interior and the Governor of Idaho signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) which transferred most wolf management responsibilities to the State of Idaho. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) is the primary state agency responsible for carrying out wolf management activities in Idaho. In April 2005, the Governor of Idaho and the Nez Perce Tribe (NPT) signed a MOA that outlined responsibilities between the State of Idaho and the NPT in regards to wolf conservation and management.

The USFWS published a proposed delisting rule in February 2007 and final delisting rule in February 2008, and wolves were officially delisted 30 days later in March 2008. The U.S. Federal District Court in Missoula, Montana, issued a preliminary injunction on Friday, July 18, 2008, that immediately reinstated temporary Endangered Species Act protections for gray wolves in the northern Rocky Mountain DPS pending final resolution of the case. This included all of Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming, the eastern one-third of Washington and Oregon, and parts of north-central Utah. On September 22, 2008 the United States filed a motion to vacate the delisting rule, return the gray wolf to the list of endangered and threatened species, and remand the matter to the USFWS. On October 14, the District Judge filed an order granting the United States' motion to remand the delisting rule back to the USFWS, and dismissed the case.

On October 24, 2008 the USFWS announced it would reopen the public comment period on its proposal to delist the gray wolf in the northern Rocky Mountains. Through a notice in the Federal Register published on October 28, 2008, USFWS asked the public to provide comments and any additional information on the February 2007 proposal to delist wolves. The USFWS analyzed the comments and rewrote the delisting rule including additional administrative record, data, analysis, and further explanation to address the federal courts concerns. The rule was sent to the Federal Register (FR) in January but not posted. The Obama administration put a hold on all rules and regulations sent to the FR that had not become final under the Bush administration pending review by the new administration. At the time of this writing, no decision had been made.

This annual progress report is a cooperative effort between the IDFG and the NPT, with contributions from U. S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services (WS) summarizing wolf activity and related management in Idaho during 2008. The IDFG developed, and the Commission passed the Idaho Wolf Population Management Plan that outlines how wolves will be managed through regulated hunting (IDFG 2008). Objectives identify higher harvest in areas with higher conflicts with livestock and/or ungulates. The 2008-2012 population objective is to maintain 500-700 wolves in the state.

During 2008, biologists documented 88 resident wolf packs in Idaho that were alive at the end of the year. A minimum of 428 wolves was observed, and the minimum population was estimated at 846 wolves (Appendix A). In addition, there were 16 documented border packs counted for Montana and Wyoming that established territories overlapping the Idaho state boundary and likely spent some time in Idaho. Of the 60 packs known to have reproduced, 39 packs qualified as breeding pairs by the end of the year. These 60 reproductive packs produced a minimum 192 pups.

In Idaho, wolf packs ranged from the Canadian border south to Interstate Highway 84, and from the Washington and Oregon borders east to the Montana and Wyoming borders. Dispersing wolves were occasionally reported in previously unoccupied areas, and the increase in our minimum population estimate appears to be a result of range expansion, primarily in the Panhandle, and an increase in average pack size used for calculating the population. Sixteen previously unknown packs were documented for the first time during 2008, but there was a net increase of only 5 documented packs in the state. New packs and wolves attempted to recolonize within the Southern Mountains DAU but became involved in livestock conflicts and were subsequently removed. Four hundred and ninety-six wolf observations were reported on IDFG's online website report form during 2008.

One hundred and fifty-three (153) wolves were confirmed to have died in Idaho during 2008. Of known mortalities, agency control and legal landowner take in response to wolf-livestock depredation accounted for 108 deaths, other human causes (including illegal take) 23 deaths, 18 unknown causes, and 4 wolves died of natural causes.

During the 2008 calendar year, 96 cattle, 218 sheep, 12 dogs, and 1 horse foal were classified by WS as confirmed wolf kills; 32 cattle, 46 sheep, and 1 dog were considered probable kills by wolves.

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