

Idaho Wolf Update
May 17 – May 30, 2008

To: Idaho Fish and Game Staff and Cooperators

From: Fish and Game Wolf Program Coordinator, Steve Nadeau

Subject: Status of Gray Wolf Management

When wolves were delisted at the end of March, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decided to discontinue the publication of the Northern Rocky Mountain wolf weekly. Instead, for the time being, Idaho will publish an Idaho specific wolf biweekly, which will be posted on the Website. Along with the USFWS, contributors to these reports have included the USDA APHIS Wildlife Services, the Nez Perce Tribe, and the states of Idaho and Montana. Past wolf weekly publications are available for review on our wolf webpage and links along with all pertinent and updated wolf information and publications at: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/wildlife/wolves/>

Monitoring

5/27: Jason Husseman got a pup count of five pups in the Hughes Creek pack.

Nez Perce Tribe crews have traps out in the Scott Valley area, where the Orphan pack was last known to reside, based on sign located there this week.

Isaac Babcock obtained a partial pup count on the Stolle Meadows pack; while tracking the radio-collared alpha female, B249, he happened across a secondary den. Inside he observed two black pups, but there are likely at least another one or two.

Isaac and Bjornen Babcock obtained a visual on GPS radio-collared male B327 in the Scott Valley area; he appeared to be alone (as he was during an aerial observation 5/25/08). This crew investigated the past two aerial locations of female wolf B290 (originally a member of the Morgan Creek pack); a den is highly suspected due to the site fidelity being exhibited by this wolf, but no direct evidence of reproduction has been obtained thus far. They also documented a new pack, containing radio-collared female B315, on the breaks of the Snake River; B315 and an uncollared wolf were observed away from the den/rendezvous site and one adult and multiple pups were heard howling. This pack will be named soon.

Holyan conducted additional scouting in the Boulder Creek drainage southeast of McCall following up on reports from Idaho Department of Lands personnel that made a sighting in the area. Holyan had verified wolf sign here in February/March. Flights were conducted on 5/25 and 5/26. Female B192, originally captured as a pup in the Soldier Mountain pack (born in 2003), was aurally observed north of McCall with another wolf. B192 had been missing from her natal territory since June 2007, although she was identified via DNA from a scat collected in the Bear Valley pack's territory during July 2007.

Control

Wildlife Services (WS) has investigated 57 reported wolf depredations so far in 2008 (they conducted 36 investigations by this date in 2007). WS confirmed 35 depredations compared to 22 during the same time frame in 2007. Therefore investigations have increased 58 percent this year over last, and confirmed livestock kills have increased 59 percent as well.

From January 1 to May 25, Idaho Fish and Game has recorded 45 dead wolves. Twenty-two were control actions due to livestock depredations, five were killed by producers under state law 36-1107, one was killed by a producer under the federal 10j rule, two died of natural causes, three from vehicle collisions, seven unknowns, and five illegal kills. Wolves continue to remain in lower elevations and on private lands due to late spring conditions during denning season thus making them more vulnerable to livestock depredations and other forms of mortality. Also, because of increased wolf populations expanding into suboptimal habitat and high conflict areas higher levels of mortality can be expected.

On 5/19, WS captured and radio collared a gray, sub-adult male wolf at the depredation site near Hill City where unknown wolves killed 18 sheep the weekend before.

On 5/20, WS confirmed another calf killed by the Pass Creek pack on private land along the East Fork of the Salmon River. So far, this pack has killed four calves in the past three weeks; all on private land.

On 5/23, WS confirmed that a wolf killed a calf on private land southeast of Grangeville. This property neighbors the property where WS confirmed another wolf depredation earlier this spring. Control efforts are ongoing.

On 5/25, WS confirmed that wolves killed two buck sheep and probably killed 13 more on private land about 10 miles north of Carey, east of the Little Wood Reservoir. Several more sheep are missing. A neighbor saw three wolves running from the property. Control efforts are underway.

On 5/27, WS confirmed that wolves killed another six sheep on the Boise National Forest adjacent to this property. Control efforts are ongoing.

On 5/29 WS looked at a calf on private land near Leadore that was reported as a wolf depredation. There was no evidence that wolves were involved at all.

On 5/29, WS confirmed that wolves killed 33 sheep (nine ewes, 24 lambs) near Alexander Flat on the Boise National Forest. Control efforts are underway.

On 5/29 Husseman and WS visited the Pass Creek suspected den area in a control effort that involves attempting to bump wolves from their den site that will soon have

cattle on it, but backed off when the conditions were not right; further attempts will be made to try to move the wolves before the cattle gets put on the range.

On 5/29 the suspected breeding female of the Pass Creek pack was trapped at the depredation site on the East Fork Salmon River and euthanized. Though WS attempted to avoid lethal removal of the female, her leg opposite the trap was broken and she could not have been released and expected to survive. The pups appear to be weaned so proactive efforts to have the remaining wolves move the pups away from the private land cattle operation are ongoing.

Management

A wolf radio collar was found on mortality in the Selway wilderness (Selway pack) during a routine Nez Perce Tribe telemetry flight. Michael Lucid (Idaho Fish and Game) found the wolf carcass and it appeared to be a natural death.

On May 22, the Fish and Game Commission voted to approve recommendations for rules for the first wolf hunting season. Additionally, they approved a total mortality limit that would approach the goal of achieving the estimated population level of approximately 518 wolves, or the lower end of the range approved in the March 2008 Wolf Population Management Plan (518-732). This population level assures viable and healthy wolf populations across Idaho, reduced populations in areas where there is high conflict with livestock and ungulates, assure connectivity with Montana, Yellowstone National Park and Wyoming, and establishes the first big game hunting season for wolves in Idaho. Total mortality limits include all forms of reported or verified mortality including road kills, control actions, natural mortality, illegal kills, as well as regulated harvest. At current population levels, more than 200 wolves would be expected to die from all forms of mortality except legal harvest. Once the limit is reached in each wolf zone the hunting season for that zone will be closed. Once the statewide limit is reached, hunting will close across the state. All mortality will be accounted for both by confirmation and estimation using radio collar data. Remaining live wolf populations will be estimated using standard and newly researched techniques that rely on radio collar and GPS data for aerial counting wolves in packs, as well as DNA data, hunter and public reporting, and other techniques. The goal of maintaining wolves at the level approved will assure long-term healthy wolf populations in balance with prey, reduce conflicts and assure that wolves occupy optimal habitat in Idaho. Including hunting as a form of management will improve acceptance of wolves in Idaho and assure that wolves are here to stay.

On April 28, a lawsuit was filed in federal court in Missoula to prevent delisting. The states of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming along with several other groups were granted intervener status on behalf of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The injunction hearing was in federal court in Missoula on May 29. Judge Malloy said he would get the ruling out soon.

Information and Education

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission met from 7-9 p.m. May 21 to listen to public comment at their open house at the Jerome Fish and Game office. About 100 people attended and many testified.

Carter Niemeyer gave a wolf walk and presentation to about 20 people at the Idaho Conservation League annual meeting at Red Fish Lake on May 17.

Wolves are being reported in Placerville and Lowman areas around residences. Information is being distributed to reduce conflicts.

We also would like to remind people that when wolves are in the area, please be aware that they may attack or injure dogs. It often helps to keep dogs in kennels or inside buildings at night and to not let them roam freely when humans are not around. When fresh wolf sign is found, place dogs on restraints and keep supervised. The state law allows individuals to harass or kill a wolf attacking or molesting their domestic animals including pets. If you are having concerns or problems with wolves close to your residence, please inform the Fish and Game Office nearest you.

Please help us manage wolves by reporting wolf sightings on our Fish and Game observation form found at: http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/apps/wolf_report/

Wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains (NRM) were delisted on March 28, 2008. The USFWS successfully recovered and delisted the population with the help of state, federal, tribal and non government partners. Management of these wolves now resides with the states of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. The 2002 legislatively approved Wolf Conservation and Management Plan along with the March 2008 Idaho Fish and Game Wolf Population Management Plan, as well as the laws and policies of the state now govern wolf management in Idaho. Wolves are now listed as a big game animal in Idaho and protected under the laws and policies of the State of Idaho.