

Idaho Wolf Management Progress Report September 2009

Wolf Hunting Seasons

Hunting seasons opened in the Lolo and Sawtooth wolf management zones on September 1 and in the Selway and Middle Fork wolf management zones on September 15. Seasons in the remaining eight wolf management zones opened October 1.

Wolf hunting seasons will close immediately in individual wolf management zones if the harvest limit for that zone is reached. Seasons close immediately statewide if the statewide harvest limit of 220 wolves is met.

Hunters are required to call 1-877-872-3190 within 24 hours of killing a wolf. They must have the skull and hide checked in by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game within five days of kill.

Idaho wolf hunting seasons and rules are available on the Fish and Game website:

<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/hunt/wolf/wolfrules.pdf>

Hunters are required to confirm the season remains open in the zone they are hunting by calling 1-877-872-3190 or by checking status online:

<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/hunt/wolf/quota.cfm>

Harvest update From September 1 through September 30, 16 wolves were harvested by hunters. Two were killed in the Lolo Wolf Management Zone, five in the Middle Fork Zone, seven in the Sawtooth Zone, and two were killed in the Selway zone (Table 1.). An additional wolf was killed illegally in the McCall-Weiser wolf management zone before that season opened October 1. The wolf was seized, and the suspect has been cited. Wolf harvest seasons opened in all remaining zones on October 1. As of October 8, 33 wolves had been killed (Table 1.). Wolf harvest is expected to increase beginning October 10 when most deer and elk hunters head to the field as those seasons open.

Monitoring

The 2008 annual report on Wolf Conservation and Management in Idaho is available at: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/wildlife/wolves/manage/>. The minimum year-end population estimates for 2008 for Idaho are 846 wolves, 88 packs, with 39 documented breeding pairs.

During September, Idaho Fish and Game, the Nez Perce Tribe, and USDA Wildlife Services personnel captured three wolves. One new wolf was radio-collared, one previously marked wolf was captured, and its radio collar was replaced. One pup was captured, marked with ear tags and released.

By the end of September, there were 95 documented packs in Idaho. Reproduction has been confirmed in 57 packs, and a minimum of 179 pups have been confirmed produced (of which 13 have been documented to have died of various causes). To date, 48 packs meet breeding pair criteria (at least two pups produced and currently surviving). Pup counts are incomplete in several packs that were determined to be reproductive, so their breeding pair status may still be confirmed with additional effort.

The summer field season has come to a close and trapping efforts have been suspended as hunting seasons have opened throughout the state. Nez Perce Tribe seasonal biologists Shannon Katchel and Kari Holder performed exceptionally well throughout the season and are now on furlough until next year. We thank them for their outstanding contributions.

Management and Control Actions

During September, USDA Wildlife Services confirmed wolves killed a bull, two cows, six calves, 44 sheep, and a guard dog. Wildlife Services also confirmed that two guard dogs were attacked and injured by wolves. Another two calves and four sheep were documented as probable wolf kills. In response to these and previous wolf depredations, Wildlife Services killed 19 wolves. Wildlife Services confirmed that a black bear killed three sheep and determined that a lion probably killed a calf. Confirmed wolf depredations in Idaho from 2003 – September 30, 2009 are reported in Table 2.

Research

Idaho Fish and Game wildlife research crews continue to monitor wolves and elk survival in the Lowman and North Fork Clearwater study areas. Trapping efforts ceased with the opening of hunting seasons.

University of Montana crews had a very successful summer and collected more than 1,200 DNA samples from wolves in three study areas. UofM crews tested howl boxes and rub pads throughout the three study areas in Idaho. Results from the 2008 hunter survey are nearly complete, and it appears that, as in 2006 and 2007, hunter reports of the numbers of wolves in the study areas largely track the known density of wolves in those areas. DNA and data analyses are in progress. To learn more about this project that is developing alternative methods to radio telemetry for monitoring wolf populations, go to:

<http://www.umt.edu/mcwru/PERSONNELPROFILES08/PPDaveAusband2008.htm>

Information and Education

Further information and updates can be viewed at:

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

A reminder: wolves are fully protected under state law. For more detailed information on the laws and policies protecting wolves in Idaho, and what people are allowed to do to protect livestock and pets, please visit the Idaho Fish and Game website or call a local Fish and Game office.

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

Table 1. Total known wolf mortality by cause, Jan. 1, 2009 – Sep. 30, 2009.

Wolf Mgt Zone	Control	Harvest	Illegal	Legal	Other	Unk	Total
Dworshak-Elk City	3				1	2	6
Lolo		2				3	5
McCall-Weiser	23		1 [#]	2		1	27
Middle Fork		5				2	7
Panhandle			2				2
Sawtooth	21	7	4		2	3	37
Selway		2					2
South Idaho	2						2
Southern Mountains	22		1	3	1	7	34
Upper Snake	6		2		1		9
Total	77	16	10	5	5	18	131

[#] Wolf shot in closed wolf zone that will count towards zone quota.

Table 2. Confirmed wolf depredations in Idaho from 2003 to September 30, 2009.

YEAR	Depredations ¹				Wolf Mortality			
	Cattle	Sheep	Dogs	Total	WS ²	10j / 36-1107 ³	Other ⁴	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
Jan 1 – Sep 30, 2009	70	285	14	369	77	5	49	131

¹ Includes confirmed wolf depredations resulting 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, illegal take, and legal hunter harvest beginning Sep 1, 2009.

Delisting

Gray wolves were delisted wolves in Montana, Idaho, the eastern one-third of Washington and Oregon, and a small part of north-central Utah on May 4. Wolves in Wyoming will remain under the adequate regulatory mechanisms of the Endangered Species Act. The US Fish and Wildlife Service will continue to manage wolves in all of Wyoming under the provisions of the 1994 nonessential experimental population rules.

In Idaho wolves are being managed as a big game animal. They are protected by state laws already approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Idaho legislature, and Idaho Fish and Game Commission. The Fish and Game Commission set a statewide harvest limit of 220 wolves. Nez Perce Tribal members may take up to 35 additional wolves within the Nez Perce Tribal Treaty Area.

Litigation Status

On June 2 a lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court in Missoula by a coalition of 13 environmental and animal rights groups. Another separate lawsuit challenging the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's delisting criteria was filed shortly after by the Greater Yellowstone Coalition. Those two cases were consolidated in the U.S. District Court in Missoula under Judge Donald Molloy. Their complaint alleges the Northern Rocky Mountain wolf population is not recovered and that the delisting violates the Endangered Species Act for many legal reasons, including that delisting cannot occur without an adequate Wyoming regulatory framework in place.

On August 20, a request for preliminary injunction was filed by the plaintiffs requesting that wolves in Montana and Idaho be placed back on the Endangered Species list while the lawsuit is resolved within the next year. Arguments on the injunction were heard at the federal courthouse in Missoula on August 31. Judge Molloy denied the motion for preliminary injunction on September 8 on grounds that the plaintiffs had failed to show hunting seasons in Montana and Idaho were not likely to cause irreparable harm to the wolf population. But Molloy indicated the plaintiffs have demonstrated a likelihood of success on the merits of their lawsuit. Among other things, Molloy stated concerns with leaving a portion of the Northern Rockies Distinct Population Segment still listed – the state of Wyoming.

You may review information, past wolf updates, and publications on our wolf webpage at: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/wildlife/wolves/>