

The Outdoorsman

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Winter feeding Issues - Part 2 of 2

April 2004

F&G Protects Wolves, Rattlesnakes

by George Dovel



On March 25, 2004 the Idaho F&G Commission classified wolves as protected big game animals despite their predator status.

For many years it has been illegal for hunters in Idaho to shoot at any wild *game* species from a mechanically powered vehicle, aircraft or boat, or capture or kill *big game* animals with pitfalls, traps or snares. The prohibited methods that apply collectively to all game animals, birds and fur-bearing species are listed in Idaho Code Section 36-1101.

The additional prohibited methods of take that apply only to *big game* animals are listed in Idaho Administrative Code under IDAPA 13.01.08.05. These include "any net, snare, trap, chemical, deadfall or device other than legal firearm, archery or muzzleloader equipment."

From 1945-1971 extended either-sex deer and elk seasons and multiple deer harvests in an increasing number of units ultimately resulted in record low populations of both species and a sharp drop in big game tag sales. To offset this loss of income, IDFG, the Commission and their support groups asked the Idaho Legislature to approve adding mountain lions to the list of big game species and charging residents \$10 and nonresidents \$135 for the privilege of hunting a lion.

Outdoorsmen pointed out that this would result in an excessive increase in lions since trapping would be prohibited and skilled lion hunters would only be allowed to



Author and Rob Donley with 5 lions and bobcat taken on Middle Fk of the Salmon in 1970 before lions were made big game animals.

kill one lion per year. But the two year IDFG campaign was successful and the large predators were given big game status in March 1971.

With reproductive rates comparable to deer, it took a few years for the lions to increase but Idaho now has record high lion populations and harvests, with severely declining mule deer and elk populations. Because the mountain lion has big game status, the Commission hears demands every year for even higher lion populations from an organized hound hunter group that admittedly cares nothing about the impact on declining deer and elk herds.

This group ignores the necessity to balance predators with their prey species, insisting that no trapping, snaring or other effective methods that violate "fair chase" be used to control these predators because they are now called "big game" animals. The \$50 bounty that encouraged professional lion hunters and trappers to effectively control lions and restore bountiful deer and elk populations is history.

For several decades Alaska's wolf bounty, and salaries collected by professional trappers and wolf hunters, allowed that state to maintain world class hunting for moose, caribou and dall sheep. But since wildlife biologists convinced the Game Board to drop the bounty and make the

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wolf a big game animal/fur-bearer, estimated wolf populations have tripled and sport hunting for the three big game species has been severely curtailed.

Unlike the mountain lion, which averages only 2.6 surviving kittens every two years, the wolf's reproductive potential allows it to multiply at a rate of up to 34% per year where populations are hunted. North America's noted wolf authority, David Mech, recently stated that wolf hunting alone will not stabilize wolf populations, which will continue to expand until primary and alternate prey species are depleted.

Conscientious wildlife biologists in Canada and Alaska have recorded the decimation of moose and wild sheep populations and entire caribou herds numbering more than 100,000 animals by wolf packs where sport hunting was the only means of regulating wolf numbers.

I.C. Section 36-104 (b) 2 requires the Idaho F&G Commission to hold hearings to determine whether or not any wildlife species may be taken without depleting it. If it finds that an open season may be declared without endangering the supply of any species, it shall make a temporary rule in respect to when, under what circumstances, in which localities, by what means, what sex, and in what amounts the wildlife may be taken.

If the Commission finds that a normally unprotected predatory species such as coyotes are in such short supply that the take must be controlled, this Code Section allows it to set a season with bag limits and methods of take, including trapping and snaring. However it can no longer allow mountain lions to be trapped or snared without going through a process of altering their big game classification by exception or reclassification.

Armed with all of this information, the Senators who wrote the Idaho Wolf Plan included the following: "The designation of the wolf as a big game species, furbearer or special classification of predator that provides for controlled take provides legal authorization for Idaho Department of Fish and Game to manage the species."

USFWS officials approved the special predator classification "as long as it is a managed predator with set seasons and take" when the plan was written. Inclusion of the predator classification is the reason the wolf plan was approved by a majority of both houses of the Idaho Legislature, because it was consistent with their intent that the wolves be removed from Idaho, or carefully limited to the federally mandated minimum if they are not removed.

The Office of Species Conservation followed up on that language recently and the Idaho Plan was again approved by USFWS for delisting. It appeared that delisting would soon allow Idaho to cut the already excessive number of wolves in half but one thing was overlooked: the private goal of IDFG biologists to create and maintain a large population of wolves which may not be controlled as other predators are.

When the Draft Wolf EIS was written in 1993, IDFG Wolf Biologists justified wolf introduction by providing prey population estimates that were 600% higher than actually existed. When the Legislature learned of this misrepresentation, it amended I.C. Sec. 36-715, specifically forbidding IDFG from expending funds or entering into a cooperative agreement with any agency, department or entity of the United States government concerning wolves unless expressly authorized by state statute.

Yet on September 27, 1994, while a USFWS public hearing was being held in Boise to determine whether or not Canadian wolves should be relocated in Idaho, IDFG Director Jerry Conley and Wildlife Bureau Chief Tom Reinecker quietly issued USFWS a special permit allowing the wolves to be released in Idaho. The permit was accompanied by a letter from Conley endorsing the strict federal wolf plan and agreeing to work with the federal wolf team to introduce Canadian wolves into Idaho, including providing IDFG staff support.

Shortly before the first wolves were released in Idaho, IDFG Wolf Biologist Jon Rachael wrote a Wolf Position Statement, which included the following:

"The IDFG supports wolf recovery in Idaho, believing that wolf recovery is compatible with all other natural resource interests in the state and that it will not have a negative impact on Idaho's economy. After delisting, the IDFG will probably manage wolves as game animals similar to lions and black bears."

The foregoing history and information may help the reader to better understand events that occurred during the March 24-26, 2004 Commission hearing and meeting concerning IDFG wolf management.

The published meeting agenda did not include any language indicating that wolves would be discussed so neither hunters nor the general public provided wolf input during the Wednesday evening hearing. However the Idaho Outfitters and Guides Association requested that the wolf be classified as either a fur-bearer or special predator, allowing it to be trapped or snared.

The following afternoon, one of the authors of the Idaho Wolf Plan, Senator Skip Brandt, arrived to discuss the reasons for designating the wolf as a special predator. Commission Chairman Nancy Hadley acknowledged him and other legislators present, but did not invite his input.

Instead, Director Huffaker told the Commissioners they already had the authority to allow trapping and snaring of a big game animal and the other classifications were unnecessary. Commissioner John Burns raised the issue of "special predator" designation but Huffaker responded, "It isn't necessary - we intend to manage the wolf as a big game animal. It's what people are expecting and that's my recommendation."

Without further discussion the Commissioners voted unanimously to reclassify the wolf as a big game animal. The Legislators got up and left the room.

Commissioner Cameron Wheeler followed them out into the hall and explained what appeared to be a prearranged vote by insisting the Commission must get control of wolves immediately and stop the damage they are causing. I pointed out that once the wolves achieve big game status there is an existing prohibition against the use of traps and snares, hunting with airplanes or vehicles, and all other effective means of control.

Commissioner Wheeler responded that USFWS would never accept Idaho's special predator classification because they had rejected the Wyoming Wolf Plan. However there is a significant difference between the Wyoming plan, which allows *all* wolves seen outside Yellowstone and certain federal wilderness areas to be shot on sight, and Idaho's plan which provides for regulated take statewide.

Wheeler returned to the meeting and asked for clarification and IDFG attorney (DAG) Dallas Burkhalter simply read aloud a selected portion from the Idaho Code. Burkhalter failed to explain the difficulty that will probably be encountered in getting a temporary rule approved to overturn half a century of fair chase regulations.

Snakes, Bats, Amphibians Protected

State Nongame Wildlife Manager Chuck Harris presented the Commission with IDFG recommendations for reclassification of unprotected wildlife to protected nongame species. In addition to making the common crow a game bird, the recommendations gave protected status to several small animals and birds plus all bats, reptiles and amphibians.

Commissioner Burns asked if this included rattlesnakes and Harris responded that it did. He explained that the new classification "is not intended to prevent killing a rattlesnake in your back yard if it could harm your kids...and it would allow up to four rattlesnakes to be kept as pets."

His recommendations were approved unanimously by the Commission as a temporary rule without further discussion. Pending amendment of I.C. Sec. 36-1107, or Legislative changes to the rule, it is now a misdemeanor offense to kill any snake, lizard, bat, skink, toad or frog (except bullfrogs taken by legal means).

Mule Deer Seasons Shortened

During the past few weeks, Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife, the Mule deer Foundation and other sportsmen groups in southern Idaho have demanded that IDFG halt the destruction of mule deer herds. Commissioners from the Southeast, Upper Snake and Magic Valley Regions have spent time listening to sportsmen and designing shorter seasons to address the declining deer populations.

SE Region Commissioner Marc Gibbs was visibly upset when he was given different IDFG season proposals than had been discussed for several weeks. On Thursday, he reported the Southeast Region had lost 9,000 does in two years and one unit has a buck:doe ratio of only 6:100.

He said that sportsmen gathered 649 signatures in six days supporting a 4-point bucks only season in Units 70 and 73 and instructed IDFG Wildlife Game Manger Brad Compton to prepare a new set of proposed deer seasons by the following morning. The seasons would include a five day 4-pt or better bucks only season in Units 70 and 73 and no antlerless deer hunting in the region. He reminded Compton, "There'll be no doe harvest in Southeast Idaho by any means other than automobile."

Biologists Defy Commission

The following morning Compton presented a new set of proposed regulations which included no antlerless deer seasons, except for a misprint, but still did not include the 4-point or better bucks only season in Units 70 and 73. When Gibbs asked him why it was not included Compton responded that antler point restrictions did not work and "Staff" was not comfortable recommending them.

Burns argued that the information he has indicates that 4-point antler point restrictions do work and Gibbs announced his intention to make a motion to include them. Huffaker intervened, reminding them it was the biologists' job to give the Commission their best recommendations and the Commissioners' job to set the seasons.

Commissioner John Watts, who failed to reduce the mule deer seasons in the Southwest Region, said that he knew Gibbs "does not agree with the restriction, which is not biologically sound," but said Gibbs was pressured into doing it and that he would vote for it. A unanimous vote restored the brief 4-point season and Commissioner Fred Wood said he wished that all mule deer seasons south of the Salmon River had been shortened accordingly.

Was Wolf Reclassification Legal?

Idaho law appears to prohibit the Commission from classifying or reclassifying any *predatory animal* as follows:

"I.C. Sec. 36-201. Fish and game commission authorized to classify wildlife. With the exception of predatory animals, the Idaho fish and game commission is hereby authorized to define by classification or reclassification all wildlife in the state." (emphasis added).

At one time the wolf was included in a partial list of predatory *wildlife*. The list contained 8 species then, including the starling, but lynx, bobcat and wolf were later removed. Since the wolf was never reclassified by the Legislature, it appears to remain a predatory animal unless/until it is reclassified by that body. DAG Burkhalter may disagree with that assessment.

(in my opinion, the track record of IDFG wildlife managers indicates they are so obsessed with the chance to get another exotic species to manage and sell the opportunity to hunt, they are willing to promise something they will not and can not deliver. Despite the myths that have been perpetuated by wolf advocates, no country has ever been able to control wolf populations with regulated sport hunting and trapping alone. – ED)

SW Region Winter Feeding in 2001-02

Why IDFG Feeding Programs Are Never Successful

by George Dovel

Virtually all of the emergency feeding criteria adopted by IDFG after the 1993 disaster were ignored in 2001-02. Feed and troughs were not stored at locations in Garden Valley and Lowman by December 1, and none of the other mandatory preparations had been accomplished.

The criteria to begin feeding, an 18-inch snow depth at or below 4,000 feet on the south slopes, occurred in late November but it was ignored. During the December 12, Feeding Committee meeting, residents reported a 34-inch snow depth at 3,500 feet but local Conservation Officer Matt Erickson reported that the depth was only 9 inches at the Garden Valley Ranger Station's 3,100-foot elevation. The official recorded depth of settled snow at the Garden Valley Ranger Station on Dec. 12 was actually 18 inches and increased to 28 inches the following day.

When Southwest Region Supervisor Don Wright was forced to feed, he ordered feed but no energy supplement blocks. On December 17, still waiting for the feed pellets to be manufactured, Wright authorized local feeding expert Sandy Donley to distribute the few IDFG supplement blocks stored in Garden Valley.

The following morning my wife and I helped Donley set up the block stations with his snow cat, which included scattering a few flakes of certified hay as an attractant to lure the deer and elk to the blocks initially. When we returned to the paved road we were confronted by Landowner Sportsman Coordinator John Nagel, Habitat Biologist Neil Johnson and local C.O. Erickson.

Erickson turned his tape recorder on and shouted, "Sandy, you're killing those deer!" Despite their obvious lack of knowledge concerning mule deer nutrition, Erickson and Nagel were responsible for determining when, where and how to feed on the South Fork of the Payette River winter range.

Following my recommendation, IDFG hired Donley on December 21, as a temporary employee to implement previously established feeding procedures and to feed in the Garden Valley-Deadwood River area. Former Boise County Sheriff Mike Butler was hired to feed in the Banks-Garden Valley area and local volunteers fed in the Lowman-Grandjean area.

Voluntary wildlife rehabilitation veterinarian Dr. Liz Scott strongly recommended that IDFG maintain feed in the troughs at all times and that was done initially. But IDFG refused to feed at two-thirds of the historical feed sites, including 11 established sites on the South side of the river where 40 percent of the elk population spend every winter.

At the sites where feeding occurred in the Garden Valley area, both deer and elk were fed high-energy deer

pellets. The elk were able to digest the deer pellets because their rumens had been conditioned with the supplement blocks.

With the exception of a couple of special deer sites, the deer and elk from Lowman upstream were fed only elk pellets consisting of 100% ground alfalfa. The initial use of supplement blocks there allowed the deer to digest a combination of alfalfa and pine needles.

Dr. Scott had examined the feed sites prior to a January 9, 2002 Feeding Committee meeting in Garden Valley. She warned Nagel and Erickson that the animals in the Lowman area were receiving insufficient feed and there were not enough troughs to allow some animals to eat. She explained how this caused the hungry animals to mill around the troughs in unhealthy concentrations for hours and then rush the troughs, unnaturally gorging themselves while the calves got nothing to eat.

Nagel disagreed and told her that the elk didn't need feeding. He said IDFG was going to force them to forage for natural food higher up on the windblown ridges.



Aerial view of windblown ridges above South Fork of the Payette near Garden Valley where IDFG said elk could find natural food.

When the Committee instructed Donley to order and continue to distribute more supplement blocks in areas where IDFG refused to feed elk, Nagel said he agreed with using the blocks but his boss, SW Region Wildlife Manager Jon Rachael, refused to authorize their use.

On January 11, the local FS Ranger provided the combination to locked gates so that blocks could be distributed to elk reported trapped up the Deadwood River. But that same evening, Erickson told the Ranger that IDFG did not want any block placed on public lands and advised Donley and me that citations would be issued to any citizen who placed either blocks or feed on public lands.

Local residents donated the money and equipment to purchase and deliver several tons of blocks. Block stations were placed on accessible private property where deer and elk were not being fed and they saved several hundred animals from dying.



Local resident Jere Calloway sets energy block stations where IDFG refused to feed elk and deer.

The feeding volunteers in the Lowman area complained that there was rarely enough feed available and they had to underfeed on weekends or run out. They were out of elk pellets on January 12, and the high-energy IDFG deer pellets were substituted and fed to approximately 100 elk at one feed site.

The wildlife supplement blocks delivered to Lowman on December 17, had been used up several weeks earlier and within 24-36 hours Nagel reported that 12 elk died at the feed site and others may have died away from the troughs. Most were calves and two calves necropsied at the Wildlife Health Laboratory in Nampa had scoured (liquid stools) and died with artificial feed in their intestine and "natural" material in their rumen.

IDFG Veterinarian Dr. Mark Drew also examined a dead cow and four more dead calves at the feed site, with substantial evidence of scouring in the animals and on the ground. He recommended that the elk feed be "decreased" to 6-8# per head per day and the number of feed troughs be increased to enable all of the elk, including calves, to eat.

Drew was not told that the high-energy deer pellets had been substituted for the alfalfa pellets and his recommendations were appropriate with the limited information he was given. Veterinary Doctors Jay Green, Charles Lange and Liz Scott, and Ruminant Nutritionist Chuck Hurst wrote letters indicating that the abrupt switch to pellets containing highly fermentable carbohydrates caused the elk deaths at the Lowman feed sites.

These three highly respected veterinarians spent many hours inspecting feed sites and examining both live and dead deer and elk in an effort to insure maximum

survival. Instead of listening to their expert advice, IDFG employee Al Marion, who was hired to replace Donley on January 14, referred to them as meddling agribusiness lobbies in several newspaper articles he wrote.

On January 15, 2002, IDFG told Butler and Marion to cut the amount of deer pellets being eaten in the Banks-Deadwood area in half. IDFG feed records show that Marion immediately eliminated one feed site and cut feed to all of the other sites by 50 percent, except for 200 pounds being fed daily next to Donley's house.

However Butler followed the experts' advice and continued to maintain feed in the troughs around the clock. Recorded snow depths exceeded two feet for the next two weeks and dozens of dead deer and elk were visible from the road on the hillsides above Marion's feed sites. Donley reported locations of many of these dead animals to Nagel and Erickson and urged them to examine the animals but they claimed they couldn't find them despite the magpies, ravens and eagles on the carcasses.

In an interview published on January 27, the *Idaho Statesman* quoted Southwest Region Wildlife Manager Rachael: "Are they (deer and elk) really in any danger of starving? At this point, no. As much as anything it's a social issue."

Concern on the part of two Boise County Commissioners resulted in the Commission appointing four citizens with years of feeding expertise to a Boise County Winter Feeding Advisory Committee. Three local members of the Committee began examining and photographing only those dead deer and elk on the hillsides where no evidence of large predators or external injury was present.



One of nearly 300 animals that starved to death above the IDFG feed sites after feed was cut in half in mid January.

Dr. Green spent hours with County Committee member Doug Youren on snowshoes verifying losses from starvation. As chairman of the County Committee, I transported right front distal leg bones to Dr. Lange who determined advanced malnutrition was the cause of death.

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After publishing a written attack on the County Committee members by Al Marion, the Boise County newspaper editor accompanied Donley to verify the existence of the dead animals. They collected the hollow leg bones from two deer and two elk and forwarded them to the Caine Veterinary Center for a February 26, analysis. Again, absence of bone marrow indicated the primary cause of death was starvation.

When this information was provided to IDFG, Erickson confronted Donley and told him that removing leg bones from elk that had died of natural causes was illegal, implying that if he continued the practice he would be arrested. His statement was not true but the veterinarians had already instructed the Committee to crack the leg bones on the carcass and verify the lack of marrow. When Donley, Youren and Jere Calloway first began examining and photographing the dead deer and elk, it was necessary to reach the animals soon after they died to prevent assorted scavengers from consuming most of the carcass. But by mid February so many animals were dying each day on the hillsides above the Marion feed sites that the scavengers could not keep up with them.



Early victims of starvation, including this cow elk, were quickly stripped by scavengers.

Of the 328 dead deer and elk examined and photographed by the County Committee members and/or veterinarians in one small area, 262 were found above the Marion feed sites where the daily feed ration was cut by 1,396 pounds in mid January. Fewer than 10 were found some distance above the Butler feed sites and all but four of the rest were photographed in adjacent wintering areas where no feed was provided.

Many dead deer and elk were seen on both sides of the South Fork but not photographed because of time constraints or difficulty in reaching them. None of the dead animals on 90 percent of the winter range were photographed.

The high percentage of dead cow elk and doe deer among the animals that died from advanced malnutrition above the Marion feed sites is an indicator of the extreme losses elsewhere where neither species were fed.

Crusted snow and below freezing temperatures continued in Garden Valley during the last week in February without the warming that allows green-up to begin. The energy blocks and hay provided by private citizen donations allowed several hundred elk to survive that IDFG still refused to feed. After viewing an Idaho Farm Bureau videotape of these animals, and others that died on federal ground, several Legislators on the Resource Committees spent a day on site verifying the Department's refusal to feed those elk.



By mid February, so many animals were dying each day that bloated scavengers could not keep up with them.

On March 1, 2002, IDFG cut the already reduced feed by another 25 percent at all sites and announced its intention to "wean the deer and elk away from the feed sites." Since there was no new plant growth, this caused additional death losses and also increased the losses from grass tetany when green-up did arrive.

On March 5, during a legislative hearing at the Capitol, several veterinarians testified that many animals were starving because IDFG refused to feed them. Then newly appointed IDFG Director Steve Huffaker agreed that the feeding had not been done properly but said that he had been powerless to do anything as Wildlife Bureau Chief. He promised the Legislators to order both hay and pellets that day to be delivered to Garden Valley and Lowman.

Seven Hours later, Huffaker told Senator Judy Bartlett that the shipments were already loaded but Southwest Region Commissioner Don Clower had ordered them not to proceed. When other Commissioners learned of Clower's irresponsible action they reportedly held a telephone conference vote and approved the shipments being sent.

But at a public meeting in the IDFG Trophy Room promoting their initiative to eliminate two Commission Districts, Clower told feeding committee members he had halted the shipments a second time by having the telephone vote declared unlawful because it was not properly noticed.

During a second legislative hearing on March 12, Acting Wildlife Bureau Chief Tom Parker, SW Region Supervisor Wright and Nagel were asked repeatedly who was responsible for halting the feed shipments to Garden Valley. All three claimed they did not know and one Senator suggested they be sworn in before giving further testimony.

Nagel denied that deer pellets had been fed to the elk that died at Lowman and several IDFG employees, including Al Marion, testified that winter losses were less than 10 percent which was normal. Marion blamed the feeding controversy on ignorant local citizens, agri-business veterinarians who also testified, and legislators who were meddling.

F&G Feeding Committee member Jerry Stuart was allowed to play a videotape showing dead deer and elk above the Marion feed sites during the testimony. Despite a CD-Rom showing about 250 dead deer and elk in one small area, Mark Drew presented a typewritten IDFG claim that only 46 elk and 19 deer had been found dead from all causes on the entire winter range. That paper claimed that only eight elk and no deer died from malnutrition.

At a County Commission hearing held later that day in Crouch and attended by 80 people, including three legislators, Erickson testified that the 2001-02 snowfall in Garden Valley was substantially below normal. The 2001-02 snowfall recorded at the Garden Valley Ranger Station was actually 105.5 inches, the second highest recorded snowfall in 50 years.



Jere Calloway with five-point bull elk that starved to death in record snowfall in Garden Valley during 2001-02 winter.

Prior to the County Commission hearing, SE Reg. Commissioner Marc Gibbs was given a tour of selected feed sites where deer had been full fed and were in good

condition. Fawn-to-doe ratios were comparatively high at these sites because of the large number of wet does that were killed during archery and youth any-weapon seasons. Does with up to four fawns, including 1-3 orphans, were documented near the end of the 2001 hunting season.

During the F&G Commission hearing on March 13, 2002, I presented documentation, including photos, of early starvation losses totaling at least 20 animals per square mile. I requested the Commission consider closing the deer season to all hunting and reduce the elk take by 50 percent. But Huffaker reported undocumented good doe-fawn ratios and Clower insisted the Commission continue the extended seasons and antlerless harvest.

Additional carcasses examined and photographed in late March increased the death loss to 40 per square mile in that small portion of the winter range in Garden Valley. One of the historical best three mule deer hunting areas in Idaho (units 33, 34 & 35) now has the lowest deer population ever recorded.

By limiting feeding expenditures rather than feed properly, IDFG wasted thousands of dollars, allowing at least half of the animals to die that had been fed for the first three weeks of winter. Although Garden Valley and Lowman residents saved many animals by feeding them on private lands, including Boise Cascade forest lands, the prohibition of feeding on public lands caused severe losses that were impossible to mitigate.



The unprecedented ban on winter feeding on public lands took a heavy toll of future breeding stock.

Local residents like Dan and Shauna Fry, who fed 40 elk without any losses, provide proof that properly conducted emergency feeding programs are successful. Following the IDFG feeding disaster in 1992-93, IDFG District C.O. Brent Hyde suggested that it would be more cost effective to subcontract the occasional feeding operation than to take conservation officers and biologists away from their normal duties during months of "comp" (vacation) time following a severe winter.

Several solutions are discussed in the article "Winter Feeding Funding" on page 11.

Winter Feeding Advisory Committees

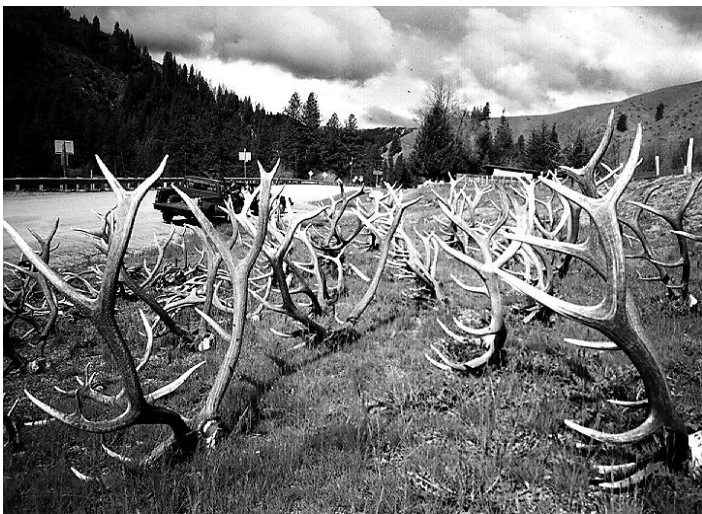
by George Dovel

A severe drought across southern Idaho during the spring, summer and early fall of 1992 reduced the nutrient level of the limited forage that was available to deer, elk and antelope. Hunter killed animals checked by IDFG during the early hunting seasons had little or no fat reserves and their condition became worse as the hunting season continued.

Natural forage was in such short supply that many ranchers pulled their cattle off the range in September and began feeding them hay. By Thanksgiving, abnormal precipitation signaled a potentially severe winter causing experienced outdoorsmen to urge IDFG to begin feeding deer and elk.

Despite record December snow depths with many animals already dead from advanced malnutrition, IDFG employees, from the Director down to local conservation officers, refused to feed. In Southwest Idaho media pressure forced token feeding operations in early January, but feeding in the Magic Valley, Southeast and Upper Snake Regions was started even later.

Both the Department and the F&G Commission claimed that winter losses were only normal and refused to halt antlerless harvest or shorten the 1993 seasons. Ignoring angry protests from thousands of Idaho hunters, F&G officials continued to deny the losses during 1994 Legislative hearings.



Elk racks from 100 bulls that died from starvation in Garden Valley during 1992-93 winter.

Idaho Legislative Resource Committee members concluded that IDFG employees were not capable of determining when the combination of animal condition and severe weather dictated emergency feeding, or how to feed properly. They drafted a bill which created citizen winter feeding advisory committees to "act as an independent resource in each district to give advice and

recommendations on the administration of winter feeding programs.

IDFG officials lobbied vigorously against the bill until Senator Terry Haun, a staunch IDFG supporter, contacted me and agreed to vote for it if I would agree to serve on the Southwest Region Committee. Out of 25 citizens appointed to committees in five regions, I was the only one with an emergency winter feeding background.

Names of the other 24 appointees were submitted to the F&G Commission by Don Clower's Idaho Wildlife Council, as mandated by the new law. The IWC was formed as an IDFG support group and several of the appointees candidly admitted they were chosen because they did not believe in any form of supplemental feeding.

The IDFG Wildlife Bureau promptly provided the following statement to all five committees: "A point commonly made by (wildlife) professionals is that supplemental feeding is a poor substitute for proper winter range habitat and population management, and will eventually result in reduced populations and less hunter opportunity."

Based on that misinformation, the inexperienced committees decided they could eliminate emergency winter feeding by improving winter range and further reducing already depleted deer and elk populations.

Fortunately, our Committee Chairman contacted other western state game agencies and got a very different response from some of their wildlife managers. Colorado research Biologist Dr. Dan Baker wrote, "the type of winter situations our feeding policy is intended to address are so severe that the carrying capacity for deer is virtually zero. Mortality is generally density independent."

After two years of concerted effort by Chairman Jim Olson and me, the Southwest Region Supervisor agreed, to implement all of our recommendations. We worked with local citizens to eliminate recreational feeding, worked with county government to protect historic big game range through zoning ordinances, and repaired damaged relations between IDFG and Boise County residents.

Meanwhile, Wildlife Bureau Big Game Manager Lonn Kuck failed to cooperate with our Committee, publicly ridiculed our recommendations and suggested the committees should be abolished. Several of the other committees allowed regional IDFG officials to run the meetings and simply "rubber stamped" the biologists' decisions not to feed.

In December of 1996, heavy snowfall occurred across much of Southern Idaho. Our Southwest Region Committee had already recommended using energy supplement blocks on the Payette winter range in

November. The blocks kept the deer and elk distributed in small groups utilizing natural forage, and they survived the moderately severe winter in good condition without supplemental feeding.

But deer and elk that were stranded in the Teton Valley in the Upper Snake Region weren't so fortunate. A former Committee member urged the Committee to recommend feeding the animals but it refused, claiming the animals weren't stressed. On March 5, 1997, in response to requests from sportsmen in the Region, IDFG Director Steve Mealey met with local sportsmen, the Regional Supervisor and three members of the Feeding Advisory Committee to receive input.

Regional Supervisor Don Wright said the elk spent part of the year in Wyoming and Idaho shouldn't have to feed them. "If we eliminate the winter feeding they'll 'go away'." Feeding Committee's Kent Clark added, "If we feed we'd be creating welfare elk, the calves won't forget, they'll keep coming back."

Mealey reminded them that Wyoming was feeding Idaho elk and said, "We are not a 'no feed' state, period." He and the local Conservation Officer had already inspected the malnourished animals and he overruled the Committee and ordered feeding to begin immediately.

Two months after Mealey was fired, Jim Olson resigned from our Southwest Region Committee. His letter of resignation was accompanied by his written expression of concern at the lack of commitment on the part of the F&G Commission and IDFG with regard to winter feeding, and a decline in cooperation between IDFG and the committees.

During the year I was acting Committee Chairman, a new SW Region Supervisor basically ignored most of the established criteria we had taken several years to reach agreement on. Rather than address problems reported by private citizens to our Committee, he often attacked their character and credibility.

Regional IDFG officials continued to interview prospective feeding committee appointees, rejecting those who supported emergency feeding of big game. Most of the committees were staffed with one or more IWC members who had worked actively with IDFG insiders to get Mealey fired.

I received complaints from the few knowledgeable committee members in other regions alleging that their leadership promoted the Department's anti-feeding agenda. The corruption of the feeding committees coupled with the lack of cooperation from the Department resulted in my resignation in 1999.

The same feeding committee members who had promoted the IDFG agenda to get Mealey fired, joined F&G Commissioner Don Clower in a media campaign designed to force Gov. Kempthorne to fire Commissioners Burns, Gibbs and Moulton. When that failed they promoted a proposed citizen initiative to eliminate Burns'

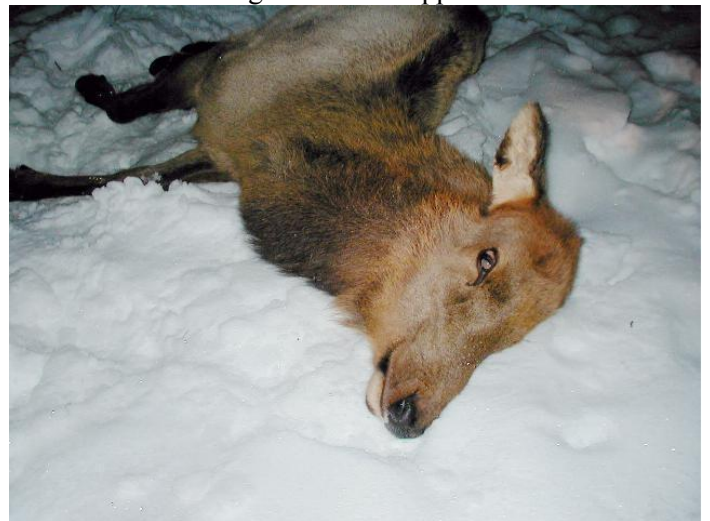
and Moulton's Districts and give the IWC the same authority to select F&G Commission candidates that they already have to select Feeding Committee candidates.

Intent on promoting their political agenda, the SW Region Committee ignored the written criteria that IDFG must always have feed, supplement blocks and troughs on hand by December 1, on the South Fork of the Payette winter range. In November 2001, snowfall on that range was already 300 percent of average and local citizens asked the Committee to begin using supplement blocks to prevent the massive downstream movement of elk that occurs only during an extreme winter.

The Committee responded that the Regional supervisor would not allow it and nothing was done. In early December, deer and elk were already dying and both Jim Olson and I urged the Committee to immediately recommend distribution of blocks and feed. During the Committee meeting on December 12, the Regional Supervisor interrupted the Chairman and told the Committee not to recommend either feeding or block distribution.

The Committee recommended that both blocks and feed be ordered and distributed immediately but the Supervisor refused. A Committee member reportedly convinced Director Sando that not feeding the starving animals would generate adverse publicity and damage their initiative petition drive and Sando overruled his Regional Supervisor.

Landowner/Sportsman Coordinator John Nagel refused to feed the 40 percent of elk that winter on the south side of the South Fork of the Payette River. During a public Feeding Committee meeting he was warned they would starve and die if they weren't fed and he responded, "That's the best thing that could happen."



SW Region Feeding Committee officers concealed starvation of several hundred elk to protect IDFG image.

After IDFG failed to provide enough feed to the deer and elk they were feeding, local citizens invited

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Committee members to come up and see for themselves the animals that were dying above feed sites. Dedicated Committee member Jerry Stuart traveled to Garden Valley and spent a day documenting the death losses on videotape.

At the next Committee meeting, Secretary Jack Fisher called Stuart "a traitor" for exposing the failed feeding effort, which tainted the IDFG image and hurt Fisher's campaign to make the Department unaccountable with his initiative.

Then Fisher, Current Chairman Butch Olson and temporary IDFG employee Al Marion conducted an extensive campaign with the media and public officials to discredit outdoorsmen, veterinarians and legislators who told the truth about the feeding disaster.

The Committee held a meeting on February 11, with a Channel 2 Television reporter present. The members discussed Dr. Lange's insistence that additional feed be provided but Nagel argued it was time to cut back on feed even more to "move the animals toward more reliance on natural feed."

Despite the fact there was no natural forage available and many animals were admittedly in poor condition, the Committee endorsed Nagel's reduced feeding program with a unanimous vote for the media's benefit. That vote reflected the Committee's ignorance of wild ruminant physiology and its willingness to satisfy the IDFG agenda rather than perform its mandated function.

Although Stuart wanted to continue to serve on the Committee, SW Region Supervisor Al VanVooren told the Boise County Commission that IDFG had decided to replace him with a qualified Garden Valley resident. The County considered several qualified applicants and unanimously endorsed Jere Calloway for the position.

Calloway was subsequently interviewed by VanVooren and by newly appointed F&G Commissioner John Watts but he was not appointed. Instead Watts recommended and the Commission approved appointing Garden Valley taxidermist Dino Hughon, who strongly supported the failed feeding program and was not recommended by the Boise County Commission.

On June 16, 2003, well known sportsman Mel Betty resigned from the Southeast Region Winter Feeding Advisory Committee after serving more than three years. In his letter of resignation he documented the deliberate refusal by the Wildlife Bureau to cooperate with the committees, and said the emergency feeding that was done in 2001-02 was "too little, too late".

His letter stated, "The criteria for when to start emergency feeding the animals was established by the Idaho Wildlife Council, a puppet organization created by and for IDFG. As both are opposed to winter feeding of big game animals, it's no wonder that we ended the winter with high deer losses throughout the state. I meet daily with sportsmen from eastern Idaho and at least 90 percent

feel the same way I do. The IDFG has done everything in their power to stop all winter feeding of big game animals unless they approve, which they will not. I find it useless to spend any more of my time and expense on a lost cause."



Prime breeding age mule deer buck, and others like him on the South Fork of the Payette winter range, were fed by private citizens during the harsh 2001-02 winter. Outdoorsmen no longer trust winter feeding advisory committees to help preserve Idaho's declining mule deer herds.

Summary

Idaho Code Section 36-123(4) mandates, "The committees shall have the authority to act as (a)...an *independent* resource to give advice and recommendations, and (b)...a liaison between the commission, the department, interest groups, and the public on winter feeding issues."

The obvious legislative intent was that the committees must remain autonomous (i.e. free of outside control) and give advice and recommendations to the F&G Commission and the Department based on input from area residents, veterinarians, ruminant nutrition specialists, county officials and others with winter feeding expertise.

Instead, the committees have become IDFG damage control buffer groups, doing what IDFG says while preventing the agency from being held accountable for its failure to properly administer emergency feeding programs and funds.

With IWC determining who is allowed to serve, political activists with no feeding expertise continue to populate the committee memberships. Qualified local residents with the knowledge and incentive to conduct successful feeding programs are prevented from serving.

The severe 2001-02 winter provided irrefutable evidence of the committees' failure to function as they were intended. One logical alternative might be a well qualified dedicated committee appointed by the County Commissioners where feeding historically occurs.

Another is simply to repeal the law and eliminate the committees. IDFG biologists could then be held accountable and forced to conduct successful emergency feeding programs or pay someone else to feed properly.

Winter Feeding Funding

By George Dovel

For eighty years, IDFG paid the cost of emergency winter big game feeding with money from the sale of all licenses, tags, permits and other income. In FY 1984 a new \$1.50 surcharge was added to all deer, elk and antelope tags, with the money dedicated for: (1) feeding these three species, (2) control of depredation by these species, (3) control of predators affecting these species, and (4) rehabilitation of winter range for these three species.

In addition to this dedicated fund which has generated more than \$8 million since 1984, the emergency winter feeding program has received over 5,000 tons of free USDA grain, which it fed, sold or bartered, and private donations of feed, troughs, transportation and equipment.

Only one winter range reseeding project in the Boise foothills, and the coyote study in the Southeast Region have been paid for out of the fund. Yet less than 20 percent of the dedicated feeding money has been used to purchase feed.

As with other dedicated funds in the F&G Set-aside Account, money has been misappropriated to fund a multitude of inappropriate projects ranging from buying promotional caps to purchasing six new pickup trucks.

To preserve the dedicated money for the purpose for which it was intended, the Legislature amended I.C. Sec. 36-111 to require *not less than 75 cents* out of every \$1.50 taken in to be set aside in a special account solely for winter feeding. Once the money in that feeding account exceeds \$400,000.00, the additional money may be spent for rehabilitation of winter range, but cannot *legally* be spent for other purposes.

Feeding by IDFG Too Expensive

The reported cost per animal fed in IDFG feeding programs is higher than in other western states. Yet it does not include the salaries, vehicle and other expenses and "comp" time of the several full time IDFG employees involved in each feeding operation.

When these employees, who receive hourly wages, attend public meetings or perform other functions outside of the normal hourly pay period, they are not paid for overtime. Instead they accumulate annual "comp" time, which may amount to several weeks, allowing them to take extended vacations later.

These absences, during normally busy months, prohibit them from performing the functions they were trained for.

Conversely, they were not trained to assess the condition of a big game animal from its appearance, its posture and its actions. And the classroom or POST academy they attended did not provide the knowledge and experience that is essential in order for them to conduct a successful emergency feeding program.

IDFG Officials Oppose Feeding

In order to continue to receive nearly half a million dollars from licensed big game hunters every year for emergency feeding and depredation control during the occasional extreme winter, IDFG officials and Commissioners must indicate they are prepared to feed in accordance with Commission feeding policy. That policy requires them to feed to prevent abnormal losses or depredation during those winters.

But IDFG officials do not believe in supplemental feeding, despite its acceptance by the scientific community as an important game management tool. During the 21 years since the dedicated feeding fund was first provided, they have consistently failed to prevent massive die-offs of deer, elk and antelope because they consistently feed too little too late.

The money taken from Idaho big game hunters to maintain dynamically stable big game herds is being used to help destroy them by feeding improperly. Concerned outdoorsmen, not IDFG, are responsible for most of the animals that are saved.

Possible Solutions

As long as inexperienced IDFG employees attempt to micromanage emergency big game feeding, it is doomed to failure. One suggested solution is to turn the appropriate portion of the feeding fund over to the counties where feeding historically occurs. County commissioners who are concerned with preserving their valuable wildlife resource could appoint an experienced feeding committee to recommend the temporary employee(s), handle the logistics and recruit the experienced volunteers to get the job done properly.



Local residents with big game feeding expertise can prevent this kind of waste by conducting proper emergency feeding programs.

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Winter Feeding Funding

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Another solution that is currently being discussed by some legislators is to transfer the funding to the Idaho Department of Agriculture, which is more qualified to administer emergency feeding programs. This agency already has the authority to control big game feeding in areas where brucellosis and other contagious diseases pose a threat to livestock.

A third suggested solution is to follow IDFG DCO Brent Hyde's recommendation to subcontract the feeding to qualified local residents. This would entail establishing site specific criteria for when to use supplement blocks and when to switch to emergency feeding, but IDFG would continue to maintain the interest bearing account and pay the bills.

There are obvious drawbacks to each of these proposed solutions, which mean transferring some degree of protection of our primary big game species to another more capable entity. Whether or not one of these solutions, or another one, will be adopted by the Idaho Legislature, the crisis of declining mule deer populations mandates that drastic corrective action be taken during the next session.

Don't miss the articles on big game harvest and Combat Biology in the May **Outdoorsman!**

Editorial...

For several decades, outdoorsmen have watched Idaho big game populations take a nose dive following the occasional extreme winter, when literally thousands of deer and elk are allowed to starve to death. IDFG biologists and their supporters excuse their failure to mitigate the losses with the comment, "That's nature's way".

The necessity to both reduce hunter opportunity and correct the newly created predator-prey imbalance is ignored as they devise another five year plan that is no more successful than the last one. Unfortunately, it is always the dedicated hunters, who are also experienced outdoorsmen, who must force Idaho game managers to halt the chain of wildlife destruction and do the job they are being paid to do.

There was a period when academic theorists convinced wildlife managers that passive "management" was the environmentally sound course. But those theories were scientifically proven false 25 years ago and it's time for our wildlife managers to wake up and start managing wildlife as mandated by Idaho Law.

If they aren't willing to work for a "hook and bullet" agency that is required by law to provide continued supplies of wild game for hunters, they should quit – not try to impose their agenda on those who pay their wages.

Each month, Outdoorsman articles reveal little known facts about a variety of fish and game management issues that affect every Idahoan, especially those who cherish Idaho's hunting, fishing and trapping heritage. Please help distribute these facts to help stop the destruction of our billion-dollar wildlife resource and restore sound wildlife management for future generations. A donation in any amount will help defray the cost of printing and mailing these informative bulletins to elected officials. A donation of \$20 or more will pay the cost of printing and mailing all bulletins to you for the next 12 months, and will guarantee they will also be sent to the Senator and Representatives in your District.

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