

# The Outdoorsman

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## Gov. Otter Submits Alternate Sage Grouse Plan To Restrict Human Activity on 10 Million Acres of Idaho

By George Dovel

After associates convinced me to begin publishing the current version of The Outdoorsman in March of 2004, the first 23 issues documented the change from state F&G agencies managing our wildlife resource – to many of them ignoring state laws and exploiting it. While still pretending to preserve, protect, perpetuate and manage our valuable game and fish species, the only species they took any effective action to perpetuate were “native” predators and other non-hunted species and their parasites and diseases.

Five years ago I published Outdoorsman Bulletin No. 24, summarizing for readers, including Idaho’s state and federal lawmakers, exactly how our state Fish & Game management was hijacked by national and international extremists. That issue discussed so-called “nongame program funding” and explained how that was simply a phrase used to accomplish the transition from managing the game, fish and furbearers which benefit humans, to implementing the so-called Wildlands/biodiversity agenda promoted by the United Nations and various extremists.

### **We’ve Won a Few Battles but We’re Losing the War**

Our publication of facts resulted in a few notable battles being won, including the Idaho Legislature’s defeat of TNC’s (The Nature Conservancy’s) effort to have taxpayers fund its acquisition of so-called “conservation easements”. Also, the National Rifle Association’s “Right to Hunt, Fish and Trap” language published in that 2007 issue will finally appear as a proposed Constitutional Amendment on Idaho’s November 2012 ballot.

But despite these minor setbacks for bureaucrats whose goal is destroying our rural way of life, our Western Governors have given them control of our ability to develop cheap energy and other benefits from our public lands. It is represented as the states controlling their own destiny but, nothing could be further from the truth.

Back when USFWS invited the three Northern Rocky Mountain states to participate in wolf recovery and submit their own plans for how this would be done in each state, the Idaho Legislature created a Wolf Oversight Committee. It told IDFG to provide accurate information and said the plan must preserve local customs and culture.

Instead, IDFG statisticians grossly exaggerated the number of prey animals available for wolves, and a majority of the Oversight Committee members allowed Biologist Jon Rachael to simply copy the FWS Wolf Plan. That included its extreme penalties for anyone who killed or harassed a wolf without proof it was in the act of killing livestock. Efforts by Boise County Commissioners to include the right to protect domestic livestock and dogs on private land in the Plan were publicly ridiculed.

### **History is Simply Repeating Itself**

Now, nearly two decades later, a similar committee (“Sage-Grouse Task Force”) was appointed by Idaho’s Governor, and co-chaired by Fish and Game Director Virgil Moore and Otter’s legal counsel. The Task Force was supposed to rewrite a federal plan to prevent the sage grouse from possibly being listed as a threatened species in 2015, while protecting existing rights of Idaho citizens.

But like the former Wolf Oversight Committee, Gov. Otter’s Task Force submitted a condensed form of the federal “Dec. 21, 2012 Sage Grouse Conservation Plan” to Gov. Otter on June 15, 2012. Apparently virtually copied from Wyoming’s “amended” federal plan, it restricts new human activity and implies more grouse leks\* should be counted and more money spent on habitat projects.

(\* assembly areas for male grouse display and courtship)

Before we discuss the draft plan that Otter prepared for the feds on June 29, 2012, let’s examine IDFG records to see if the fed’s solutions produced more grouse:

Year	Lek Count	Total Hunters	Grouse Harvest	Birds Per Hunter
1986	178	11,200	37,900	3.4
1996	387	12,000	21,000	1.8
2006	660	8,900	12,500	1.4

Earlier Idaho Sage Grouse plans written in 1997 and 2006: (a) put restrictions on new human activity; (b) increased the number of leks counted every year; and (c) increased federal funding for IDFG grouse surveys and other projects. But the continuing decline in the number of

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### Otter Submits Sage Grouse Plan – *cont. from page 1*

sage grouse harvested by hunters in Idaho and other states is proof that none of these solutions have worked.

Sage grouse, as their name implies, normally rely on some types of sagebrush to exist. If half of the sagebrush in the 11 states with sage grouse populations has been converted to grassland or other agricultural use, or else destroyed by fire, it is reasonable to assume that the remaining acres should support up to half as many sage grouse as it previously may have been capable of.

But once their population declines, whether from excessive harvest by humans or other causes, the decrease in grouse does not cause a decrease in the number of many of their primary predators. This is especially true of nest predators such as ravens, crows and magpies – which rely on many other food sources for their survival.

#### A Comparison with Elk and Bears

Outdoorsman readers are aware that both black and grizzly bears are a major predator of neonatal (newborn) elk calves. When the ratio of bears to elk was low, the elk herds in Idaho's Clearwater Region remained healthy.

But when IDFG biologists allowed hunters to kill too many elk, the same number of bears kept killing the same number of newborn elk. Because there were now too few adult elk left to produce enough calves to feed the bears, plus enough surviving calves to replace adults that died, the once-famous elk herd now remains in a non-productive unhealthy predator pit.

Seventeen years of protected wolves added to the bears, cougar and lesser predators impacting the Clearwater elk herd has virtually destroyed world-famous elk units that provided almost half of Idaho's annual elk harvest for half a century. A very similar scenario is playing out in the 11 states that still have populations of sage grouse – but refuse to control their predators.

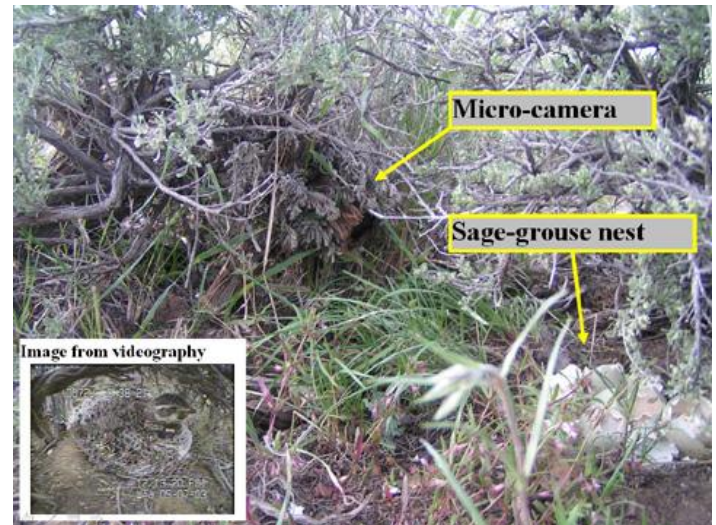
Every wildlife biologist with any involvement in sage grouse is aware that excessive predation is the **primary** cause of the grouse decline. And virtually all of the recent research indicates that raven populations have increased by 600% in the U.S. during the past 25 years, with increases of up to 1600% in parts of the West.

#### NDOW Claims Its P-R Funded Study Was Flawed

When I read the research report published on July 25, 2008 by Idaho State University Assistant Professor Dr. David Delehanty and former graduate student Dr. Peter Coates (see at <http://www2.isu.edu/headlines/?p=1308>), I felt this was finally a quality of research that no wildlife manager could ignore or excuse\* away. I was wrong.

(\* In sage grouse mortality study W-48-R-21 by NV. Dept. of Wildlife in 1988, NDOW put 7 brown chicken eggs in each of 200 simulated grouse nests in two study areas in Washoe County, and on a ranch in Elko County. Predators ate 100% of the Washoe County eggs in two weeks and destroyed 84% of the nests in 3 days. NDOW now claims the study proved nothing because the nests were artificial.)

The ISU researchers reported that sage grouse left their nest for about 25 minutes to get water and feed each morning near dawn, and again each evening at dusk. Taking advantage of the hen's brief absence in the morning, they concealed miniature camouflaged infrared video cameras focused on the nest area to record every predator of the eggs and young chicks around the clock.



Pre-nesting hens were captured at night using a flashlight, and fitted with radio collars in order to follow their movements and locate the nests they built later (see video image inset).

Other researchers had claimed ravens, badgers and ground squirrels were primary sage grouse nest predators. But despite frequent nest visits by the ground squirrels, they were never able to bite through the large eggs.

The cameras confirmed that small bits of eggshells found in ground squirrel droppings by earlier researchers resulted from their eating pieces of shells, a source of calcium, after a real predator had destroyed the shell in the nest and eaten its contents.

The researchers used video monitoring at 55 of the 87 nests they regularly observed from 2002-2005. Ravens committed slightly more than half of the total predation at nests, with badger predation running a close second.

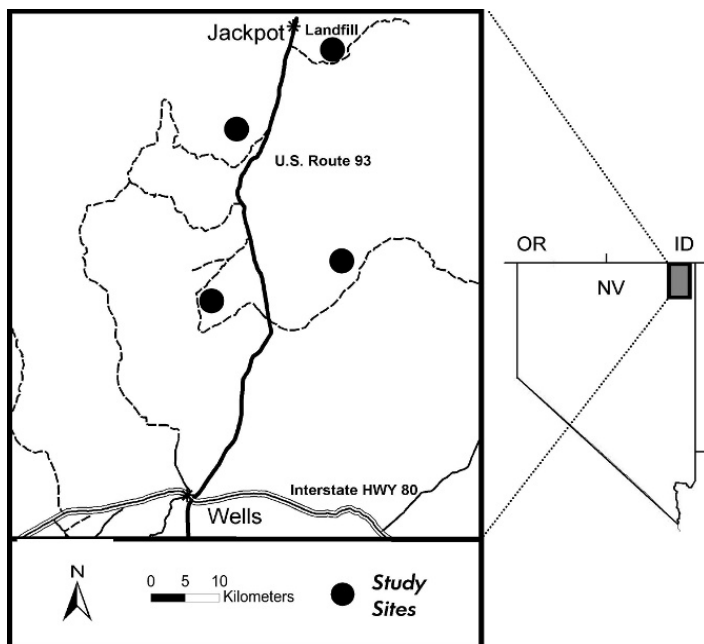


Video frame photo of Raven eating eggs in Sage Grouse nest in NE Nevada.

In 2010 a more complete and updated version of their study was published in the Journal of Wildlife Management. But as with their study published earlier, their recommendation remained the same:

**“We encourage wildlife managers to reduce interactions between ravens and nesting sage-grouse by managing raven populations and restoring and maintaining shrub canopy cover in sage-grouse nesting areas.”**(emphasis added)

“Managing” ravens or other primary nest predators means reducing their population to a number that will allow enough surviving sage grouse chicks to halt the decline and restore the populations. The Coates/Delehanty research included getting USDA APHIS Wildlife Services to distribute 10,500 chicken eggs laced with poison at the southernmost of their four research areas (see below).



Coates and Delehanty sage-grouse study sites in NE Nevada during 2002–2005, based on lek complexes separated by distances of more than 12 miles. Ravens were poisoned at southernmost site by USDA-WS. Note landfill near Jackpot.

Similar raven control in both Nevada and other states had similar success increasing young sage grouse survival. In a 1981 Idaho Study by Autenrieth, raven predation was also the major cause of nest failure.

And once raven control was initiated, 51% of nests survived compared to only six percent in the study area with no raven control. Although controlling ravens and other major nest scavengers is the logical solution to increase young sage grouse survival, nest predators are not mentioned in the FWS Greater Sage Grouse Fact Sheets.

Its 2006 Sheet discusses 35 Army installations and numerous National Guard facilities that fall within the sage grouse areas. It boasts about how the Yakima Training Center developed a greater sage grouse conservation plan

which included translocating birds to diversify the gene pool, maintaining high quality habitat, and reducing the threat from fire and predation (by altering habitat).

#### **Military Bases Spend \$Millions on Sage Grouse**

Among its report of the expensive conservation measures being implemented by these various military bases, it says Idaho’s Mountain Home AFB has been working on sage grouse conservation since 1996, including research, habitat mapping, grouse surveys and avoidance protocol. It describes how it trained ground emitter crews to report sighting of the species, sagebrush habitat and invasive weeds and how it restricts human access to nesting sites during the breeding and nesting seasons.

This one air base spent more than \$3 million just on sage grouse from 1998-2004. These costs plus the helicopter grouse surveys, restoring native plants, getting rid of invasive plants and weeds, etc. at all of the military bases that are involved amounts to millions of *taxpayer* dollars spent by DOD every year on the failed effort to halt the sage grouse decline.

#### **FWS: Restrict Human Activity – Ignore Predators**

The next FWS “Greater Sage Grouse Fact Sheet”, published in 2011, fails to mention that military efforts to transplant sage grouse successfully were a dismal failure. Ongoing military activities are not even mentioned and the “threats” section reflects the “restrict new human development” agenda that is now dictated by each state’s wildlife management agency as follows:

“A sage brush community may take years to recover from disturbance and some range management practices. **Greater sage-grouse populations are negatively affected by energy development activities (primarily oil, gas, and coal-bed methane); especially those that degrade important sagebrush habitat, even when mitigative measures are implemented. Impacts can result from direct habitat loss, fragmentation of important habitats by roads, pipelines and power lines, and direct human disturbance. The negative effects of energy development often add to the impacts from other human development, resulting in declines in greater sage-grouse populations.** Other important factors in the species’ decline include fire and invasive plant species.”(emphasis added)

#### **Otter’s Plan Ignores Predation as a Threat**

Gov. Otter’s 52-page June 29, 2012 Sage Grouse Plan says it supplements and in some cases replaces the (358-page) 2006 Idaho Plan. It continues, “For activities not addressed by this planning effort, including predation issues, the 2006 State Plan and LWG (local working group) plans will continue to be operative.”

It goes on to explain that regulatory mechanisms in this plan “address *primary threats* (i.e. large infrastructure and energy development, wildfire, and invasive species) and *secondary threats* (i.e. livestock grazing management

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Otter Submits Sage Grouse Plan – *cont. from page 3* issues, West Nile virus, recreation, and livestock infrastructure.)” Those are exactly the threats FWS told the state governors to address, with no mention of predation as a threat to sage grouse survival.

In preparing its 2006 Plan, the Idaho Sage Grouse Advisory Committee listed predation as only a very minor threat to sage grouse survival – number 12 in a declining order of ranked threats! And the biologists’ solution to sage grouse predation by ravens, crows and magpies is to eliminate their food sources provided by humans.

Although covering landfills, trash collection sites and sewage treatment facilities, and providing personnel and vehicles to dispose of road-kills might sound attractive, it ignores the tons of agricultural crop residue that is still available to ravens during a normal winter. Although large numbers of ravens and crows congregate at garbage dump landfills, especially during deep snow winters, they are also well-equipped to scavenge the wild creatures elsewhere that succumb to malnutrition.

### LWGs Find It Easier to Repeat the Myth, “Control of Predators Is Not Necessary to Restore Sage Grouse.”

The 2006 Plan includes three pages of biological questions that must be answered before a decision is rendered to attempt limited short-term predator control. Two of those questions require three years of research and record keeping to get answers, and then there are habitat and infrastructure requirements and specific criteria that must be met before they ask IDFG to request control.

### But One Utah LWG Dealt in Facts – Not Myths

During a March 2007 Predator Workshop held in Portland, Oregon, Baxter et al presented the results of an eight year study confirming that red fox predation was driving Utah’s Strawberry Valley sage grouse to extinction. They reported that the grouse population decreased from 3,000-4,000 in 1939 (Griner 1939) to only 150 in 2000 – the third year of the study.

Beginning in 1999, after fox predation was confirmed as a major cause of recent sage grouse decline, USDA-Wildlife Services specialists combined aerial gunning and on-the-ground fox control. In 2001-2002, fixed wing and helicopter gunner flights easily located active fox dens by noting dirt on top of the snow, and then placed an ESA-approved gas cartridge in each active den to kill the foxes.

For all of 2003 through 2005 they added control of coyotes, badgers and skunks, and used aerial gunning, gassing dens, site-specific shooting and trapping, plus weekly poison egg baits to kill magpies, crows and ravens. Ground hunting and gassing dens by volunteers was also used to remove and disrupt breeding of resident red foxes throughout the study area.

### Trapping and Transplanting Triples Grouse Numbers

While this intensive predator control was taking place, Utah FWP submitted a plan to transplant sage grouse

with the same characteristics and DNA to the Strawberry Valley from five different locations. This prevented the inbreeding and poor reproduction that destroyed the declining pygmy rabbit population in Washington, and also prevented shortages in the several source populations.

And the intensive predator control prevented the poor survival that otherwise occurs when any prey species is relocated in a new environment without first controlling its predators. Thanks to excellent chick survival, 30 months after the first transplant, the declining Strawberry sage grouse population had tripled!



One of two signs erected by the Strawberry Valley LWG to caution those who recreate in the area not to disturb the sage grouse.

The sign shown above states, “Current population numbers have increased through reintroduction efforts and effective habitat restoration and predator management.” It is important to remember that none of the dozens of expensive habitat and infrastructure recommendations in all of the sage grouse plans were considered relevant by the Strawberry LWG members until *after* several years of predator control and the transplanted grouse had reversed the grouse decline.

### Over \$1,000 Spent For Each Grouse Harvested

The millions of dollars spent annually by the military on these recommended corrective measures is just the “tip of the iceberg”. For example, Wyoming appropriated an average of a million dollars annually for six years to implement former Governor Freudenthal’s *Core Area* Sage Grouse Plan and has appropriated over \$35 million since 2005 for wildlife projects – with 40% of that used to purchase conservation easements.

Those easements, which prevent portions of large ranches from being subdivided or developed, receive a 3-to-1 match from hunter’s federal excise taxes and other sources. In 2010, one of those other sources, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, provided \$20 million for Wyoming conservation easements and another \$17 million to fund Wyoming Sage Grouse Core Area projects.

In Feb. of 2012, Wyoming Gov. Mead reported that expenditures from the state-appropriated trust fund and matching funds have totaled \$200 Million spent on the ground since 2005. If you add sage grouse funding from the BLM, USFS and the many other sources mentioned in this article, and divide the average annual funding by the number of sage grouse killed by hunters, you will see that Wyoming is spending one or several thousand dollars for each sage grouse that is harvested!

### **Failure to Control Predators Has Decimated Wyoming's Once Famous Sage Grouse Harvests**

Although Wyoming's reported 2011 harvest of 10,120 sage grouse is almost exactly the average 10,140 birds harvested during the preceding 10 years, it is an **88% decline** from the 1980 harvest of 85,254 grouse! Sage grouse numbers had peaked between the 1930s-1960s and the total decline becomes more severe in each new decade.

In 1990 hunters in Wyoming killed only 41,786 sage grouse and that was also when the IAFWA, the State biologists' lobbying group in Washington, D.C., declared that hunting had been replaced with non-consumptive wildlife recreation as the State Agencies' top priority. In 2000, one year after a December 2, 1999 *Sublette County Journal* article titled "Are Sage Grouse the Next Spotted Owl?" the number harvested had dropped to 20,685.

The "Spotted Owl" article pointed out that biologists' research indicated the need to control nest predators. But two lengthy rebuttal articles by Wyoming sage grouse biologists were also published, including the following comment:

"Although predators **are** the agent responsible for the majority of nest failures, the ultimate cause **probably** relates to habitat inadequacies, and not overall predator numbers. Sage grouse nesting habitat is characterized by dense sagebrush patches, with hatching success hinging on a healthy residual and forb herbaceous understory." (emphasis added)

The current state alternate sage grouse plans similarly claim that lack of habitat is the "real" problem in most areas. Yet they offer not one shred of evidence to substantiate the unsupported opinion that manipulating the habitat will halt or significantly reduce the nest predation.

But the Coates video-camera research in Nevada found that, regardless of nest cover, the addition of each extra raven in a nesting area substantially increased the odds of predation and nest destruction. It also found that leaving a grass and/or forb understory at the nest site, resulted in increased predation by badgers and other four-legged predators, and also radically increased the potential spread of destructive wildfire.

### **Feds, NGOs Lack Authority to Manage Sage Grouse**

It is important to remember that all three of Idaho's state sage grouse plans – 1997, 2006 and 2012 – were written by committees that included people whose goal was

to lock up rural land in core areas and wildlife corridors. But neither the federal participants nor the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have any authority to dictate how the states manage their wildlife unless/until that wildlife is listed as a threatened or endangered species under the ESA.

### **So Why Aren't the Governors' Plans Trying to Restore Sage Grouse by Controlling Excessive Predators?**

In his Feb. 2012 State of the State address, WY Gov. Mead boasted that the \$200 million in trust fund expenditures created about 500 new jobs per year and paid a total of \$21 million in labor earnings since 2006. Most of the \$200 million spent was state or federal income taxes or federal excise taxes paid by hunters so receiving only a \$21 million return (benefit) would seem to be a poor investment for those who paid the taxes.

Despite Wyoming's use of the fed's recommended tools to rebuild its sage grouse population since 1996, the harvest has declined another 23%. During that same 16 years, the harvest in Idaho has declined from 21,000 in 1996 to only 2,144 in 2011 – a decrease of 90%!

For cynical readers who feel I may have cherry-picked the 1996 date to make Idaho look bad, Idaho's 1990 sage grouse harvest was 55,800 which means the 2011 harvest of 2,144 reflected a decline of **96%**! Yet on page 1 of his June 29, 2012 "Alternative Plan for Sage Grouse Management in Idaho," Gov. Otter wrote: "Idaho currently enjoys viable and widespread populations of sage-grouse."

But on page 23 his plan states, "Due to the fact that sage-grouse can move across large areas during the year, IDFG is unable to precisely calibrate the State's population or the minimum viable population." (emphasis added). Yet at "4.3.12 Predation" in Idaho's 2006 plan, which is part of Gov. Otter's 2012 plan, it states:

"Some believe sage-grouse declines coincided with the abandonment of broad-scale predator control efforts in the 1970s. During the post-1986 timeframe, however, sage-grouse **populations** overall stabilized, and in some instances increased."

Yet the annual harvests published by IDFG below indicate that exactly the opposite occurred overall:

<u>Period</u>	<u>Total Years</u>	<u>Total Harvest</u>	<u>Avg Annual Harvest</u>
1987-1995	9	350,200	38,911
1996-2005*	9*	92,600	10,289
2006-2011	6	38,536	6,423

(\* 2003 missing)

Although the season length was changed from 30 days to seven days in 1996 due to declining birds, the harvest still averaged 18,167 for three more years before it began to nose dive. In 2008 and 2009 biologists increased

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### Otter Submits Sage Grouse Plan – *cont. from page 5*

the season to 23 days and doubled the bag limit but it did not attract more of the hunters who knew the chance for harvesting even one sage grouse was poor.

The 2010 harvest was reported as 4,052 for 3,539 hunters and the 2011 harvest was 2,144 for 2,715 hunters. This was a new record low season harvest and also a record low for the number of birds harvested per hunter.

Idaho's seven-day 2012 sage grouse season may be moved back to September to attract more hunters. The earlier season allows hunters to recognize juvenile grouse, which are preferred for eating, and makes it easier to kill hens and juveniles before they scatter in October.

### Male Counts at Leks Don't Guarantee Recovery

The message in Gov. Otter's new plan that IDFG is not able to accurately estimate sage grouse populations or accurately calculate a minimum viable population is being repeated by other states. Despite an Idaho judge claiming the total population in the 11-state area is somewhere between 100,000 and 500,000, none of the state plans make any effort to accurately estimate the number in their state.

Instead they count just the number of males that are presumably "booming" at the active leks they find and count. Then they use those numbers over each three-year period to see whether one or both of the counts declined by more than 10% compared to the 2009-2011 counts.

There are obvious discrepancies built into this system. Not the least of these is the fact that the 2009-11 male/lek counts supposedly indicated a stable sage grouse population, yet the three years of declining harvests are the second lowest, the lowest, and a new record low harvest.

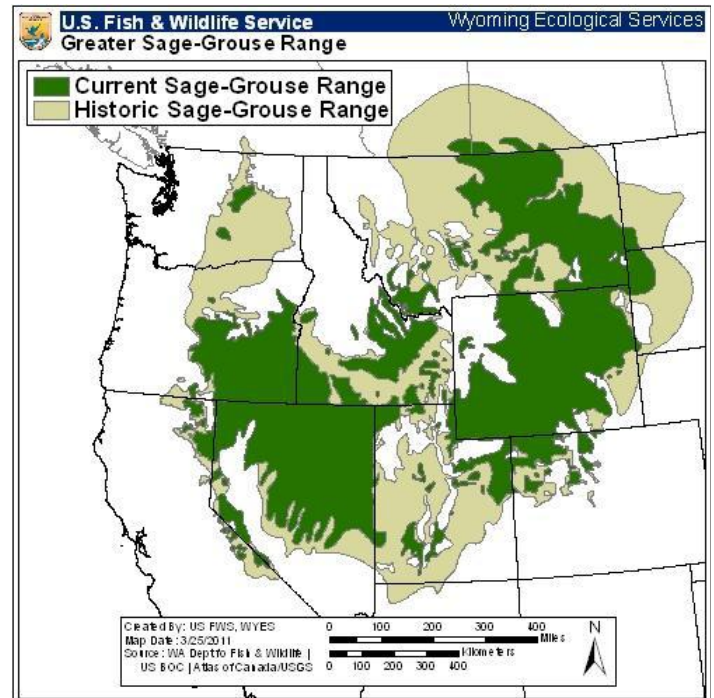
Would it be reliable to use the number of bugling bull elk counted to estimate the total number of bulls and cows, and the calves that survive predation? Of course not! Yet the plans are more concerned with imposing extreme restrictions on human activity than they are with restoring healthy viable sage grouse populations.

### Feds, Judge, NGOs Create Another "Spotted Owl"

Beginning five years ago, *Outdoorsman Bulletins* 24, 29, 41 and 47 documented how 400 state wildlife information specialists attending the FWS/TNC school in West Virginia were taught to spread misinformation about nongame wildlife. The state agencies were then provided with propaganda kits to help them convince the 49 state governors and the States' congressional delegations they must work together with federal agencies and NGOs (e.g. TNC and The Wildlands Network) to regulate wildlife habitat, energy and water development and all other human activities on public lands.

In February of 2007 the Western Governors Assn. adopted "**Protecting Wildlife Mitigation Corridors and Crucial Wildlife Habitat in the West.**" In June of 2008, WGA approved its "**Wildlife Corridors Initiative**" using the TNC/WCI "Spine of the Continent" Wildlands map to illustrate proposed Core Areas and Wildlife Corridors.

That map implied a significant portion of Idaho would be designated as sage grouse core areas, and the 19 governors in the WGA were directed to involve their state wildlife agencies in every phase of the plan. IDFG and MTFW&P recently completed their multi-state boundary of that portion of Idaho and Montana set aside to protect bears, wolves and mountain lions, and the following FWS map illustrates the sage grouse areas in the 11 states used as a guide in mapping each state's core areas:



March 25, 2011 USFWS map indicating their current and historic sage grouse ranges in the 11 states and two Canadian provinces.

### Litigation That Supposedly Forced State Plans

In 2004 FWS said the sage grouse would not be listed under the ESA, but in 2007, Boise Federal District Court Judge B. Lynn Winmill said FWS should reconsider its decision because he said it was "based on politics rather than science." In 2010 FWS said the sage grouse should be listed as "threatened" but did not list it because too many other species had a higher listing priority.

FWS also said there was inadequate protection in the federal rules to protect the grouse from wildfires, cattle grazing, etc., and gave the BLM and the states until 2015 to come up with strict preventative measures that would be implemented if certain criteria were not met. In a series of lawsuits filed by three activist groups headed by "Western Watersheds", Winmill approved this FWS action.

In yet another ruling on Feb. 7, 2012, resulting from a Western Watersheds lawsuit against the BLM, Winmill ordered the BLM to immediately place the needs of sage grouse above the needs of cattlemen. At issue were five recently renewed grazing permits, which the Plaintiff charged and Winmill agreed, failed to properly address all potential impacts on Sage Grouse.

The Wyoming and Idaho Sage Grouse Plans plainly state that their primary goal is to prevent the bird from being listed by FWS in 2015, with a secondary goal of protecting sagebrush habitat for the grouse. Instead of proposing solutions that will halt the grouse decline, they both propose providing an understory in nesting areas that guarantees uncontrolled spread of wildfire and increased predation by 4-legged predators.

Otter's requirement to limit the spread of wildfires to either 1,000 or 2,000 acres is ludicrous to Idahoans who have seen 933,000 acres already burned this summer – with 42 wildfires still active. One fire between Twin Falls and Oakley started three weeks ago, is still only “10% contained”, and wiped out a significant portion of the “Core” and “Important” Habitat Zones before most of the firefighting equipment even arrived.

The fact that sage grouse and all other game species were flourishing when predators were controlled and vast herds of livestock grazed off the understory, is ignored by extremists who want to severely curtail or eliminate almost every human use of the 10 million acres in Idaho. The Idaho plan bears a remarkable resemblance to the Idaho Wolf Plan copied by IDFG nearly two decades ago – except F&G was doing everything secretly and illegally then – whereas now they have legally been put in charge of the destruction by our Governor.

#### **Would Interior Dept. Approve Existing Practices?**

Wyoming's plan would exempt current grazing and oil and mineral extraction and Idaho's plan would exempt current grazing and other practices, but the BLM and Judge Winmill have just halted the grazing exemption in both Idaho and Wyoming. Several Idaho members of Otter's Sage Grouse Task Force recommended changing a Core Habitat Zone (CHZ) in Washington and Adams County to a General Habitat Zone (GHZ) so that it is not part of the 10 million acres but, like the grazing exemption, how long will that last?

The few who hopefully still respect the welfare of at least some of their constituents seem to ignore the reality that they have promoted the anti-predator control, anti-resource user plan of their state fish and Game agency, the federal agencies and their radical NGO supporters. What guarantee does Otter have that the federal bureaucrats will honor their promises?

And if they do, and even if environmental activist Judge Winmill decides to reverse his 2012 ruling and approve the plans that disagree with that ruling, what will stop the next environmental activist from filing another legal action based on the fact that sage grouse populations are known to still be declining?

#### **“The Dark Ages of Wildlife Management?”**

Most of the bureaucrats who claim to support the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation weren't even born when sportsmen and wildlife managers rebuilt our wild game resource. Those who have researched the

remarkable feat even slightly, know that controlling predators to allow their prey species to recover was the primary biological tool that was used.

Yet many of the academic and agency wildlife biologists I have discussed this recovery with tell me that period was the “dark ages of wildlife management.” They repeat the well worn excuse that the “predator and prey evolved together for 10,000 years” and say they consider it “barbaric” to kill one species to benefit another.

The reality is that many Idaho sage grouse and mule deer populations had recovered so much by the mid-1930s that the federal agencies reported tens of thousands in some areas where there are now only a few hundred. Livestock grazing limited the size of many wildfires and facilitated the forage growth required by these species.

But by the late 1960s and early 70s the overharvest of virtually every game species was taking its toll. Protection of predators compounded the problem and it took until the late 1980s to partially restore these species.

In the early 1990s most wildlife managers endorsed a “hands off” philosophy of game management, now called “ecosystem management”. They continued to protect predators and non-game species and continued to exploit the game species in Idaho, including sage grouse.

Idaho hunters are now paying much more to harvest a fraction of the mule deer and upland birds they did then. Yet these destroyers of our wild game, who should be charged with criminal negligence for the loss of our billion-dollar wildlife resource, have been put in charge of restoring sage grouse and regulating all human activity in the Mexico-to-Alaska wildlands system they helped create.

#### **Otter Plan Includes 149 Conservation Measures**

Instead of endorsing legitimate biological tools that will restore sage grouse populations, Gov. Otter's Plan offers 149 “Band-aid” conservation measures rather than admit that predator control is necessary in some areas. Washington County, Idaho approved a comprehensive plan which protects sage grouse leks from excessive noise.

If these measures designed to please environmental activists at your expense are disturbing, I suggest you read “Sage Grouse – Son of Spotted Owl” in the Summer 2012 issue of Range Magazine. It can also be downloaded at: [http://www.rangemagazine.com/specialreports/range-su12-sage\\_grouse.pdf](http://www.rangemagazine.com/specialreports/range-su12-sage_grouse.pdf)

The second of seven articles addressing Sage Grouse includes an estimate of between 350,000-535,000 sage grouse in the 11 states and the author asks the question, “Is that endangered?”

On the following pages, an article titled, “Ravens and Sage Grouse” by former Nevada State Assemblyman Ira Hansen addresses the problem of sage grouse predation in Nevada. The article prompted a public response by NDOW Director Ken Mayer who said he will not take the time to increase grouse populations because he is too busy working to keep the bird from being listed.

# Ravens and Sage Grouse

By Assemblyman Ira Hansen

*(Long-time Nevada Assemblyman Ira Hansen served in District 13 until his retirement.)*

**SAGE GROUSE DECLINE:** Populations of sage grouse have been in decline for several decades and “habitat loss” is as a rule blamed. Today they are being seriously considered for placement on the “endangered species” list by the Federal Government. Even in states with excellent habitat available – such as Nevada – bird numbers have shown a similar trend.

As several studies have noted adult sage grouse survival is generally not a problem. Recruitment – how many young birds join existing adult populations – has been documented to be poor. Consequently several recent studies, including two especially pertinent for Nevadans conducted in Elko County, have attempted to address why.

“Predator control” is today a major topic of debate. The idea of removing predators, once the catch-all answer for downward trends in wildlife populations, is today regarded by college educated wildlife biologists as an anachronism, a holdover of a less educated past. Consequently most modern wildlife biologists seem to go to great lengths to avoid even discussing using predator control as a tool in their management arsenal.

Yet, examples of predators having long term impacts can be substantial and documented. When for example a primary food source is supplied unintentionally by man, secondary food sources can suffer catastrophic declines without a corresponding decline in the predator’s population.

The increase in ravens in the western United States has been nothing short of phenomenal. A 300% increase in general has been noted, with 1500% increases documented in certain areas. Much of this increase has come about from man-supplied food sources.

This trend was noted in one of the Elko studies: *“Generalist predators [ravens] that reach high numbers in human altered habitats are of great concern because they can reduce prey populations [such as sage grouse] and these predators have been shown to continue depredating bird nests even at low prey densities.”*

In plain English, even when sage grouse decline sharply in numbers because the ravens are eating them, as long as the ravens have other food sources, the raven populations are not affected by the declines in sage grouse.

*The impacts ravens have on sage grouse is in truth old news. A 1948 study conducted by the Oregon State Game Commission concluded: “The greatest single limiting factor of sage grouse is nest predation by ravens. While other predators do contribute to their toll, this study showed that the raven was the single greatest limiting*

*factor and the control of winged predators is an essential element in sage grouse management”.*

The 1948 Oregon study, in brief, had a “control” area in quality sage grouse habitat where raven populations were substantially reduced. Another very similar area was left alone with no raven removal. The results: *“Ravens again proved to be the chief limiting factor of sage grouse, and raven control the most feasible method of increasing grouse populations. Five and five-tenths percent nesting success on an uncontrolled area as compared to a 51.2% success on an area where ravens and other avian predators were controlled is a strong indication of the raven’s effect on this species.”*

History repeats itself: the 2005 Elko study, conducted by Idaho State University, while couched in more “politically correct” jargon, reached very similar conclusions, again using the control/no control methodology: *“Sage grouse nest failure and observed raven predation of sage grouse nests were associated with indices of raven abundance...our findings should raise some conservation concern considering that raven abundance has increased an estimated 300% in the past 27 years in the United States including reports of 1500% increases within an approximate 25 year period in areas of the western United States”.*

Clel Georgetta, writing about the domestic sheep industry in his Western history classic “Golden Fleece in Nevada” made an interesting observation. Written in 1968, he stated *“The crow [raven] is a newcomer. He is not a native of the state. It is believed there was not a crow in all Nevada until after the First World War when automobiles began crossing the country. All along the road jackrabbits were killed by cars. The crows followed from one rabbit to the next one, all the way out west. Now Nevada has many thousands of crows and they form one of the greatest pests at lambing time.”*

Georgetta is wrong on no ravens in Nevada as their presence was well noted by the early immigrants for similar reasons – they followed the emigrant trail eating dead draft animals and livestock. Nevertheless his observation, from a man native to eastern Nevada, whose father was head of one of the pioneer ranching families of this State, shows they were very scarce.

Interestingly, the time frame he notes for the raven showing up in Nevada, WWI, which ended in 1918, matches almost exactly the date for an overall decline in sage grouse populations in the Oregon study mentioned earlier. They noted a gradual decline beginning in 1919 which continued to the years of their study, 1946-1947.

Incidentally, most people in Nevada, including myself, cannot distinguish a crow from a raven although



they are two distinct species. Thus people like Georgetta lump them together.

**STUBBLE HEIGHT AND PREDATION:** One of the new theories on protecting sage grouse nests from avian predators is to leave “stubble”, i.e. unconsumed grass and weeds, among the sage brush plants sage grouse typically nest under to provide cover for the nests to be concealed in.

While sounding at first as plausible, this is probably the worst possible thing we could do, and I highly suspect the motive for pushing this particular pseudo-solution is a back-door attempt to remove livestock from the ranges.

It is a terrible idea in that if carried out, the fire danger would increase exponentially; the bulk of the grasses and forbs today are combined with cheatgrass or in reality are totally composed of cheatgrass. Once you start leaving the recommended minimum height of eight-inch-high dry cheatgrass stubble, you virtually guarantee fire will sweep through that sage brush community, destroying the habitat completely for sage grouse. In short, no sage, no grouse.

It should be noted as well that the peak historic sage grouse populations in Nevada, when descriptions of “clouds of birds” and “thousands of sage hen” were noted was also the time frame of unlimited and totally unrestricted grazing by - no exaggeration here - millions of sheep and hundreds of thousands of cattle and horses. If “stubble height” is so critical for protection, how did they survive and actually prosper in the very same time frame that by all accounts Nevada was so severely overgrazed?

Instead it issued a 3,200 word document dated May 2009 and titled “Wolves Delisted: Idaho Perspective,” that omits all mention of managing wolves to restore a healthy predator-prey ratio. In fact it implies in two places that killing wolves to benefit either big game or starving wolves is a violation of Idaho law as follows:

The 2010 Elko study, again conducted by Idaho State University, discovered that increased stubble height actually **increased predation** of nests by non-avian predators. “*We also found that badger predation increased at nests with greater visual obstruction.* [After ravens, badgers were found to be the most destructive predator of nests, eggs and young birds]. *Other studies have found negative or no relationships between nest survival and grass height, grass cover, shrub height, canopy cover, understory cover, and species of nesting shrub*”. In truth, not only does stubble increase fire danger, but aids additional predation as well. Hardly a well thought out “solution”.

In conclusion the logical steps to help restore sage grouse populations is to reduce raven numbers, by first doing what is practical, i.e. cover or destroy man-provided food sources; second to use selective predator control in key sage grouse habitat, probably through USDA provided

professional trappers; and three, allowing and encouraging shooting and hunting seasons for crows, even possibly a bounty system of some type, while looking to get out of or get variances on the international 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty, which calls for raven protection.

To my recollection, crow hunting as a means of protecting sage grouse started in the 1980s. Idaho was one of the first states to legalize it. The obvious question: how can you tell unprotected crows from protected ravens?

My good friend Mike Meizel, an avid trapper and outdoorsman and former Chief of Buildings and Grounds for the State of Nevada, posed that question to an Idaho Game Warden in the late 1980s. This particular Warden, blessed with good old common sense and aware of the damage ravens were causing, wryly noted “crows are the ones that hit the ground”! Beware of the simplistic response you will get from certain biologists when raven removal is suggested. “Yes” they will say, “we know ravens eat the eggs and removal helps with that but the *problem* is the *juveniles* that survive past nesting are not surviving to full adulthood. Something in the *habitat* is the problem.”

Ok, then what is that *problem* specifically? The tangible discussion typically ends about there and a series of nebulous theories – none of which seem to focus on the likelihood of *additional predation* – takes over. Not a single study I have read has suggested starvation as the cause of juvenile grouse not making it to full adulthood. In fact food studies for sage grouse state the opposite; there is a bit of a mystery why there are not many times more grouse as the studies show they eat only token amounts of their potential food supply. “Habitat” per se is NOT the problem.

Currently thanks to the mental roadblock the words “predator control” causes among most of today’s wildlife biologists, virtually every possible scenario, no matter how outlandish or poorly thought out, is placed ahead of predator removal on the “to-do” list. Indeed, several proposals call for removing from the public domain sage grouse population enhancement tools, most notably livestock grazing and agriculture despite strong evidence these greatly increased sage grouse populations in Nevada.

As I have documented in other papers, sage grouse were all but non-existent when white man first arrived in Nevada. Following the introduction of landscape modifying and landscape enhancing changes, especially the introduction of the livestock range industry and all that came with it – including predator control - sage grouse populations exploded.

Based on early explorer journals describing Indian diet and wildlife they observed, two of my earlier reports detailed the fact Nevada had next to no sage grouse comparatively speaking. For additional facts based on Indian diet, I have completed a careful review of Julian

*Continued on page 10*

### Ravens and Sage Grouse – *continued from pg 9*

Steward's 1938 report on Indian practices, including food sources, before white contact. Taken from interviews Steward did with older Indians in the 1920's and 30's, and covering virtually all of Nevada, it is a wealth of first hand information from the Indians themselves and the results on sage grouse will be of interest to those seeking facts rather than fables presented by some about the "good old days!"

I will report on that soon. I will also be reporting on the impacts on sage grouse populations caused by crested wheat seedings.

Please feel free to contact me about any aspects of these reports, or copies of past reports, and feel free to circulate them as you see fit.

In the meantime, we need to give raven removal a strong seat at the "save the sage grouse" table. I strongly believe that not only can we stop the decline in their populations, but using the past as our guide, begin rebuilding. Nevada could be a model for enhancing sage grouse populations. We simply need the leadership to boldly experiment and challenge the bureaucratic chokehold on methodology. Rather than wringing our hands over "saving" some token remnant, why don't we focus on what works?

## IDFG Wildlife Summit Illegal

Editor, The Outdoorsman

I hate it when friends fight. I hate it even more when those friends head very beneficial sportsmen groups...and the wedge they drive deeper and deeper between them turns into personal attacks.

What really hurts most is that these two friends have both worked hard for pretty much the same cause, to insure healthy wildlife populations in Idaho - with much of that effort focused on taking care of issues that, left unresolved, could destroy any chances of sportsmen ever enjoying quality hunting in that state again.

Two of those issues are the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and a glut of predators which have severely pulled down game populations.

At issue is the IDFG sponsored "Wildlife Summit", to be held August 24-26 at seven locations around the state. The purpose of this so-called summit is a look at the "Mission" of IDFG.

The agency wants to stray from their legislated mission, which by law is to concentrate on maintaining healthy populations of "Fish" and "Game"... just as the agency's name implies. What has not set well with the leaders of these two sportsman organizations is that not only have environmental groups and animal rights groups been invited to attend and participate in the summit...all of the keynote guest speakers have extremely strong ties with those groups.

Where the conflict between the two Idaho sportsman organizations developed was whether or not they would or should encourage their members and followers to attend or participate. One side proclaimed that Idaho's sportsmen should fully boycott the "Wildlife Summit"...the other side feels that sportsmen should participate and voice their feelings and concerns. Still, both sides of this disagreement do agree that for IDFG to conduct this summit, with the sole purpose of changing its core mission, is a violation of Idaho law.

Which side is right? Should Idaho sportsmen and sportsmen groups attend and participate...or boycott it all the way? That's not for me to decide. But, I will share how I feel about the whole issue.

First, I agree that the IDFG Commission has stepped way beyond its authority to conduct such a meeting...with the sole purpose of changing the mission which was handed them by the Idaho legislature. There has been absolutely no authorization given to the commission or the agency to use sportsmen dollars to conduct a meeting for the purpose of collaborating an illegal detour from the mission they have been mandated to fulfill. The goal of IDFG is to give non consumptive (non hunter, non angler) groups more say in wildlife management. I am 100% against that. These people have set back and watched Idaho sportsmen build a fine house...now they want to move in and take over. It's that simple.

These same groups, including Defenders of Wildlife, Center for Biological Diversity, the Sierra Club, and others can be largely credited for the severe loss of big game throughout the Northern Rockies, by tying up predator control issues in federal court. Now they actually want a strong say when it comes to wildlife management decisions.

What sticks in my craw more than just a little is the manner in which IDFG chose its very environmental-sided speakers. Why didn't they bring in any real sportsmen organization speakers, like David Allen (c.e.o. of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation)...Gray Thornton (Executive Director of Wild Sheep Foundation)...Don Peay (founder of Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife)...or Miles Moretti (Executive Director of the Mule Deer Foundation)? IDFG's choice of speakers says reams about their agenda.

My feelings are, in regard to attending the "Wildlife Summit", that both of the quarrelling sportsman groups WOULD HAVE accomplished one hell of a lot more and made a much bigger statement if all of their efforts had been used to organize a complete sportsman take over of these meetings. Since the meetings are about to happen, that's now pretty much impossible.

Do we need sportsmen inside these meetings, participating and LOUDLY voicing their disapproval of

*Continued on page 12*

# The Wildlife Summit

By George Dovel

On July 26, 2006 at the WAFWA (Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies) convention in Fargo, North Dakota, the F&G Commissioners adopted a resolution agreeing to use the **Public Trust Doctrine** as a tool to force democratic access to wildlife for everyone (not just those who hunt or fish). The resolution included maintaining the highest ethics and respect for wildlife and a commitment to work with AFWA (the national group that lobbies and dictates policy) to pursue the legal language necessary to make the **PTD** effective.

Two years later, On March 28, 2008, IDFG employees Michelle Beucler and Gregg Servheen conducted a workshop in Phoenix for the Wildlife Management Institute with a presentation titled, "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Reflections from a Nonhunter." They taught that providing a sustained yield of game for hunters has inflicted irreparable damage to other species and the environment and forced predators into near extinction.

After providing a long list of alleged damage to wildlife, non-hunters, landowners and environmentalists, they said sportsmen felt they should dictate management just because they paid the costs. Then they said "This undermines the **Public Trust Doctrine**\*, and leaves no room for breaking out to engage the non-hunting citizenry and broader wildlife conservation"

(\*they mentioned hunter violation of the **Public Trust Doctrine** four times in their presentation)

Two years later, In the Spring 2010 issue of *Management Tracks*, Organization of Wildlife Planners President Michele Beucler authored an article titled, "The Death of Wildlife Management?" She wrote that it was time to bury wildlife management and engage a broader citizenry in 21<sup>st</sup> Century conservation challenges such as rapid growth and development in key habitats, climate change and nature deficit disorder.

In June of 2011 while IDFG Director Moore was attending an environmental forum in Boise, he announced his intention to convene a "Wildlife Congress" in 2012 "to hear from sportsmen and other wildlife groups about what the priorities for the agency should be and how to pay for them." This was quickly followed with an article by *Western Watersheds* Media Director Brian Ertz in which he blasted hunters and anglers for allegedly claiming they should have more voice in how wildlife is managed because they pay for its management.

Ertz invoked the **Public Trust Doctrine** repeatedly and Moore responded by initially only sending out invitations to environmental activist groups rather than include hunters and fishermen. For those who wish to refresh their memory, all of this and more was reported in *Outdoorsman Bulletin* No. 47.

A special edition of "Idaho Fish and Game News" for August 2012, includes a plea by Summit speaker Shane Mahoney for "a broad and deep coalition" to be formed for the conservation of wildlife. The next page says "Broad-Based Commitments are Key to Wildlife Conservation" and cites Gov. Otter's Sage Grouse Plan as an example of the type of coalition IDFG is seeking with the summit.

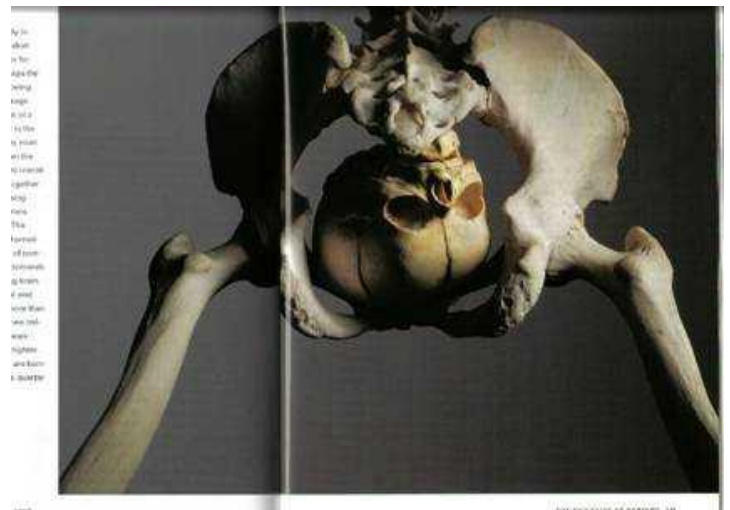
I urge everyone who reads this issue to promptly send a letter or email to Virgil Moore giving him your opinion of the tactics he and his employees have used in their effort to destroy scientific wildlife management used to preserve, protect, perpetuate and manage Idaho wildlife as required by Idaho Code 36-103.

If you receive this by email later today (it's 2:00 A.M. on Friday, August 24, 2012) I urge you to either join other concerned outdoorsmen in a demonstration of your opinions at one of the seven locations that will host the Wildlife Summit beginning this evening, or at least contact the IDFG website today and they will provide a link so you can see and hear what is going on and express your opinions.

Please include a copy of your email or letter to Director Moore with a copy to at least the Commissioner who represents you and to Senator Monty Pearce. The appropriate addresses are on page 12.

## Don't Put it Off

Several years ago I was sent the following photo of human remains buried in an unusual position. It was titled: "The First Politician" and it's printed here as a reminder not to stick your head in a dark place and forget to do what you know you should – even though it's Summer and you'd rather be someplace else.



Don't forget to mail or fax your opinion to Virgil Moore with copies to one or more Commissioners and Senator Pearce. Please read this issue and consider how this will affect your loved ones.

Wildlife Summit Illegal – continued from pg 10  
the manner in which IDFG is violating their mission? MOST CERTAINLY! Do we need sportsmen standing in opposition to the summit and LOUDLY voicing their disapproval of the manner in which IDFG is violating their mission? MOST DEFINITELY!

Being at the summit does not necessarily constitute "participating" in the summit. Those in opposition need to gather in protest, be very visible, and be heard as they march with their protest signs in front of each meeting location. There will be media coverage...and sportsmen need to be there to tell their side, their opinion of how IDFG is selling them out.

This is going to hundreds of sportsmen in the Northern Rockies...and to national and state sportsmen organizations. These days, we have to be extremely careful to not let a common cause divide us. When we do, our anti-hunting enemies win - and sportsmen as a whole lose.

**Toby Bridges**  
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