# IDFG Continues to Deny It Violated Idaho Law

By George Dovel

To counteract a false claim by Idaho Fish and Game Commissioner Randy Budge that certain hunters who testify are not telling the truth about the Department's role in transplanting Canadian wolves into Idaho, *Outdoorsman* Bulletin No. 38 published documents proving IDFG violated Idaho Code Sec. 36-715(2) by:

- (a) illegally signing a document which officially approved the FWS wolf plan;
- (b) illegally signing a permit authorizing FWS to introduce up to 75 Canadian wolves into Idaho.

I suggested it was time for them to admit the truth about how we got where we are, put it behind them, and get on with the business of restoring our billion dollar wildlife resource. Instead, a May 13, 2010 *Lewiston Tribune* article stated, "Department Director Cal Groen said the document was signed to make sure any wolves placed in Idaho were done so under an experimental and nonessential population status."

As Chief of the IDFG Natural Resource Policy Bureau, Groen knew FWS needed state approval of its plan to bring "Nonessential Experimental" Canadian wolves into Idaho in order to appear to comply with 50 CFR 17 and the intent of Congress. He also knew Idaho Law

prohibited IDFG from signing the agreements – yet they did it anyway.

But instead of admitting they violated Idaho law in order to get Canadian wolves into Idaho as I suggested, Groen had a "Wolf Reintroduction/Recovery Timeline" placed on the website the last week in May which conceals their illegal actions. It claims the Permit was simply "a courtesy in accordance with state law and the Idaho wolf management plan currently being drafted by IDFG." and truthfully admits the full Commission formally approved introduction of the wolves by FWS two months later

If Groen's statement to the *Tribune* is an admission that we would not have many wolves in Idaho today if the documents allowing FWS to transplant them had not been signed, he admitted the truth about the controversial documents for a change.

But his willingness to continue to mislead the public with a carefully crafted document distorting the truth does not excuse the fact that Fish and Game's violation of State Law then to serve its private agenda, is now costing Idaho citizens up to \$24 million each year just in lost revenue from elk hunters. Unfortunately, that cost represents just the tip of the iceberg to Idaho Citizens.

# The Truth about Idaho's Declining Elk Harvests

By George Dovel

In response to criticism from *The Outdoorsman* and many outfitters and hunters, IDFG Director Cal Groen and the Idaho F&G Commission say they are taking appropriate steps to restore elk populations that have been depleted by wolves. Those steps include authorizing four outfitters to kill up to five wolves each before June 30, 2010 in certain unidentified "back country" areas, and increasing the fair chase bag limit on bears and lions from one to two in the normal hunting seasons in those areas.

In just the Lolo and Selway Zones, electronic calls may be used for black bear and mountain lions, and the calls may still be used only for lions in Units 41 and 42 in Owyhee County. These actions would have been applauded several years ago but are "too little too late" now.

I have worked closely with Idaho Fish and Game issues since 1957 and, despite the clear requirements in I.C. Sec. 36-104(b), I have never seen the F&G Commission listen to citizen testimony and then decide game declines require season changes or other emergency action until biologists finally admit it is necessary. This is usually one or several years later and then only after citizens have sought help from their legislators to force the action.

The claims by IDFG biologists and wolf advocates that all is well in the majority of elk units are patently false. In the following pages you will learn that every elk unit or zone in Idaho with a significant wolf population also has severe ongoing declines in annual hunter harvests.

continued on page 2

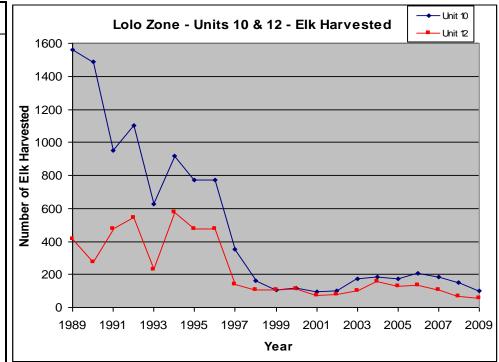
#### Declining Elk Harvests – continued from page 1

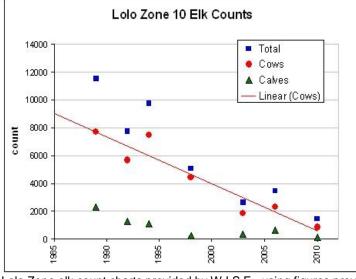
Just before Canadian wolves were transplanted into Idaho, Clearwater Region Units 10 and 12 were two of 14 "High Density" Idaho elk units containing three or more elk per square mile. Contrary to IDFG biologists' claims now, the 22-year Clearwater Elk Ecology Study (1964-1985) proved the elk were only consuming 25% of available winter forage; conception and calf birth weights were high; and daily calf weight gain was more than adequate to insure survival – but uncontrolled predators, primarily black bears, were killing too many newborn calves.

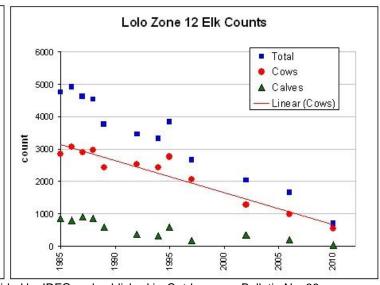
Bear removal tripled elk calf survival which restored the elk herd and maintained it at high density level until wolves appeared, despite excessive hunter harvests. The following elk harvest figures were provided by F&G's Bruce Ackerman. However all harvest figures for the year 1995 do not match any of the harvests originally published by IDFG (e.g. the published 1995 Lolo Zone elk harvest was 1,925 instead of the 1,246 Ackerman reported).

#### Lolo Zone - Units 10, 12 - Elk Harvested

<b>Lolo Zone - Units 10, 12 - El</b>						
	Elk Harvested					
Year	Unit 10	Unit 12	Total			
1989	1559	416	1975			
1990	1490	274	1764			
1991	952	476	1428			
1992	1104	543	1647			
1993	625	230	855			
1994	915	576	1491			
1995	773	473	1246			
1996	773	473	1246			
1997	354	138	492			
1998	165	106	271			
1999	105	105	210			
2000	119	110	229			
2001	96	75	171			
2002	103	81	184			
2003	176	100	276			
2004	187	158	345			
2005	174	130	304			
2006	206	134	340			
2007	183	108	291			
2008	153	68	221			
2009	98	56	154			







Lolo Zone elk count charts provided by W.I.S.E., using figures provided by IDFG and published in *Outdoorsman* Bulletin No. 38.

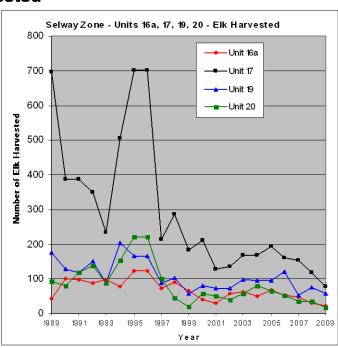
Although two requests for the most recent elk and deer counts for all units were forwarded to IDFG State Big Game Manager Jon Rachael on May 6, 2010, he has ignored the law requiring him to provide a response within 10 days.

Only 14% of the Lolo Zone is in a designated Wilderness Area, but 71% of the Selway Zone is in Wilderness and three of its four Units were also "High Density" Elk Units when wolves were introduced. In 1996 the Lolo Zone's 350 antlerless permits were increased to 1,900 and the 225 Selway Zone cow permits were increased to 1,400 either-sex permits.

Although both total elk numbers and the number of cows in the Selway Zone dropped by half from 1995-2007, there were still 3,381 cows to halt the decline into a Predator Pit if 10J predator control had been implemented then. It was not.

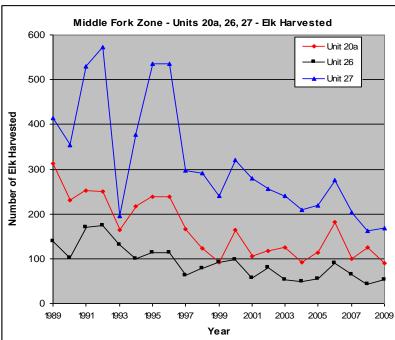
## Selway Zone - Units 16a, 17, 19, 20 - Elk Harvested

Selway Zo	one - ur	IIIS 168	I, 17, 19	, ZU - E	ik marv
Elk Harvested					
Year	Unit 16a	Unit 17	Unit 19	Unit 20	Total
1989	43	697	175	94	1009
1990	100	388	128	80	696
1991	98	387	118	118	721
1992	88	350	152	139	729
1993	97	235	88	87	507
1994	77	505	204	154	940
1995	124	702	167	221	1214
1996	124	702	167	221	1214
1997	72	215	89	101	477
1998	91	287	104	46	528
1999	66	183	59	21	329
2000	41	211	80	59	391
2001	29	128	74	50	281
2002	59	136	74	41	310
2003	62	169	99	57	387
2004	50	168	96	81	395
2005	69	193	96	66	424
2006	53	162	120	52	387
2007	49	153	52	35	289
2008	31	118	76	36	261
2009	23	79	57	17	176



## Middle Fork Zone - Units 20a, 26, 27 - Elk Harvested

Elk Harvested				
Year	Unit 20a	Unit 26	Unit 27	Total
1989	313	139	415	867
1990	230	101	353	684
1991	253	170	529	952
1992	251	173	573	997
1993	165	131	195	491
1994	216	100	377	693
1995	238	114	535	887
1996	238	114	535	887
1997	166	63	297	526
1998	123	78	292	493
1999	92	91	241	424
2000	164	97	321	582
2001	105	56	279	440
2002	117	81	256	454
2003	125	53	240	418
2004	92	49	210	351
2005	113	55	218	386
2006	181	89	275	545
2007	100	64	204	368
2008	126	43	163	332
2009	90	53	169	312



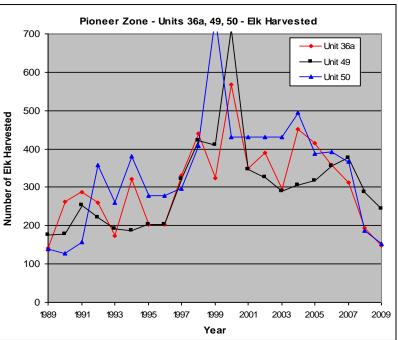
The Middle Fork Zone Wilderness Units, including Big Creek and Chamberlain Basin, were not "High Density" Elk Units. Wolf biologists' 2006 claim that wolves were not impacting deer and elk numbers in Big Creek was not accurate.

### Declining Elk Harvests – continued from page 3

Three more of the 14 Idaho high density elk units prior to wolf introduction were in the Pioneer Zone. Note high kill in August 1<sup>st</sup> general season elk reduction hunts in Units 49 and 50 in 1999 & 2000. This zone is just starting to get wolf packs so the decrease since 1994 is only 39% but the trend is sharply down – with no changes in the 2010 antlerless harvest!

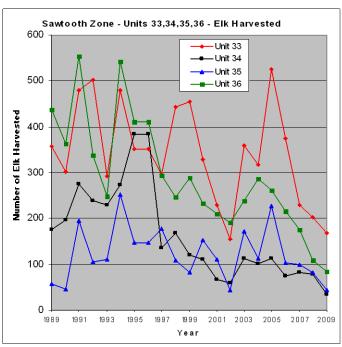
## Pioneer Zone - Units 36a, 49, 50 - Elk Harvested

Pioneer Zone - Units 36a, 49, 30 - Elk r				
Year	Unit 36a	Unit 49	Unit 50	Total
1989	141	176	139	456
1990	262	178	128	568
1991	287	253	157	697
1992	260	222	358	840
1993	173	191	260	624
1994	322	188	380	890
1995	204	203	279	686
1996	204	203	279	686
1997	331	321	296	948
1998	439	421	409	1269
1999	324	411	744	1479
2000	567	714	430	1711
2001	348	346	431	1125
2002	389	326	430	1145
2003	294	289	431	1014
2004	452	306	495	1253
2005	416	316	387	1119
2006	358	355	392	1105
2007	312	377	367	1056
2008	193	287	186	666
2009	148	244	153	545



## Sawtooth Zone - Units 33,34,35,36 - Elk Harvested

Elk Harvested					
Year	Unit 33	Unit 34	Unit 35	Unit 36	Total
1989	357	176	58	438	1029
1990	302	196	45	363	906
1991	479	275	195	554	1503
1992	503	238	105	339	1185
1993	293	229	111	249	882
1994	480	274	253	542	1549
1995	352	385	147	411	1295
1996	352	385	147	411	1295
1997	297	135	178	294	904
1998	443	168	109	246	966
1999	454	120	82	289	945
2000	328	110	152	234	824
2001	229	66	110	210	615
2002	155	59	44	192	450
2003	360	112	172	239	883
2004	318	101	113	286	818
2005	525	112	228	262	1127
2006	375	74	104	215	768
2007	230	83	100	175	588
2008	203	78	83	108	472
2009	168	35	44	84	331

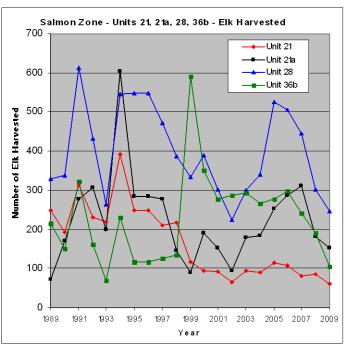


Despite the extreme 1992-93 winter that killed several hundred elk and most of the deer in the area, in 1994 Units 33 and 35 remained two of the highest elk density units in Idaho. SW Region Wildlife Manager (former wolf biologist) Jon Rachael used a combination of archery, muzzleloader and any-weapon general seasons and controlled hunts from late August through early December to maximize license income. He ignored massive wolf pack increases and the harvest "nosedive" beginning in 2006 and was recently rewarded by being promoted to State Big Game Manager by Director Groen.

In 1992 IDFG counts showed Unit 21A had an amazing 19.4 elk per square mile and in 1993 Unit 21 had 6.5 elk per square mile. In 1996 Unit 28 had 3.8 elk per sq. mile and in 1997 Unit 36B had 3.7 elk per sq. mile. As in many other Idaho units, antlerless elk hunting that was initiated to control depredation of crops became a major license revenue source.

Salmon Zone - Units 21, 21a, 28, 36b - Elk Harvested

Outline 2	<del></del>		<u></u>	<del>5, 00.5</del>	
Elk Harvested					
Year	Unit 21	Unit 21a	Unit 28	Unit 36b	Total
1989	248	72	328	214	862
1990	192	169	338	150	849
1991	312	278	612	321	1523
1992	231	307	432	160	1130
1993	220	199	265	69	753
1994	391	604	545	231	1771
1995	249	283	548	117	1197
1996	249	283	548	117	1197
1997	211	278	473	126	1088
1998	216	146	388	134	884
1999	116	89	334	590	1129
2000	94	191	389	351	1025
2001	91	151	303	277	822
2002	65	93	223	287	668
2003	94	180	300	293	867
2004	89	183	339	267	878
2005	114	252	525	278	1169
2006	107	287	506	298	1198
2007	81	310	446	241	1078
2008	85	181	301	189	756
2009	60	152	245	104	561



On May 28, 2010, an IDFG News Release stated that February-March 2010 game counts showed that cows in the four Salmon Zone Units had only declined "slightly" since 2008 but the number of bulls has shown a sharper decline. The release states that the ratio of bull to cow elk is "about 11 bulls per 100 cows across hunt units 21, 21A, 28 and 36B."

It admits the number of bulls has been declining since the early to mid 2000s and says "Fish and Game needs to reduce hunting pressure for a few years" so starting this year it is capping resident B Tags by reducing the average number purchased for the last five years by 20 percent. Then it reminds you that resident tags will go on sale July 10 so if you applied for a controlled hunt and weren't successful, don't wait too long to buy your B Tag.

The cap of 2,507 B Tags was already included in the 2010 hunting rules brochure and this is simply a plea for hunters to spend more money applying for some controlled hunt for a better chance to kill an elk before the June 5 deadline, and then invest in an elk tag in the Salmon Zone when they don't draw. Reducing the number of hunters increases the harvest success rate but every wildlife biologist knows that capping tag sales less than 50% normally has no impact on the number of animals harvested – except perhaps to *increase* it slightly initially due to fewer hunters disturbing the animals.

This is actually an admission that IDFG intends to continue destroying the elk population with unlimited either-sex archery hunting from Aug. 30-Sept. 30 in three units and from Dec. 1-Dec. 31 in the remaining unit, and continue harvesting too many bulls with even fewer cows to provide more replacement bull calves. At only 11 bulls per 100 cows, bulls remain well below the 18-24 per 100 cows objective and the increasing wolf numbers continue to kill most of the elk that would have been harvested by hunters.

Because the Antlerless Harvest Thresholds for mule deer units, and the Elk Cow and Bull Objectives for elk zones were set shortly after the severe 1992-93 winter, they are low compared to historical populations. It is possible for an elk population to still meet its objective in one unit, yet fall far below that in other units in the same zone due to excessive wolf predation.

#### Startling New Facts about Wolf Interactions with Cattle on an Idaho Ranch

During a symposium attended by about 250 people on May 22, 2010 in La Grande, Oregon, Idaho cattle ranch manger Casey Anderson revealed some startling facts about the interaction of wolves with the cattle he manages on the OX Ranch. Headquartered in Council, Idaho, ten of 1,000 cows on the OX ranch he manages were radio-collared and satellite tracked to determine how many of them encountered the single radio-collared wolf in the area.

Anderson said that researchers from U of I and OSU expected the wolf might encounter two or three of the radiocollared cows in a herd of 450 but were shocked to learn that wolf was in the vicinity of all 10 collared cows 784 times from Declining Elk Harvests – continued from page 5

May 23 to Nov. 30, 2009! He said at one time last spring there were 28 wolves in the area and reportedly said they killed 13 wolves on the ranch in 2009.

Besides confirmed wolf kills of 18 head of cattle in 2009, Anderson reported 62 calves disappeared from an uncollared herd of 317 cows in another pasture before roundup. He blamed 45 of those calf losses on wolves and said such dramatic losses were the direct result of not controlling wolves before their numbers got out of hand.

Anderson said the researchers in the ongoing two year study are learning that wolves initially kill deer and elk but as soon as the wildlife becomes scarce, the adult wolves learn how to kill cows and then teach their young how to kill them. He said you're going to have problems with even one or two wolves but pointed out that instead of the 150 wolves agreed upon, we now have over 100 breeding pairs and many more wolves.

Anderson said the wolves have created handling and distribution problems in the cattle on the ranch and, even with humans in the pasture, the wolves manage to sneak in and kill a calf. He also said reportedly because of wolves spreading the eggs, fecal samples of his cattle now reveal tapeworms in almost every test for the first time ever, despite a good worming regimen

## **High Wolf Densities = Harvest Declines of 55%-90%**

In this article, I have published harvest charts and graphs of five elk zones that illustrate significant harvest reductions since 1994 – just before wolves were transplanted into Idaho – but similar declines are occurring in various stages in every unit where wolf densities are increasing. The official IDFG statewide elk harvest in 1994 was 28,000 compared to the estimated 2009 statewide harvest of only 15,443 elk.

That 45% overall harvest decline in all elk units since the year before wolves were introduced, includes the elk herds where no wolf packs have ever been reported. This makes the harvest decline from 1994-2009 in the higher density wolf zones even more extreme – ranging from 55% to 90%!

## **Selling Extra Antlerless Harvest Depletes Herds**

The Pioneer Zone was included to show how harvests nose dive when wolves are added, yet no changes were made in the liberal antlerless hunts for 2010. Despite the continuing alarming decline in the units and zones with increasing wolf numbers, female harvest made up a whopping 41% of the statewide elk harvest projected by Ackerman's modeling in 2009!

This despite the fact that a majority of the female elk that were killed were carrying at least one unborn calf and represented about a tenfold increase during the life of each cow if half of those unborn calves were females. The 15,256 controlled hunt elk permits that are offered for drawing in 2010 plus dozens of archery and muzzleloader general season cow hunts are proof of the IDFG agenda.

Anyone who attended the Dec. 6, 2007 Alternate Funding Committee meeting and heard F&G's Sharon Kiefer excitedly tell key legislators how the Department intended to raise large sums of money by selling chances to draw scarce limited hunt permits, knows what has happened to Idaho wild game management. Regulating hunting seasons to provide a sustained yield for hunters who pay for wildlife management is now only a memory.

With or without wolves, IDFG officials have systematically exploited game populations as a source of immediate revenue rather than manage them as a valuable sustainable natural resource. Their refusal to control wolves, even to save a resource once valued at a billion dollars, illustrates their lack of integrity.

#### The Panhandle Zone

I have saved discussion of the Panhandle Zone for last because, like Northwest Montana, it was not part of wolf introduction and lacked major wolf impact for years. Elk and moose have prospered in the northern Panhandle but declined in the southern counties – especially elk in Units 7 and 9 next to the Clearwater Region's Lolo Zone.

Panhandle elk harvests reached a record high in 2007, slightly exceeding the 1994 harvest, but declined sharply in the past two years to one-third less than the 2004 harvest. Wherever wolves have become established in central and southwest Idaho, moose numbers have declined dramatically – another casualty of Canadian wolves.

#### More Fish and Game Double Talk

Groen's op-ed News Release on March 8, 2010 proclaimed "Idaho Fish and Game is committed to saving the Lolo herd and keeping Idaho's other elk herds healthy." But in a *Boise Weekly* article by Deanna Darr published on April 7, 2010, Groen's Big Game Manager, Jon Rachael, said: "The reality is we're a bit limited on what we can do to help that elk population."

Rachael continued, "Down the road, if we cannot see a positive impact from hunting, we will have to seek out other measures." Yet since Jan. 1999, the top experts in North America have told Rachael and other biologists in the Northern Rocky Mountains it is impossible to reduce wolf populations with sport hunting and trapping.

So why is Rachael repeating this nonsense about using sport hunting to reduce wolves when any prudent person given these same facts knows it has never been done in North America? The answer is simply if you repeat a lie often enough it begins to sound plausible.

### Rachael - "They're Not Going To Disappear"

And for those who are familiar with the Lolo Zone elk harvest decline of 90% and population decline of 83%, from 1994-2010, Rachael offered the reassurance that even with the substantial decline in the Lolo Zune elk herds, "populations are not going to disappear." He added, "Is it reasonable to expect those to fully recover? No. But they're not going to disappear."

## **IDAHO FOR WILDLIFE** – News Bulletin No. 5

#### MISSION STATEMENT

"To protect Idaho's hunting and fishing heritage. To fight against all legal and legislative attempts by the animal rights and anti-gun organizations that are attempting to take away our rights and freedoms under the Constitution of the United States of America. To hold all Federal and State Agencies who are stewards of our wildlife accountable and ensure that true science is used as the primary role for our wildlife management."

Great news for upland bird hunters! We have just started a pheasant surrogator program in the Moscow area along with installing 2 new Chucker surrogators in Bonners Ferry! We currently are working with over 20 surrogators in Southern Idaho with tremendous success! Many thanks to IDFG employees and especially F&G Commissioners for their valued support, as we work together to improve our upland bird hunting.

We've recently heard rumblings that Idaho for Wildlife is an anti-IDFG group! Is this our position? The answer is a big NO! We respect, admire and greatly appreciate most of our IDFG friends and neighbors. Unfortunately, we recognize that a small number of IDFG leaders have engaged in questionable management practices that have resulted in the drastic reduction of our elk herds that are located in high wolf density zones. As this Outdoorsman issue reveals, we are losing our once famous elk herds. The tragedy is that sportsman invested millions of their dollars over many generations to help build these beautiful game herds. As our mission statement indicates, we want those who have been given stewardship of our wildlife to be held accountable for their management practices. This strong position demands that anyone involved with the destruction of Idaho's wildlife resources should be exposed and brought to justice for robbing Idaho of its valued resources and jeopardizing our hunting heritage. Our children and grandchildren are those we are fighting for, as much of our past big game is now history.

One of the greatest wildlife conservation leaders I know today is RMEF president David Allen. Why do I respect this man so much? When I first corresponded with David 2 years ago, he came right out and sincerely apologized that RMEF of the past had not taken a stronger position regarding wolves, and said their past science, along with former board members, had been flawed. Mr. Allen, along with many of our sportsman and outfitters today, has observed the fruits of the radical environmental groups' science as our big game herds are being slowly destroyed in high wolf density regions. He showed true grit and guts when he admitted errors of RMEF's past. As most sportsmen know today, he is aggressively taking on those who perpetuate "disingenuous" science and he is asking for proof of their studies where they claim habitat is destroying our elk herds and claim wolves can't negatively reduce our ungulate numbers!

Wouldn't it be wonderful if certain Idaho Fish and Game officials could follow RMEF's excellent example of courage, transparency and strong leadership skills? This would go a long way to win over the hearts of many furious sportsman and desperate Outfitters who are trying to survive and provide sustenance for their families. Our Outfitters, Sportsmen and Sportsman Groups are tired of the bureaucratic rhetoric, denial and fraud and it's time to demand more from those who have been given the responsibility of perpetuating our wildlife.

## Declining Elk Harvests - cont. from page 6

While a few elk will remain in the Lolo Zone as long as there are alternate prey species available, wolves will keep them in a predator pit, quickly killing off temporary increases as they did in 2007. Although allowing outfitters to kill up to 20 wolves appears to be a token step in the right direction, it is just that – too few to make a difference but a gimmick to divert attention from the disaster wolves are causing.

### Rachael - "We're Limited on What We Can Do"

Rachel's claim, "we're a bit limited on what we can do to help that elk population," is the lie F&G biologists and Commissioners have been telling everyone ever since they refused to use the 10J Rule to have Wildlife Services remove 105 wolves from the Lolo Zone in 2008. Since May 4, 2009 they have had full authority to remove as many wolves as are necessary from any area in Idaho by any legal means used by Wildlife Services so long as the minimum number of breeding pairs remains in the State.

But it has become painfully obvious, regardless of what they say, that Fish and Game has no intention of taking the steps that are necessary to restore elk and deer populations or to halt the increasing wolf predation on livestock and domestic animals. Rachael's additional comments in the article make it clear that he will no longer provide hunters a reasonable opportunity to harvest game.

"We could manage for a much larger number of deer and elk, but that would be a larger number of wolves to go with it," he said. "We're so far removed from a natural human-unaffected landscape that it's just not realistic."

The closer we get to a landscape where everything but a few birds and parasites are scarce, the more our State game agencies divulge their real agenda. In their blissful

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ignorance, they treat humans as trespassers in ecosystems that humans have shaped for thousands of years before elk or the present day wolves even existed on this continent.

But if you understand what has happened yet continue to try to negotiate with them, you are validating their extremist agenda and you will lose. Regardless of how boring the charts and graphs in this issue may be, they provide facts proving that you are being lied to by the agency you pay to manage and perpetuate our wildlife.

The handful of wolves thousands of hunters were able to shoot in seasons that lasted up to seven months, including the period when wolves are easiest to locate and kill, should have convinced you that hunting will not get the job done. It cost millions of dollars to allow these wolves to repopulate our states and it will cost millions more to eradicate them or reduce them to a manageable minimum number and keep them there.

The alternative is getting harder to live with every day and I suggest you need to make your elected officials aware of the facts at every opportunity you can arrange.

## **Notice**

In an effort to increase circulation of the information in *The Outdoorsman* five issues ago, I agreed to accept a small donation for each issue in return for allowing IWF (Idaho For Wildlife) to circulate a one-page news bulletin in this publication for 6-7 months every year. I emphasize again today that neither IFW nor any other group or individual dictates the editorial content of The Outdoorsman.

IFW also posts every past Outdoorsman issue on their website in a version that is easy to select and read or download and print. If you have internet access I urge you to take advantage of this free service at:

http://www.idahoforwildlife.com/Outdoorsman.html

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