

One supervisor covers two Fish and Game offices

BY TODD ADAMS

Declining revenues have prompted Idaho Department of Fish and Game Director Virgil Moore to appoint Steve Schmidt as supervisor of both the Upper Snake and Salmon regional offices.

Moore decided not to hire a new supervisor in the Salmon office after former supervisor Jim Lukens retired in order to save money and keep more Fish and Game employees working in the field, he told The Challis Messenger last month. Before that, fish and wildlife managers in the Salmon office took turns as acting supervisor.

Schmidt told The Messenger this week he plans to spend time in the Salmon office every other week and to attend additional meetings as needed there.

Schmidt has supervised both the Salmon and Idaho Falls offices since mid-September, effectively doubling his workload. Not counting seasonal workers, he supervises about 43 permanent employees in the Upper Snake Region and 40 in the Salmon Region.

“It’s a significant increase in my workload, but I think our folks are very adaptable and we can make it work,” Schmidt said. “The department is trying to do everything we can to keep as many field employees on the ground as possible. The director made the decision to remove people at the top end instead of the bottom and I think most people will support that.”

“We have excellent employees in both the Idaho Falls and Salmon regional offices,” Schmidt said, and I’m convinced we will provide the services the public has come to expect from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.”

The department’s revenues come from sales of resident and non-resident hunting and fishing licenses. Non-resident license sales in particular are down, Schmidt said. Fewer hunters are coming to Idaho for several reasons, he said, including the nationwide economic downturn and **concerns** that wolves have caused declines in some of Idaho’s big game populations.

The effects of wolf predation on elk herds has been highly variable, both across the state and the Salmon Region, Schmidt said, with declines in the highly-publicized Lolo herd, for example, **while the Island Park herd is thriving despite the presence of many wolves in Yellowstone National Park and surrounding national forests.**

Habitat conditions, the amount of harvest by hunters, the age structure of the herd and predation all combine to affect elk populations.

Schmidt has worked for the Fish and Game department for nearly 32 years, starting out as a wildlife habitat biologist before working his way up to his current position as supervisor of two regions.