

The Outdoorsman

Bulletin Number 21

Oct-Dec 2006

The Domestic Elk Controversy

By George Dovel



On September 28, 2006, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation's Blake Henning emailed this photo of a bull elk described as a new world record killed with a bow in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness.

Many readers who frequent the internet have seen the above photos and some have read a variety of opinions expressed by hunters once several sources confirmed that this was not a Rocky Mountain elk and was actually raised and killed inside a fenced enclosure in Canada. On Oct. 5, 2006, I received copies of the following emails from two prominent wildlife experts concerning the story:

Email Recipients,

He (the bull in the photos) was raised on an elk farm and, therefore, the "hunt" was canned. This is becoming a real problem as it gives all hunting a bad rap.

The real problem, though, is that big bull elk are no longer found on most public lands due to gross mismanagement by state fish and game agencies - too many hunters for seasons that are too long.

Bulls have to be 7-9 years old before they are really mature and virtually 100% of the bulls on public lands are killed before they reach that age. Thus enter the free market and canned hunts.

Montana passed a law outlawing not only elk farms but all canned hunts. Most of Canada, though, is wide open to this type of "hunting".

So while the B&C (Boone & Crockett) Club will not accept trophies from high-fenced areas the Club has done



People who recognized the elk quickly reported that it was raised on a 1,000-acre fenced game farm in Quebec. Photo, provided by the Boone & Crockett Club, shows the bull a few weeks earlier.

nothing to address the real problem - the mismanagement of public game herds. This also applies to other species such as mule deer - for instance, how Montana "manages" mule deer is criminal.

In my opinion, the Club is entirely too cozy with state and federal agencies. But as far as I know, only one other member would agree with me.

Charles (Dr. Charles Kay)

Dear Friends,

The Quebec game farm bull elk purportedly killed in the Selway-Bitterroot, brings up the whole sordid business of wrecking elk genetics, as well as giving all hunters a black eye. The poor bull in question was a freak, and there are excellent reasons why such monstrous antlers do not normally grow on elk in the wild.

Such huge antlers are not a boon, but an impediment to bulls in their normal reproductive functions. This was demonstrated in the experimental increases in antler size as practiced on Herman Göring's very private hunting estate, Rominten, by the late Forstmeister Walter Frevert, and duly reported on after the war by Frevert in his book *Rominten*.

Stags with such super-antlers were incompetent in combat and were routinely defeated by stags with normal

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antlers. Secondly, their freak antlers tended to lock so that both stags died.

Furthermore, Frevert found that, to really bring the antlers into freak dimensions, it was necessary to prevent stags from breeding. That is, any natural freak of that size is a shirker, a non-breeder - a conclusion I was able to verify via field observations of monstrous mule deer bucks in Waterton National Park in Alberta.

The deliberate breeding of elk for such huge freak antlers is thus a deliberate wreckage of the natural genetics and the natural rut-functions of elk. It is to deliberately generate biological incompetence in elk, which will - of course - slip across game fences into the wild.

Killing tame elk for trophies is giving all of us who hunt a black eye. And we do have a precedent that keeping the hunting heritage free of such defamation is a legitimate interest of the state.

That was in Montana. Too bad Quebec has not heeded it.

The shameless propagation of this filthy activity is not giving the French in Canada an uplift. The despicable habit of "canned hunts" has been denounced by the Boone & Crockett Club, and rightly so. When will the Safari Club follow?

Is that an arrow sticking out of the downed bull's haunch? If so, that speaks for itself.

Sincerely,
Val Geist

Dr. Geist, has written that he once supported raising scarce big game species on fenced preserves, ranches, or farms to provide a supply of healthy, genetically diverse breeding stock to restore depleted wild populations. Restoration of limited hunting of the white rhinoceros is an example of the success of such a program.

But there is a strong similarity between a hunter shooting a white rhino in a fenced preserve in Africa and that same hunter killing an exotic species in a fenced enclosure in Texas. The first big game ranch and big game shooting preserve was established in Texas in 1953, one year after John M. Olin established the first bird shooting preserve in Pennsylvania in what was called an industry effort to save the American hunter.

As Dr. Kay points out in his email, the real culprits are the western state fish and game management agencies that pay lip service to wildlife conservation while they exploit the game species on public lands for short-term license income. With the possible exception of Wyoming, states in the "lower 48" with the most private land and limited populations of large predators generally have the highest big game populations and harvests.

The Commercialization of Sport Hunting

Prior to the end of the World War II, there was limited interest in the lower 48 states in killing big game animals primarily to mount and hang on the wall. But once the suppliers of the weapons, equipment, and transportation

services needed to fight a war suddenly found far less demand for their products, they joined together in a massive advertising campaign to create an expanded market for their products and services among hunters and fishermen.

Enthusiastic outdoor writers helped them promote trips to western states to hunt "trophy" bull elk and buck mule deer and catch "monster" wilderness trout. The 1948 IDFG Biennial Report described this as the greatest sales publicity program ever and expressed concern about how to meet the increasing demands on the resource.

Until that happened only a few out-of-state hunters hired packers to enjoy the spectacular scenery and abundant big game Idaho had to offer in the back country. But as more hunters began seeking "trophy" heads to adorn their walls, packers also became guides whose job it was to locate the big bucks, bulls, rams and billies for their clients.

"Canned" Hunts

Once mountain lions were re-classified as "big game" animals, some lion hunters became outfitters or vice versa and many sold lion and bear hunts with guaranteed kills for a high fee. But they quickly discovered that most of the potential clients were not physically capable of following the dogs very far over rugged terrain.

A few of the less ethical outfitters began capturing lions and bears and turning them loose just ahead of the hunters. The dogs quickly treed the animal and the outfitters collected a handsome fee for a guaranteed kill that involved no hunting and very little work.

The term "canned hunts" was first used to describe this practice when it was exposed to the public, and many state fish and game agencies quickly sponsored legislation prohibiting the capture and caging or penning of wild game animals without a special permit. Another more common unethical activity was the practice of guides killing elk for their hunters.

Although it was already illegal for one person to kill a game animal and allow someone else to tag it, the practice was fairly common among several of the larger outfitter operations in Idaho during the 1960s and early 1970s. According to a recent report by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, "trophy poaching to satisfy wealthy status seekers" has been a significant factor in the 50% increase in wildlife crimes from 1980-2001.

The "Trophy Mania"

With depleted mule deer and elk populations partially restored in western states by the mid-1980s, F&G agencies once again extended seasons to include easy hunting of bucks and bulls in the rut. This was done to accommodate what Val Geist has described as the "trophy mania" promoted by the commercial outdoor media,

Geist, who is a professional member of Boone & Crockett, points out that a trophy once served as a reminder of all that's involved in a true and honorable hunt, including hard work and a willingness to pass up marginal

shots and lesser specimens. He contrasts this with the current "pursuit of trophy heads at any cost," which he considers a serious threat to the integrity and future of both public lands hunting and scientific wildlife management.

Mexican Ranch Trophy Hunts

November "trophy hunts" when the bucks were completely vulnerable quickly decreased the chance of killing a large mule deer buck in the western states. When this happened Mexican outfitters began to offer desert mule deer hunts for bucks with 30-inch antlers on private ranches.

Large ranches in Sonora that had not been hunted might produce one or several bucks in the 160-180 point B&C class for a year or two. But like the public lands rut hunts in the western U.S., Mexico's desert mule deer hunting seasons were extended into the late December to early January rut and the big bucks were quickly killed off.

In the Sept. 2003 Issue of Sports Afield, Walt Prothero described how a group of unscrupulous Mexican outfitters began sneaking their clients into ranches where mule deer had been protected. They would bribe a ranch employee to tell them when the coast was clear to poach a large buck and later cover up evidence of the kill.

Private Lands Trophy Hunting

The mule deer shortage created by western states wildlife managers coupled with the expanding trophy mania resulted in a void that was also filled by farmers and ranchers in western Canada. The "in" place to "hunt" big mule deer bucks became the hay and grain fields where farmers could pick up a few thousand dollars for "guiding" buck shooters to the deer that were feeding in their fields.

An increasing number of large ranches in the western states were leased to outfitters, and a large ranch owner in Wyoming went to court with the claim that ownership of land where big game resided all year entitled the landowner to manage that game. The court held that ownership of the wild game remained with the citizens of the state but that, alone, did not resolve the problem.

Landowners Set Seasons, Manage Public Game

Restoring biologically sound mule deer and elk hunting seasons to shorter periods when bucks and bulls were less vulnerable would have provided more older bucks and bulls on public lands. The short seasons would also have reduced the impact from hunters on private land significantly, and made it far less profitable to convert from farming and ranching to selling private-land trophy hunts.

Instead, most western game agencies signed agreements with private landowners allowing them to create a series of hunts from mid-summer through late fall and sell up to 90% of the hunts to wealthy sportsmen. The handful of residents who draw one of the few permits available to them are generally limited to only 2-4 days of hunting during periods when game is less vulnerable.

Because a nonresident hunter pays ~10 times as much for a license and tag as a resident, the income to

F&G is far greater from nonresidents, even with far fewer total hunters. The fact that most residents, who own the game, can no longer hunt on private land is ignored.

Original Limited Entry Hunting

During the late 1920s Idaho game managers learned that suddenly opening a general mule deer hunting season in the Cassia/Minidoka area where no hunting had been allowed for years resulted in excessive harvests. Where predator populations are properly controlled, wild animals that have not been hunted in their lifetime show no fear of humans when they are first hunted.

In 1944, when IDFG limited the number of deer permits for the Cassia and Albion Mountain Divisions to 4,550 after another extended period of no hunting, hunter success in each was still **82%** of total permits issued! A similar kill occurred with elk that had never been hunted in central Idaho and it became common practice to issue a limited number of permits to prevent overkill when big game hunting was allowed in Idaho's game preserves.

Owyhee County Deer Slaughter

October general deer seasons outside of the Panhandle, combined with simultaneous opening dates in each big game unit, maintained proper hunter distribution in the rest of the state. But when the largest protected mule deer herd in the state was suddenly opened to hunting, the lure of extra license dollars caused IDFG biologists to ignore the need for simultaneous October opening dates.

From 1946-1956 no big game hunting was allowed in Owyhee County, and 1080 poison plus predator bounties allowed mule deer numbers to reach record levels. In 1956 IDFG biologists advertised an early general season mule deer hunt in states as far away as California and thousands of hunters converged on Owyhee County on opening day.

By that evening nearly 5,000 mule deer had been checked through just the Marsing check station and the IDFG recorded kill for the Owyhee special season was 9,960 deer! This did not include wounded or dead deer that were never recovered in what sounded like a battlefield at sunrise and resembled an old time jackrabbit drive with no place for the deer to hide from the shooters.

Trophy Elk Hunters Pay for Special Bow Seasons

In the 1960s and early 1970s, IDFG biologists continued to decimate the mule deer and elk populations with 60-day either-sex seasons (90 days in the back country units). The new policy of catering to trophy hunters and other special interest groups included extending extra buck seasons into late November, and increasing the handful of general archery season units during both deer and elk rutting periods.

In 1971 the archery manufacturers supported a proposal to tax the sale of archery equipment to provide additional funding to manage state wild game populations. Their proposal was designed to increase archery equipment sales by adding thousands of big game hunters to the small

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number of dedicated archery hunters by using a national wildlife management advisory group to "sell" bowhunting as a safer game management tool in populated areas.

In 1975 Idaho bowhunters began paying for their archery tag in return for receiving more archery elk seasons during the rut and some Nov.-Dec. deer seasons. By 1979 the number of special privilege general archery seasons had sky-rocketed to include **50** deer units and **38** elk units!

Selling Bonus Limited Controlled Hunts

In 1977 there were no limited controlled deer hunts in Idaho and only the 10 limited controlled elk hunts that had existed in the game preserves and a few other protected areas (now WMAs) for the previous 32 years. But the same IDFG biologists that had taken big game harvest opportunity away from the average rifle hunter by selling it to bowhunters when the game is most vulnerable, began to raffle bonus deer and elk hunts to rifle hunters as limited controlled hunts (LCH).

By 1990, IDFG was selling tens of thousands of chances to draw a coveted LCH permit to "hunt" mule deer or elk in mid-summer, during the rut, or in the snow of Nov.-Dec. The number of LCH for deer had increased from none in 1977 to **35** hunts with **15,700** permits in 1990, and included only five units without a separate general season for the same species and sex!

The number of LCH elk hunts had increased from 10 hunts with 465 total either-sex permits in 1977 to **118** hunts with **16,430** permits in 1990! Nine elk units were traditionally LCH hunts and seven general elk hunts did not include antlerless tags - but all of the rest were strictly bonus hunts in units that already had general seasons for the same species and sex.

But rifle hunters were not the only recipients of F&G selling expanded harvest opportunity. The number of general archery seasons had also been increased to **79** general archery deer units and **60** general archery elk units, which exceeded the number of general any-weapon elk seasons and allowed the killing of cows or calves as well as bulls.

Biologists Promote Trophy Hunting

During the past 10-15 years game biologists in the East and Midwest have encouraged private landowners to plant special pasture mixes that attract white-tailed deer, and to provide free-choice supplements that produce huge unnatural antler growth in whitetail bucks. In most cases these are so-called "free roaming wild" deer that belong to the citizens of the state yet they are managed by farmers or ranchers using animal husbandry techniques.

This practice already existed on large ranches in Texas and elsewhere that sold hunts for whitetails and exotic species, as well as on farms and ranches that were raising domestic elk commercially. Game managers apparently forgot that the primary purpose of hunting wild game has always been harvesting food.

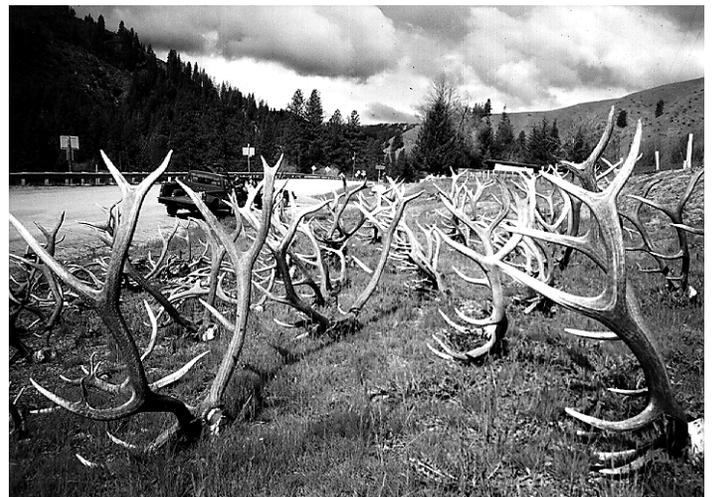
Assisted by outdoor writers, who glorified guided hunts for trophy deer and elk in far away places, IDFG biologists began using the term "meat" hunter as if it were a dirty word. They praised nonresident hunters who, they said, "pay what the animals are worth to hunt them," and designed hunter surveys to solicit responses indicating that harvesting game is a low priority with Idaho hunters.

What It Takes To Produce Trophies

Given the choice, most hunters will shoot a mature male mule deer or elk except when the quality of the meat has deteriorated during the rut. But the emphasis on trophy hunting ignored the reality that it takes a special combination of factors to produce a wild animal with a unique set of antlers that qualify as a trophy.

The recognized authority on this subject, Dr. Val Geist, cites the following factors as being essential to producing trophy animals. (1) genetic potential; (2) availability of a high-quality diet, preferably over a period of five generations; (3) protection of enough of the most promising younger males until they reach their prime; and (4) limiting young males' participation in the rut, which facilitates winter survival and retention of the nutrients that enhance growth.

But instead of managing elk herds to maintain a healthy percentage of prime bulls, IDFG sold thousands of bonus hunting permits when the bulls were most vulnerable. Its refusal to feed in units where it was indicated during the occasional extreme winter guaranteed heavy losses among bull elk that managed to survive the bonus hunting seasons.



April 1993 photo of 100 elk racks removed from bulls that starved to death on Unit 33 winter range After IDFG refused to feed them.

Selling Trophy Hunts to the Highest Bidder

Following severe 1992-93 winter losses, big game managers in several western states began spending thousands of dollars on habitat improvement and selective predator control in a handful of units where trophy hunting permits are sold to the highest bidder. It didn't take long for some of the domestic elk breeders to copy the state

game management agencies by efficiently raising trophy bulls and selling them to elk shooters.

In the states where these elk shooting preserves are approved by the F&G agency, wildlife managers do not object since they retain control and receive revenue from the endeavor. But in Idaho, F&G's repeated failure to take precautions to prevent the spread of disease in big game animals caused the Idaho Legislature to impose strict restrictions on the importation, handling and shipment of deer, elk, antelope, moose, bighorn sheep and bison.

In the mid-1990s it mandated those restrictions be enforced by the Idaho Department of Agriculture's Division of Animal Industries and transferred the licensing and supervision of domestic cervidae farms or ranches from IDFG to the Ag agency. Under current Idaho law "domestic cervidae" include only fallow deer and elk - and reindeer south of the Salmon River.

Strange Bedfellows

According to two former F&G Commissioners, IDFG resented the loss of revenue and control and called on its traditional support groups to publicly denounce elk farming. But the Idaho Wildlife Federation (IWF) and Safari Club International - "Idaho" Chapter (SCI-ID) were not the only groups to attack the elk breeders.

The largest anti-hunting organization in the U.S., the Humane Society of the U.S. (HSUS) increased its attacks on game farms and canned hunts. When it merged with the "Fund for Animals" on January 1, 2005, it provided its reported membership of more than 8 million anti-hunters with a list of methods to use in "shutting down the canned hunt industry."

These included: (1) "Ask your lawmakers to crack down on canned hunting. If your county or state has no law against canned hunting, push for such a bill. You can contact The HSUS government affairs staff for help;" and (2) "Use the Power of the Press. Write letters to your local newspaper about canned hunts or canned hunt legislation affecting your community."

In the 2006 session of the Idaho Legislature Sen. David Langhorst introduced Senate Bill 1279 which would have made importation of domestic cervidae into Idaho a misdemeanor offense, and would have required that any animal imported would be seized by IDFG or other law enforcement officers. HSUS endorsed Langhorst's bill and wrote, "In addition to helping stop the spread of chronic wasting disease, this bill will help cut importation of deer and elk for canned hunts."

HSUS, Langhorst Also Opposed Right To Hunt

Also in the 2006 session, HSUS opposed SJR 105, the right to hunt amendment, which provided that "all wildlife within the state shall be preserved, protected, perpetuated and managed to provide continued supplies for the citizens of Idaho to harvest by hunting, fishing and trapping for the continued benefit of the people." Instead of debating the proposed Constitutional amendment in the

Senate Resource Committee where it passed unanimously in their absence, Sen. Langhorst helped Sen. Little destroy its chance of passing by the required two-thirds majority in the full Senate by offering an ineffective substitute immediately before it was voted on.

Langhorst Background

Langhorst served as an IWF Board member from 1992-2001, as Affiliate Representative of the National Wildlife Federation in endangered species discussions in mid-1995, and was the salaried director of the Ketchum-based Wolf Education and Research Center. With its reported 70,000 members, the Center was described as the largest wolf advocacy group in the world.

Ed Bangs and David Mech served on its Board of Directors and its agenda included raising money for logistical support of wolf recovery in Idaho and promoting the "Adopt-a-Wolf" program in Idaho schools. As a panelist in the IDFG/IOGA 1999 Wolf Symposium in Boise, Langhorst claimed that Idaho poachers kill more than ten times as much game as wolves do!

After his election to the Idaho Senate in 2004, Sen. Langhorst attended the founding meeting of the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses in Texas where he was elected to its Executive Council. At that meeting more than a quarter million dollars was pledged to help form sportsmen's caucus advisory councils in every state.

ISCAC Parrots F&G Agenda

Sen. Langhorst and Jerry Bullock, Vice-President of SCI-ID, were largely responsible for the formation of the Idaho Sportsmen's Caucus Advisory Council (ISCAC) whose present membership reportedly consists of 29 sportsmen (or other) interest groups. Last minute changes to the proposed bylaws by Bullock and Langhorst in 2005 assured that a primary function of ISCAC is to support IDFG agendas and requests for fee increases.

A majority of its directors have parroted the IDFG position on news events and legislation ever since then.

On September 6, 2006, when Director Steve Huffaker held a press conference to announce the escape of domestic elk from Rammell's facility near Yellowstone Park, he said, "This is the train wreck we've seen coming for a long time." On Sept. 10, ISCAC Vice-Pres. Bob Minter told CBS Ch 2 TV News, "Our immediate thoughts from the sportsman's standpoint is that it's simply a train wreck that was simply going to happen - it was a matter of when it was going to happen."

He claimed that sportsmen across Idaho are furious at elk game farms and they want them more strongly regulated or banned. When an elk rancher responded that this was an isolated instance by one person who didn't follow the rules, Minter said that didn't matter because elk farms cut into available prey for hunters, which he said spend \$67 million to hunt in Idaho. "That's an economic impact of \$150 million" he added.

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Apparently Minter was talking to different hunters than those in the area where the elk had escaped. Following Gov. Risch's order for F&G to kill the escaped elk on Sept. 7, IDFG spent three days using a helicopter, a fixed-wing aircraft, support crews and seven 3-man "sharpshooter" teams without even spotting a single elk or firing a shot.

In an email report to the Governor's Office on Sept. 11, Huffaker wrote that the helicopter, which reportedly cost F&G thousands of dollars per day, was "useless" and said the cover was too thick for the IDFG sharpshooters to see an elk except at close range. He said some people were "grousing" and asking why there were so many IDFG people there at such a great cost and why F&G didn't just let hunters harvest the escaped elk that Rammell couldn't recapture.

Irresponsible Charges

Sen. Langhorst, IDFG officials and ISCAC spokesmen continued to stir the pot with newspaper and TV press conferences implying that Rammell's elk were diseased and crossed with red deer, while condemning all "shooter-bull" operations. A local area newspaper published a letter from Jerry Bullock claiming, "...some legislators decided Fish and Game was doing too good a job (administering elk farms) and transferred enforcement to the friendly confines of the Ag Department."

The facts are somewhat different. When IDFG was licensing and regulating game farms, a domestic elk farmer's herd became diseased and he was required to destroy it by Ag officials. F&G biologists in Washington, Oregon and Idaho regularly imported big game animals from other states without making any effort to determine if they were diseased.

When a strain of pasteurella, apparently introduced by 50 bighorn transplants from Alberta to the west side of Hells Canyon in 1995, caused the death of about 300 bighorn sheep in the three states, biologists quickly blamed it on a feral goat seen near the sheep. This was the "straw that broke the camel's back" for Idaho State Veterinarian Dr. Bob Hillman.

He had already recommended the transfer of domestic cervid farm administration from IDFG to the Idaho Ag Department and he urged strict new requirements on IDFG shipping, handling and transplanting wild big game animals under Ag supervision (see Pg. 5). The irresponsible rhetoric from ISCAC founder Bullock fans the flames of mass hysteria rather than educate the public and legislators with facts as the ISCAC bylaws require.

Letter From High Fence Shooting Preserve Owner

In 2003 former Idaho F&G Commissioner Jeff Siddoway began operating a shooting preserve for domestic elk and buffalo on more than 11,000 high-fenced acres on his 26,000-acre sheep ranch. We obtained his permission to print the following letter in response to what

he perceives to be the Idaho media's failure to report all of the facts.

Editor:

I have watched for the better part of this year as the media has tried to influence opinion against high fenced hunting operations. The recent episode at the Rex Rammell elk hunting preserve has put this issue in the national spotlight.

There are 78 domestic elk operations in Idaho. Of those 78, I think 14 have a shooting portion connected. There are roughly 6,500-7,000 captive elk in Idaho and about 900 of these elk are taken by hunters each year.

There are some facts that have been totally ignored by the media, and I kept thinking in fairness they would eventually be brought out. After Rammell's elk escaped, I now do not believe that the media has any intention of printing the whole truth or the facts, so I will try to point out just a few.

Fact No.1. Since 1998, of the thousands and thousands of captive elk that have been moved and tested or of those that have died or been killed and tested, not one animal has shown positive to chronic wasting disease (CWD), brucellosis (bangs) or tuberculosis (TB). Not one diseased animal.

Fact No. 2. We know that wild elk do have disease in both Conant Creek and Rainey Creek.

Fact No. 3. We know that the elk that carry the brucellosis in Conant Creek carried the same genotype as was found in the cattle and we know that the cattle in Conant Creek had to be killed because of that exposure.

Fact No. 4. We know that Fish and Game has a complete monopoly on the wildlife in this state. It receives revenue from some preserves. Elk hunting ranches pay nothing to F&G but they do pay to the Department of Ag.

Fact No. 5. Of the 68,906 ungulates killed by sportsmen in Idaho in 2004, about 1,314 are tested, some for CWD, some for brucellosis, some for other things – a total of only 1.9 percent tested for some disease.

Fact No. 6. We know we have chronic wasting disease in the wild elk in Utah, Wyoming and Colorado. We also know that there are thousands of ungulates that cross state borders.

Fact No. 7. We know that Rex Rammell's elk escaped and that is against every agreement, rule and law to which the elk breeders of this state have been a party.

Fact No. 8. We know that the Idaho Elk Breeders Association supports Gov. Jim Risch to bring this whole unfortunate outbreak to a speedy resolution.

Fact No. 9. We don't know if CWD is spontaneous like Creutzfeldt-Jakob in people or if it has been in our wild herds for centuries and we just haven't looked for it until recently. We don't know its mode of transmission for sure, and we certainly don't know which species can contract the disease from which other species (i.e., species block).

I have no intention of trying to defend an indefensible position. I feel badly for the Rammell family. It is, however, his responsibility.

I guess my whole point here is that we have a lot more serious problems facing our wildlife in this state, yet

our lead agency seems content to ignore the real threat and focus on this silly issue.

Why aren't we requiring every single animal that is harvested in this state to be tested for CWD, TB and Bangs? The chances of preventing disease spread would be so much better if the hunters would just collect a little blood and the brain stem, put the stem in formaldehyde provided by F&G and mail it to an accredited lab for analysis. Then we could all sleep better.

Jeff Siddoway Terreton

In Bullock's letter referenced on page 6, he referred to legislators who support elk farming as "full-time enemies of our fish and wildlife resources (who) must be turned out of office." Three weeks after his letter was published, Siddoway faced a general election in District 35 as a first time candidate for State Senator.

Despite the high percentage of licensed hunters and fishermen in District 35 who know Siddoway operates a high fence elk hunting facility, he received 69% of the vote on November 7. It appears that most sportsmen in his district do not agree with the comments expressed by Sen. Langhorst and the Sportsmen's Caucus Advisory Council.

ISCAC Seeks Ban on All Elk Farms

The ISCAC has published and circulated a position paper stating, "It is estimated that the cervidae facilities provide less than \$10 million annually in taxable revenue (while) elk hunters provide over \$171 million in taxable revenue from elk hunting alone." It also says that captive cervid facilities disrupt traditional migration routes and it supports legislation to ban those facilities and phase out all current captive cervidae operations in Idaho. (see <http://www.idaho.scac.org/gamefarm.pdf>).

A second position paper supports legislation to prohibit new or expanded high fence and/or shooter bull operations and phase out all current operations (see <http://www.idahoscac.org/highfence.pdf>). Both papers invite recipients to contact ISCAC for more information and they provide contact addresses for its officers, directors and member groups.

The following comments were published on the internet by the Managing Editor of U.S. Hunting Today in Maine, in response to an Idaho hunter. He reports that he contacted all of the ISCAC directors and member groups and says he has not received answers to his questions:

Dear -----:

I have read and reread all the talking points about why (the ISCAC says) the state of Idaho should ban domestic elk hunting. There are a couple of things that stand out in reading their position papers.

1. Not all the facts are being presented
2. Some of their facts are outdated
3. None of their scare tactics are really based on science and that is what is most troubling.

Maine has no CWD but they are doing everything they can to prevent it from entering the state, including requiring that meat from cervids be de-boned. The bottom line is do all you can do to stop any animals from coming into the state that aren't disease free.

Maine allows licensed deer, elk, red deer, etc. farming and it is strictly regulated. This is all that can be reasonably done.

Nobody is going to stop CWD from crossing state lines. If it is all around you, it will make its way there eventually. I would be willing to wager that right now Idaho elk ranchers stand a pretty good chance of contracting the disease from wild animals and then the farmers will be blamed for it.

What angers me more about this goes beyond hunting and farming. It's a "rights" issue. I am very angry that sportsman's groups (in Idaho) have teamed up with the likes of PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) and I am just as steamed that in their selfishness, they can't see that people have a right to free enterprise.

I understand the public safety issue but where is the science that proves there is a public safety issue? There isn't any.

There may be 19,000 plus so-called members to the Sportsman's Caucus but you can be sure the majority of those are repeats – i.e. many belong to more than one club. PETA and other animal rights groups must be lapping this right up, seeing that their "divide and conquer" is working so well and they aren't even trying.

About a week prior to Thanksgiving, I sent out an email to everybody on the list of the Sportsman's Caucus Council. The gist of my email was asking for their help in getting me to understand better the reasoning behind their position. I conceded that the hunting issue was really an ethics issue but it was still an individual rights issue.

I received only two responses out of all of those and one was very tentative about how he really felt on this issue. Perhaps it isn't the majority of Caucus members who see things this way.

I love my hunting and I work hard at preserving the heritage but I am an American first and Americans should be free in their pursuit of happiness. I find this all very disturbing.

If somebody would just show me real science and reasoning behind this proposal, it would help. So far it is all emotions and scare tactics. The politics of this must run very, very deep.

**Thomas K. Remington
Managing Editor
U.S. Hunting Today**

Governor Risch's order to destroy Rammel's escaped elk and Wyoming Governor Freudenthal's request that Idaho ban elk farms were both based on the IDFG claim that some of his elk were probably cross-bred with red deer or infected with disease. Subsequent testing of all of the Rammell elk refuted both claims.

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Domestic Elk... *continued from page 7*

Although testing for red deer proteins in a single 14-year-old cow elk indicated the need for additional testing, none of the animals tested positive for either red deer genes or disease. The long-standing feud between Rammell and the two state agencies (IDFG and Ag) involved inappropriate actions by all of the parties rather than pursuing realistic solutions.

What Constitutes "Fair Chase"?

The four emails printed in this article generally reflect the opinions we have received from hunters over the past several months. A recurring theme in many of these letters is the application of "fair chase" principles to hunting practices approved by Fish and Game.

They asked why it is illegal to shoot deer and elk using bait, including mineral licks - yet bowhunters are allowed to construct blinds and kill antelope at "guzzlers" or water holes. Why is it considered fair chase to drive along a paved road in special privilege late hunts until you see deer or elk floundering in deep snow and then step out of your vehicle and shoot them when they have no opportunity to escape?

The concept of fair chase has one meaning to the person who can hire a skilled hunter-guide to put him within shooting distance of a trophy animal, and an entirely different meaning to a hunter whose physical handicap or financial situation prevents him or her from having that opportunity. Several Idaho elk shooting preserves offer the opportunity for handicapped hunters to shoot a bull and one is reportedly planned solely for that purpose.

Most of the unpublished letters expressed the opinion there is only one significant difference between harvesting tame pheasants at a F&G WMA or white-meated "catchable" trout transplanted to artificial ponds from F&G hatchery ponds, and harvesting domestic elk. That difference is that F&G sets the seasons and collects the money for the pheasant and trout harvest - but has no role in or income from the domestic elk harvest.

HSUS vs. SCI

During the past few years HSUS has spent several million dollars in various states in efforts to ban some type of animal harvest. Whether it was protecting wolf and grizzly populations from being managed in Alaska or prohibiting bear hunting and trapping in Maine, the common theme involved encouraging local hunter/environmental activist groups to seek the ban, and later providing them funding for such things as advertising, petition drives and legal fees.

Allied on the other side of the battles, the National Rifle Association (NRA), the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance (USSA) and Safari Club International (SCI) have joined hunters in defeating most of the HSUS efforts. Beginning in 2005, HSUS concentrated on attacking big game shooting preserves because, like trapping, hound hunting and bear baiting, many hunters dislike preserve shooting.

Back in 1999 when the Oregon Fish and Game Commission passed a rule prohibiting the possession, sale, and hunting of domestic exotic species, one preserve operator continued to legally import several species of exotic deer. In 2001 he was charged with 50 violations of F&G laws but both the court and the appeals court found that non-native exotic species did not fall within the Commission's jurisdiction.

On November 29, 2005, HSUS joined the F&G Commission's battle and filed an appeal brief with the Oregon Supreme Court to reverse the lower courts' dismissal of the charges. The preserve owner, with legal assistance from SCI, contended that Oregon F&G Commissioners had no authority to regulate domestic exotic species.

HSUS, F&G Become Allies

But on November 9, 2006, Oregon's high court ruled that the domestic exotic deer are wildlife because "wildlife" does not necessarily have to be wild according to the definition in the Commission rule approved by the Legislature. HSUS quickly boasted that it helped the Oregon F&G Commission ban "canned hunting" of exotics and thus it is a protector of state wildlife management agencies.

The alliance between a powerful group that is dedicated to eliminating wildlife harvest and a state agency that is supposed to be perpetuating it reflects the changing agenda of state fish and game departments. This change is evident in the attitudes of many Idaho F&G employees.

Recently an IDFG conservation officer was investigating a mule deer buck that was shot but only partially field dressed before it was abandoned on my neighbor's property. My suggestion that the C.O. finish dressing and skinning the deer so it could be donated to needy people was rejected with the comment, "I happen to be one who believes that a coyote is just as entitled to this deer as people are."

The IDFG employees who contacted their anti-hunting allies and falsely accused the F&G Commission of attempting to eradicate all predators were promoting the HSUS agenda that predators must be protected rather than managed. When former Upper Snake Wildlife Manager Ted Chu bragged to a newspaper that he had unlawfully released a coyote from a trap, he was promoting the HSUS line that trapping is inhumane.

The former IDFG officials who continue to promote their hands-off wildlife management philosophy as members of IWF and similar F&G support groups provide a necessary component for HSUS and other animal rights extremists to succeed. These support groups often exaggerate their total membership in order to substantiate their claim that they represent Idaho hunters.

FG Support Groups Exaggerate Membership

During a joint legislative meeting concerning a recent fee increase, IWF leaders claimed they represented

4,500 sportsmen. But ISCAC's published list of member organizations lists IWF as having only 297 members. These include former IDFG employees, non-hunters, anti-hunters, wilderness and wolf advocates, non-residents and members of environmental preservationist groups.

Typically, urban sportsmen who join such groups contribute to and thereby gain membership in several organizations. Most of the memberships (donations) are solicited at annual fund raisers, fairs, etc. and most of the members never have the chance to provide their input on issues or selection of officers and board members.

Of the 29 member groups listed on ISCAC letterhead, **three** with strong national affiliation provide the majority of members. Smaller groups with memberships ranging from 19 to several hundred, are offered increased political power if they will join the Council.

One of the three large groups, the Idaho Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, has both a director and an officer who also serve as President and Secretary/Treasurer of the ISCAC. Although they are not listed as ISCAC Board members it is assumed that one or both may also serve on the Board.

On June 7, 2006 NWTF Board Member/ISCAC President Mark Bell posted five questions for NWTF members with email capability on the ISCAC website. The only question referencing domestic elk farms was: "Do you support the importation of domesticated game from out of state?"

More Legislation By Intimidation?

After publishing the ISCAC position papers supporting legislative prohibition of elk farms, Bell published the following request for NWTF members wearing camouflage to demonstrate against domestic elk farms or shooting preserves on the Statehouse steps:

CAMO DAY at the Statehouse in Boise

Remember the bear initiative? Well we are back at the point where sportsmen and women need to stand shoulder to shoulder. January 16th at 11 am is the time to be at the Statehouse in Boise. We hope to rally 3000 sportsmen and women and citizens that have had enough of the legislature not recognizing we vote. This is CAMO DAY and the ISCAC (Idaho Sportsmen's Caucus Advisory Council) is hosting the event from 11 am until 3pm. We are bringing in speakers from the HUNTERS INSTITUTE and from Montana. Please set this date aside to be in Boise on the statehouse steps in Camo. The issues are the game farms and shooter bulls. The organizations of ISCAC must rally around and show support for this. The States of Wyoming and Montana are behind this and so are the RMEF, FNAWS, and MDF. This is a Tuesday and will require planning. Please support your organization and help the legislature know who we are!!! Please make arrangements to car pool or bus to get here. At the evening starting at 430 pm we (ISCAC) will host the legislative meet and greet. WE have been very effective with this event. We

need all members to contact their legislators and ask them to attend also. Please don't take this lightly, this is the event we need to support and show we are committed. There is a need for banners and we will provide handouts for all. This effort will also be for all the sportsmen's needs, including fee increase. We need to show we can make a difference. PLEASE support this effort and make plans now. WE have parking and shuttle arrangements from the F&G headquarters. Members of the ISCAC are making arrangements to help those that have to travel a long way. Agenda's and flyers are being made now. We have a firm making banners if any group wants one for about 100 bucks (DEAL).

Contact Information:

Mark Bell
Nampa, Idaho

The above request by Bell does not include the following information in a similar notice on the ISCAC website (see http://www.idahoscac.org/new_page_3.htm)

"Tom Graine's on 6th and Main is offering a free beer on the 16th for all volunteers that help and wear their camo or other sporting attire."

F&G Agreement To No Fee Increase Ignored

Despite the fact that Idaho F&G Commission Chairman Cameron Wheeler has already agreed to support Gov. Butch Otter's decision not to support any sportsman license fee increase in this Legislative session, ISCAC President Bell apparently intends for the "camo" group to demonstrate in support of the canceled fee increase.

In an email that is currently being circulated by IDFG employees, outgoing IDFG Director Huffaker suggested that citizens who are concerned about IDFG funding can still express those concerns to elected officials.

Because Idaho NWTF depends on farmers and other rural residents to feed the turkeys during severe winters, I contacted an active member of Idaho NWTF and asked for his opinion of the "Camo Day" demonstration proposed by Bell. He was not aware of it so I referred him to <http://idahonwtf.org/> and told him to click on "Statehouse Camo Day" in the upper right corner.

Five days later he emailed the following response:

"Barnabus Koka, Regional Director of the NWTF, contacted Mark Bell and told him that the NWTF does not support the ISCAC and they cannot speak for the NWTF. Charlie Henry, the NWTF State president, was also contacted and he agrees that it is bad policy and will see that all the corrections are made."

The ID NWTF website was updated today, Dec. 28, 2006, but no changes were made to Bell's appeal for hunters in Camo to appear at the Statehouse rally. It is not known how many of the 2,092 members are aware of the group's proposal to ban game farms.

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Domestic Elk... *continued from page 9*

Only A Handful Make ISCAC Decisions

A simple majority of the ISCAC Board (5 of 9) appoints an annual Rules Committee (minimum of 2 who may or may not be Board members) who then decide which rules or legislation will be addressed and what facts will be used to justify its decision on each issue. This powerful Committee's information and decision is presented to a quorum of the Board where a simple majority (minimum of 5 Board members) is needed to approve the Committee's proposed action.

Once approved, the ISCAC decision is given to a predetermined representative of each member group to determine whether the Board's decision does or does not support the Guiding Principles in the ISCAC Bylaws. If two-thirds of the group representatives say it supports the guiding principles, it is then presented to the Idaho Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus or appropriate government entity along with details of the positive or negative impacts of the proposed legislation or rule.

Position Papers Raise Questions

That is what the bylaws require but the two ISCAC position papers supporting (any) legislation that will ban game farms and so-called "high-fence and/or shooter bull operations" did not provide all of the facts or the potential negative impacts of such legislation. The ISCAC position did not even refer to which of the nine or more potential pieces of game farm legislation it supports, or to the current multi-million-dollar loss-of-income litigation now existing in Montana as a result of similar bans even with some grandfather protection.

The ISCAC bylaws make it plain that it is not the Council's responsibility to assure that some effort was made to present its legislative proposals to the members - or even to all of the officers and directors of the member groups for their consideration. The handful who control the agenda, like their predecessors in the IWF and the Idaho Wildlife Council, simply receive their information and facts from IDFG and promote the IDFG agenda.

Public Meeting Clarifies Disease Issue

A December 14, 2006 public meeting at the Jerome F&G facility shed more light on the subject of disease transmission in Idaho elk herds. Idaho Dept. of Agriculture veterinarian Dr. Greg Ledbetter confirmed the rigorous annual testing of all domestic elk for TB and Brucellosis, and of all dead elk for CWD with no disease found in 12 years of testing.

He said his agency tests all escaped elk, including several this year that were actually wild elk tagged by IDFG biologists as part of a research project. He said that most elk breeders want to do the right thing and immediately correct any problems.

F&G Director Huffaker acknowledged IDFG's role with domestic elk is limited to removal of wildlife inside new enclosures on private property, checking the fences of

new facilities and forwarding complaints to ISDA. In response to questions from hunters he assured them that if and when chronic wasting disease comes to Idaho, it won't be because of domestic elk operations but will likely be spread by wild elk coming into Idaho from Wyoming.

ISCAC Compares Elk Ranches to 'Cat' Houses

Former Idaho Rivers United dam breaching activist Max Yost presented ISCAC's position that domestic elk ranching is in direct competition with the Idaho Outfitters and Guides organization and is an unethical business practice. Yost said his group worries about private property owners fencing out wild elk that previously had used the land.

When an elk rancher reminded him that it was private land, he responded, "We don't allow cat houses (houses of prostitution) on private land." He said the Council didn't want to put anyone out of business but they believe the entire state is more valuable than one industry.

Domestic-Wild Crossbreeding

Elk rancher David Miller of Jerome presented the latest economic study showing that Idaho's 77 elk ranches support 375 jobs and contribute \$24.5 million yearly to the state's economy. He reiterated that all domestic elk originate from Yellowstone National Park's program, which sold or gave away excess elk from 1892 through 1967.

The probability that the ancestors of some of Idaho's wild elk were fed hay in Yellowstone corrals is very high. We know that ancestors of most of our wild salmon were raised in hatchery ponds built in the late 1800s when the Columbia River runs were almost extinct, and we know that former domestic elk and their wild offspring exist in the wild in other states.



In 2005, this 7X7 bull elk was reportedly killed with a bow on the CF Ranch in West Texas under "fair chase" rules. Although its score qualifies it as a new world record, it was apparently purchased from a domestic elk farm and released into the wild in Texas about 8 years before it was killed.

The bull elk in the photo on page 10 is apparently one of hundreds or possibly thousands of ranch-raised elk that have either accidentally escaped or were deliberately purchased and released into the wild by a few large ranches in several states during the past century. Unless it was a “shirker” during the 7-8 years it survived in the wild, its genes were probably passed on to future generations of wild elk.

Whether the genetic differences observed in individual animals in some Idaho elk herds during the past 50 years result from throwback genes, inbreeding, or more recent crossbreeding has not been determined. But pretending that Idaho’s wild elk are a single “purebred” wild strain is wishful thinking.

SCI State vs. National

Because the national SCI organization provides stature, assistance and membership incentives to the two Idaho chapters, SCI-Idaho leaders’ agreement with the HSUS agenda and their opposition to their parent organization’s philosophy is considered unusual. The total membership of both the Idaho and Treasure Valley Chapters is listed as 350 and Jerry Bullock of the Idaho Chapter is listed as the ISCAC contact for both groups.

Although the national SCI opposes penned (canned) hunts, it says it supports hunting inside high fences “where the element of fair chase can be provided.” Terrain, cover, weather conditions and the number and kind of species being hunted all determine the minimum size of the fenced enclosure.

The SCI Hunters Code of Ethics is part of its bylaws seen at www.sci-dc.org/docs/scibylaws.pdf. Every member is required to pledge to “ensure humane harvesting of wildlife..., comply with all game laws or the sport of fair chase..., and reflect in word and behavior only credit upon the fraternity of sportsmen.”

Hunters Criticizing Hunters

On October 1, 2006 when Sen. Langhorst announced his intention to introduce legislation in this session banning “shooter-bull” operations, he said if people want to spend thousands of dollars to hunt in pens let them hunt in other states. “Let the fat cats go to Texas.”

Private hunting leases in Texas are costly and booking hunts with ranch outfitters is even more expensive. But most of the ranches in the West Texas hill country rely on the size of the ranch – not fences – to keep the animals on their private property.

My notes for this article include several hundred pages of comments from hunters addressing the issue of hunter ethics in numerous “blogs” on the internet. Hunters condemned other hunters for everything from using a blind over bait to pursuing big game with ATVs and pickups.

A major complaint voiced by some was that hunting used to be a means to provide food for your family and spend time with family and friends enjoying the sense of freedom that only being in the outdoors can provide.

They charge that too many of today’s hunters have replaced the hunting traditions of their parents and grandparents with the quest to kill a trophy and have their name in some organization’s record book.

They agreed that every hunter likes to tag big animals but several said that every animal they tag is their own personal trophy – instead of being just an entry in a contest to see who can get the highest score in someone else’s scoring system. They argue that if we were hunting for the “right reasons” we would not be bickering over how someone else chooses to hunt providing it is legal and acceptable in that person’s area.

Many pointed out that for several years HSUS and its anti-hunting allies have conducted a massive media campaign attacking all shooting preserves in the United States – not just those that offer big game shooting. But whether U.S. shooting preserves were motivated solely by profit, or by a sincere desire to perpetuate America’s hunting tradition, the Nilo Shooting Preserve established in 1952 was dedicated to “preserving the American hunter”.

These U.S. shooting preserves, and the game breeding farms that supplied the animals and birds, existed for 50 years and also became an American tradition before they suddenly came under attack in the media. HSUS and its allies are still using the threat of transmitting disease and the absence of “fair chase” as reasons to eliminate them and the hunters who support them.

HSUS knows that strict regulation of game farms has significantly reduced the threat of disease transmission to wild populations. But it also knows that many elk game farms could not keep up with the increasing demand for elk for specialty restaurants and shooting preserves without importing elk from other states and Canada.

When Sen. Langhorst introduced and sponsored SB 1279 in 2005, it was widely represented by the media and the F&G support groups as a bill to prevent the spread of CWD. Yet the Statement of Purpose said it was “to prohibit the importation of domestic cervidae into Idaho” and did not mention disease.

Remember that it was HSUS who published the statement, “...this bill will help cut importation of deer and elk for canned hunts.” Ever since that bill failed, HSUS and its allies have concentrated on demonizing all hunters and shooters who patronize shooting preserves.

Shooting Preserves Become Political Issue

Because the liberal faction in the Democratic party generally embrace preservationist philosophy, they chose to make shooting preserves an issue during the recent election. In an August 29, 2006 *Counterbias* article entitled, “Canned Hunts: Sports Afoul,” activist author Walter Brasch soundly condemned a trip to a Pennsylvania bird shooting preserve by Vice-President Dick Cheney, former Dallas Cowboys quarterback Roger Staubach “and some Texas high-roller Republican party donors.”

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Domestic Elk...continued from page 11

Brasch provided his version of how (what he referred to as “ethics-challenged pretend-hunters”) shot dozens of tame pheasants and donated some of them to a local food bank “to justify their killing orgy.” Except for the fact the shooters were described as supporters of Republican politicians, he could have applied that same description to existing and retired IDFG employees who flock to F&G-operated shooting preserves (Wildlife Management Areas) to kill domestic pheasants.

IDFG Canned Hunts

In an interview published in the August 29, 2006 *Idaho Statesman*, former IDFG biologist Bill Platts said he hunts (pen-reared male pheasants) between **50** and **60** days each year at both the C.J. Strike and Ft. Boise WMAs. When asked if this is a quality hunt compared to wild birds, IDFG Upland Bird Specialist Tom Hemker replied, “That, of course, is open for argument.”

In some states, game agencies and some shooting preserves plant young pheasants raised from the eggs of wild birds which are better adapted for survival. When released early, they display predator avoidance behaviors and fly readily, in contrast to sluggish older birds that have been raised in captivity for several generations and not released until the day they are hunted.

In the same interview (then) Southwest Region F&G Commissioner John Watts said F&G should consider managing its four busiest wildlife management areas in the Southwest Region more for “recreational hunting” than for growing wildlife. “Are they going to manage it for recreation or are we going to manage it for wildlife that gets killed or run off within a week (of opening day)?”

IDFG WMA canned pheasant shooting, which IDFG chooses to call “recreational hunting”, competes unfairly with Idaho’s licensed shooting preserves. WMA shooters buy a WMA Pheasant Permit entitling them to shoot six pheasants for less than \$4 per bird - a fraction of the cost of each tame bird that is actually killed.

Unlike the private shooting preserves which must charge more than their actual cost to stay in business, the WMA pheasant shooters are subsidized with a hidden upland bird fee that was unfairly shifted to all hunting license buyers in a recent major fee increase. Platts or other WMA “canned hunt” shooters can buy as many cheap six-bird permits as they need and could legally kill up to 144 roosters each in 2006.

HSUS Denounces F&G “Put-and-Take” Hunting

According to the HSUS website, in 2004 Idaho was one of “thirteen states where state fish and game agencies annually repopulate public lands with tame pheasants produced in large flocks like poultry. State agencies entrusted to protect wildlife are instead financing the dumping of some three-quarters of a million factory-farmed pheasants on our wild lands, only to have most of them starve to death or be killed by predators.”

HSUS continues, “From a true sportsman's perspective, the entire process, from the stocking to the ‘hunt,’ makes a mockery of ethical field conduct and respect for animals. Instead of a challenging and rewarding hunt, pen-raised pheasants provide little more than live target practice and stocking them is expensive.”

If ISCAC members are really concerned about hunting ethics and the image hunters project as they claim, why aren't they also demanding that legislators shut down both licensed private pheasant hunting preserves and IDFG canned pheasant hunting on WMAs?

One obvious reason may be that F&G has control of and receives income from both the preserves and WMA hunters. Another may be that some of the ISCAC members participate in and benefit from the cheap WMA canned hunts (a case of whose ox is being gored?).

Wild Elk Cost More To Harvest

A third reason is that IDFG considers elk preserves to be direct competitors who offer hunters far more for less money. According to both IDFG and multiple surveys, Idaho elk hunters spend \$4,000 just in license fees* and trip expenses for each wild bull, cow or calf that is actually harvested in Idaho. (*Elk hunters pay IDFG ~\$10 million annually in direct fees and generate substantially more than that amount from matching hunter excise taxes.)

If those costs are apportioned by sex and by antler size for trophy bulls as they are in the shooting preserves, it costs more to harvest a wild elk than it does to harvest any comparable domestic elk in preserves. Preserves pay all the costs of raising disease-free genetically pure trophy-size elk and provide lodging, guides and meat processing while F&G pays none of those costs for the elk it manages.

Its failure to mitigate winter losses and its selling bonus hunts when elk are more vulnerable virtually eliminate the chance for Idaho hunters to find a bull elk that has lived long enough to grow trophy antlers. Even the Idaho Big Game Record Book requires a minimum score of 360 (typical) and 375 (non-typical) and the odds of an Idaho hunter killing such a bull have declined to only one in a quarter-million during the past five years! (see <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/apps/records/recrules.cfm>).

The Solution

In the August 29, interview, Biologist Bill Platts said, “When it comes to pheasant hunting, the WMAs are all we have left here in Idaho.” Like Platts, several avid elk hunters have quit trying to restore sound management and express the fear that in the future elk hunting will only be available to those who pay a shooting preserve owner.

The increasing popularity of elk shooting preserves in Idaho is a symptom of mismanagement – not the cause. Instead of throwing up their hands as Platt has done with pheasants, Idaho elk hunters must be willing to bite the bullet and demand an end to special privilege hunts and restoration of biologically sound management on the 37 million acres of public lands in Idaho.

Dear Idaho Legislator

As a lifelong outdoorsman who has lived, worked and recreated among wildlife for most of my life, I have no desire to visit zoos or harvest domestic animals or birds in shooting preserves. I probably would not miss game farms if they were outlawed and, although several of my sons, grandsons and friends are skilled bowhunters, I probably would not miss archery hunting if it was also banned.

The preceding article, "The Domestic Elk Controversy", is not intended to either criticize or support shooting preserves or domestic elk farms. Instead it was written expressly to provide you and your fellow lawmakers with history and facts you may use to make informed decisions.

I hope that each of you, especially those who serve on the Senate and House Resource and Agriculture Committees, will take the time to read the entire article before you are besieged with "Camo Day" demonstrators. The fact that some of them will be wearing camouflage may serve as a reminder that they are concealing some facts in their effort to destroy a method of harvest that apparently offends them.

If the "Camo" demonstrators succeed in helping HSUS ban domestic elk harvest on hunting preserves, will they also help the anti-hunters ban pheasant farms and put-and-take pheasant harvest on hunting preserves and WMAs? And what about domestic bison ranches where the tame-appearing animals are shot by hunters who often pose for photos with their trophy?

Finally, what will happen when the camo hunters' current ally, HSUS, targets their use of bows and arrows, which it describes as "brutally inhumane weapons"? Will the self-anointed hunter ethics experts at ISCAC expect the rest of us to defend their method of hunting?

If, as reported, there is general agreement between the Idaho Elk Breeders and the State Veterinarian concerning annual licensing of elk farms and elk hunting preserves, the rules adopted by the Utah Div. of Animal Industries would appear to address all of the concerns that have been raised. But if you consider banning elk ranches or shooting preserves for social reasons you may wish to re-examine bison ranches, game bird farms and other private and IDFG shooting preserves.

Why Not Address The Real Problem?

As I pointed out in the article, the exploitation of Idaho's billion-dollar wildlife resource began 60 years ago and continues today with help from the F&G agency that is charged with perpetuating Idaho's wild game, wild birds and (wild) fish for hunters, fishermen and trappers to harvest. Eliminating elk farms and/or elk shooting preserves would be another victory for HSUS and its anti-hunting allies while diverting attention from the real problem with Idaho wildlife management.

The real problem was illustrated in the fact that IDFG wildlife managers supported Senator Langhorst's and the National Wildlife Federation's Canadian wolf introduction agenda to restore what they perceive to be a "complete and healthy ecosystem". They appear not to understand that ecosystems are dynamic, constantly changing to fit changing climatic conditions and other natural and man-made changes to our environment.

Although they pay lip service to their mandate to manage wildlife populations for a sustained yield, they refuse to use any biological tool – except regulating hunter harvest opportunity – to affect the necessary changes. And that brings up another problem.

When they regulated deer and elk harvest solely by adjusting the length (vulnerability) of general male and female seasons, it cost them nothing to shorten the seasons. But once they began selling bonus hunts to allow extra harvest when the animals are more vulnerable, reducing those extra harvest permits meant reducing F&G revenue.

The research we have published proves that reducing the number of limited deer and elk controlled hunt permits by 40% or less does not normally reduce the total harvest. For example, despite moderate reductions in bonus deer hunt permits, the record low mule deer harvests have remained fairly stable for the past decade while the number of mule deer and mule deer hunters have declined.

This has necessitated frequent fee increases, which only prolong the inevitable. Mule deer populations and harvests will never be restored until bonus hunts are eliminated and breeding females are temporarily protected.

This is not rocket science – it is basic wildlife biology 101. Several of the Commissioners already know it must be done but they are apparently too timid to start, or perhaps they are hoping for direction from you.

The decision by Governor-elect Otter not to support the requested fee increase in this session should teach the Commissioners how to say "No" to the countless programs and endless research that provide no tangible benefit to declining deer and elk populations.

The camo clad demonstrators from ISCAC, whose allegiance is to the Department rather than to wildlife and hunters, will howl the loudest when they are forced to bite the bullet and give up their special privilege hunts. But the mainstream Idaho hunters who elected you and your fellow lawmakers will applaud you when you tell the Commissioners to stand up and do their job.

To those of you who sent me emails explaining your "No" vote on the proposed right to hunt constitutional amendment last session, I respectfully submit that the threat from within is very real and your help is needed.

Sincerely,
George Dovel

Paying For Value Received

By George Dovel

By the time many of you receive this issue in the mail, Governor Otter's decision not to support a sportsmen license fee increase in this session will probably have been made public. This may be an appropriate time for everyone involved with Idaho wildlife to examine what Idaho hunters are getting for their money compared to the abundant harvests they enjoyed back when a deer tag cost a dollar and an elk tag cost two dollars.

There was no extra charge for hunting upland birds and more pheasants were bagged by Idaho hunters than all other upland birds put together. Annual mule deer harvests exceeded the total harvest of all other big game species and were the major source of IDFG funding by hunters.

Mule Deer Harvests

From 1954-1970 the annual deer harvest averaged 67,626 animals of which about 58,000 were calculated to be mule deer based on check station records and hunter reports. The 1970 deer harvest was 77,087 but mule deer populations crashed from failure to mitigate starvation and predation losses during several severe winters.

It took 15 years to restore the abundant mule deer harvests which, in 1988, comprised 77,200 of the 95,200 total deer harvested. But mule deer populations crashed again during the 1992-93 winter for the same reasons as before, and they have remained at all time lows ever since.

Deer hunters in Idaho are harvesting only **one-third** as many mule deer now as they were during most of the period since total harvests were first calculated in 1953. The multiple *mule* deer harvest tags that existed during the 40s, 50, 60s, 80s and early 90s are history and a general season deer hunter has only a 1-in-4 chance of harvesting a mule deer.

Pheasant Harvests

From 1954-1965 Idaho's annual pheasant harvest averaged 583,000 with a record high of 757,000 pheasants killed by hunters in 1964. The average annual harvest remained near 500,000 through 1981 but for the next 10 years an increased bag limit to four pheasants and an extended December season took its toll.

The harvest dropped from 502,500 roosters in 1981 to only 117,700 in 1991, and by 2001 Idaho's pheasant harvest was only 87,110. Despite some optimistic F&G press releases, the average Idaho pheasant harvest for the past five years has been only 73,114 birds!

Harvest Reduced but Fees Increased

That is the lowest number of pheasants ever killed in one year by Idaho hunters since harvests were first calculated from hunter surveys more than 50 years ago. But are we being charged less for this reduced harvest?

The following statistics from the FWS 2001 National Survey of Hunting, Fishing and Wildlife-Related

Recreation in the 50 states revealed that Idaho was at the top of the 50 states in declining game harvests yet also near the top in increasing hunter fees. Although Idaho's overall game harvest *declined* by **50%** in the five-year period, the total license fees paid by 269 fewer hunters *increased* by **35%**!

Idaho	<u>1996</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Nbr. game killed	1,630,000	814,000	-816,000

<u>State</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>License Holders</u>	<u>Licenses Issued</u>	<u>Total Cost</u>
Idaho	1994	247,113	654,659	\$15,197,794
	2001	<u>246,844</u>	<u>805,208</u>	<u>\$20,496,792</u>
	Change	-229	+150,549	+\$ 5,298,998

On page 5 of Outdoorsman Bulletin No. 9, a comparison of the FY2001 and FY2004 budgets shows that only \$240,000 of a \$5.4 million total fee increase was spent on game management. Idaho citizens who own the deer and elk are paying F&G more in license fees alone for each animal harvested than it would cost to feed and raise it in captivity, plus butcher it and process the meat.

Instead of allowing F&G employees to decide what programs must be downsized to meet the budget for next year, perhaps some of the newer F&G Commissioners will take this opportunity to determine which programs are not essential to restoring wild game, birds and fish for sportsmen to harvest.

New Weapon Rules

During the January 10-12, 2007 F&G Commission meeting in Boise, adoption of non-biological rules is scheduled for discussion and action at 9:40 A.M. on Wednesday, Jan. 10. Specific proposals to change big game hunting equipment restrictions that may affect hunters using various weapon types will be discussed and voted on at that time.

IDFG is still offering the opportunity for those with internet access to fill out a questionnaire at: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/apps/surveys/bgWeapons/req> concerning changes in arrow length, weight and let-off; changes in muzzleloader ball weight, size and description; and whether or not .50 cal. rifles should be banned for hunting because some hunters are concerned about the "fair chase" aspect of long-range cartridges.

But by the time you receive this issue it may be too late for your input to be included. The NRA has sent an advisory to its members suggesting they oppose banning

the .50 caliber because such bans always lead to further banning of other calibers commonly used by American sportsmen for many decades.

It also opposes allowing a precedent to be established that one group of hunters can unilaterally determine what manner of hunting is ethical for all other hunters. NRA Headquarters expressed the opinion that game management policies should be determined based upon sound science - not the popular politics of the day.

Another proposal to allow big game hunters to use scopes with lighted reticles (e.g. "Red Dot" commonly used on pistols) was suggested by hunters as an aid to more accurate shooting under varying light conditions and for those with less than perfect eyesight. These scopes are already legal for turkey or other upland bird hunting but were outlawed for big game about 15 years ago.

Much of the public testimony on the evening of Jan. 10, will probably address the proposal to ban the use of all but "traditional muzzleloaders from all special muzzleloader seasons or hunts. IDFG biologists report that reduced mule deer numbers, improved muzzleloader technology, and relatively high muzzleloader hunter success are primary reasons for declining muzzleloader hunting opportunity.

Some newer muzzleloaders have an exposed pivoting hammer in line with the ignition source and barrel, and are currently legal to use in traditional muzzleloader hunts. One of the proposals would ban the use of these newer models in muzzleloader hunts and allow only traditional weapons with "sidelocks" to be legal beginning in 2007.

Nationwide Survey Shows Most Americans Support Hunting and Fishing

September 18, 2006

By Mark Damian Duda

National Hunting and Fishing Day was officially established in 1972 to celebrate sportsmen and their role in fostering conservation and the scientific management of natural resources and wildlife. This year those celebrating National Hunting and Fishing Day will also be able to celebrate at least a decade of public support for their activities, according to a nationwide poll.

The nationwide survey, conducted by Responsive Management of Harrisonburg, Virginia, found that support for hunting and fishing has remained strong over the past decade with approximately 3 out of every 4 Americans approving of legal hunting and more than 9 out of 10 approving of recreational fishing.

"We have been seeing public support for hunting increase in several states over the past decade where we had data but this is the first nationwide study where we could verify that public support has increased over the past

decade. In 1995, 73 percent of Americans approved of hunting while in 2006, 78 percent approved of hunting.

Poll Data:

Do you approve or disapprove of legal hunting? (2006)
45.4% Strongly approve and 32.2% Moderately approve (77.6% Approve) 4.9% Neither approve nor disapprove; 1.2% Don't know 8.0% Strongly disapprove and 8.3% Moderately disapprove (16.3% Disapprove)

Do you approve or disapprove of recreational fishing? (2006) 68.5% Strongly approve and 24.8% Moderately approve (93.3% Approve) 1.5% Neither approve nor disapprove 2.0% Strongly disapprove and 3.2% Moderately disapprove (5.2% Disapprove)

Do you approve or disapprove of legal hunting? (1995)
40% Strongly approve and 33% Moderately approve (73% Approve) 5% Neither approve nor disapprove / Don't know 11% Strongly disapprove and 11% Moderately disapprove (22% Disapprove)

Do you approve or disapprove of legal fishing? (1995)
65% Strongly approve and 30% Moderately approve (95% Approve) 2% Neither approve nor disapprove / Don't know 1% Strongly disapprove and 2% Moderately disapprove (3% Disapprove)

Happy Birthday Harvey



Bull elk shot by Pocatello sportsman/conservationist Harvey Peck near No-Tellum Creek on the Big Desert shortly after his 80th birthday.

DIVIDED WE FALL

Editor, The Outdoorsman:

Hunting is a personal experience filled with personal choices taking place in many areas with varying traditions and rules. The concept of "fair chase" is a noble one and something that is meant to be a unifying, governing force. The concept was not created as a test to divide ethical hunters.

One of the reasons our wildlife and habitat conservation system works is because individual states regulate what goes on within that state. Can you imagine the train wreck that would occur if the same rules applied for all states regardless of traditions, the diverse species of game, and various habitats found in different regions?

Deer hunting with crossbows is legal in Ohio, but not in some other states. Baiting deer is legal in some states, yet frowned upon by hunters in other states. You can run bear and cougar with hounds in some western states, but only spot and stalk hunt in others. Steel shot, lead shot, plugged shotguns, expandable broadheads, inline muzzleloaders - the list goes on and on.

The bottom line - we are too small of group not to support each other. If you hunt, you belong to a fraternity. If a hunting method is legal in another state, but not in your state, crying foul won't help the bigger picture. If a way of hunting is under attack in another state, your way is under attack, even if you do not agree with or practice this method.

Anonymous

Editor, The Outdoorsman:

Enclosed is a donation and the names and addresses for two subscriptions.

Would you have any ideas as to how we can gain control of the Fish and Game Department? I had put my name in as a member of the Commission from this District but some group had other ideas and they got their man appointed.

At times I am glad they got their way but I would still like to have worked at the problems that need to be solved

Thank you for your wonderful publication. It certainly tells of the problems they have brought upon the sportsmen.

Name and address on file

Thank you for you donation. If we continue to circulate facts to enough people, including our elected officials, they will get the job done as they did in the 1970s.

We sincerely appreciate the support from so many outdoorsmen and women who are helping us increase our circulation in all regions. Given enough facts our elected officials will make the right choices to restore honest management of our billion-dollar wildlife resource.

In case you are a new reader a donation in any amount will add you to our mailing list and a donation of \$20 or more will assure you receive The Outdoorsman for one year and will help pay the cost of mailing it to your elected officials.

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