

# The Outdoorsman

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## The Real Threat to Our Hunting & Fishing Heritage

*By George Dovel*



With the opportunity to harvest wild trout and whitefish, upland game birds and animals, and mule deer severely limited on most public land in Idaho, what has happened to our grandchildren's hunting and fishing heritage?

In March 2006, 16 of 34 Idaho Senators voted against giving Idaho voters the chance to decide whether hunting, fishing and trapping should be a Constitutional right - or simply limited privileges granted by the state. Several who voted against SJR 106, said there is no present

threat to the right to hunt and fish in Idaho but is that statement accurate?

Last month on page 14 of Bulletin 21 we again published the alarming **50%** decline in the number of game

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### The Real Threat... *continued from page 1*

birds and animals harvested in Idaho during the five-year period from 1996-2001. Instead of taking advantage of a series of mild winters during that period to rebuild depleted mule deer populations, IDFG biologists increased the number of bonus special privilege hunts by 50% to increase revenue and further reduce mule deer numbers.

For many months I have published biological facts to prove that the extended seasons resulting from selling special privilege hunts when mule deer are most vulnerable are causing the destruction of our mule deer herd. Yet selling thousands of bonus hunt permits that decimate the prime breeding animals continues to be approved by the Fish and Game Commission.

Most knowledgeable outdoorsmen tend to blame this failure to perpetuate the public's wildlife resource on ignorance, dishonesty or greed. But science-based game and fish management will never be restored until the disruptive sources are identified and exposed to public scrutiny.

#### The Preservationist Ideology

The 1960s produced many dissenters determined to replace conventional wisdom and values with "natural" preservationist ideologies. In what has been described as the "anti-industrial revolution" college professors who supported the free-thinking Hippie and New Left cultures graduated a generation of activists who were determined to save us from the perceived evils of our productive society.

In 1954, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) employee Durward Allen had published "Our Wildlife Legacy" which has been required reading for generations of wildlife conservation students. That book inspired the newly graduated wildlife biologists of the 60s to change the philosophy of hands-on fish and game management to hands-off ecosystem "management".

Now, half a century later, state fish and game agencies have changed their job description from "Preserving our Hunting and Fishing Heritage" to "Preserving Our 'Wildlife' Heritage." Durward Allen and his followers were also responsible for the predator preservationist philosophy that emerged in the 1960s.

#### Tainted Science

In 1958 Allen left FWS and joined the faculty of Purdue University to begin the now famous study of wolves and moose on Isle Royale. Hiring graduate student David Mech to conduct the study during a three-year period when the wolf and moose populations were relatively stable, both Allen and Mech claimed this proved that, left alone, predators and prey will balance themselves and protect the available food supply.

Without even mentioning severe overuse of Isle Royale forage, Allen wrote, "The great carnivore removes the elders, the ailing, the afflicted – and also, no doubt the foolish and incompetent. He is inspector of the herd, liberator of the weak, and guardian of the range."

During that same period, twin brothers John and Frank Craighead were invited into Yellowstone National Park to study grizzly bears. Like Durward Allen and his wolves, they soon became famous by claiming that grizzly bears primarily ate sick, disabled or dead elk during the spring and rarely killed a healthy adult elk.

In June 1970 a YNP biologist said the Craigheads refused to report 90 elk killed by grizzlies between Canyon and Old Faithful since they emerged from hibernation. He blamed their lack of integrity on their zeal to promote the "sick and crippled" theory taught by academic biologists like Allen (see July 2004 Outdoorsman page 2).

As a result of this and other disagreements over bear management, the Craigheads were ordered out of the Park. But like Durward Allen, they are still revered by countless wildlife biologists for allegedly "proving" that large carnivores need to be protected.

#### Data Manufactured To Fit Theories

Graduate student Maurice Hornocker worked with the Craigheads briefly before he began his own 1960s study in Idaho designed to "prove" that mountain lions had little or no impact on declining mule deer populations. IDFG helicopter counts already verified that 90-day either-sex deer and elk seasons and multiple deer harvests had severely reduced both deer and elk populations.



The 1964-67 Idaho mountain lion study by graduate student Maurice Hornocker used exaggerated prey statistics to claim lions were incapable of limiting deer and elk populations.

To "prove" the cougar weren't further reducing mule deer numbers, Hornocker ignored the F&G counts and manufactured his own set of statistics which wrongly indicated that deer were increasing every year (see May 2004 Outdoorsman pages 4-5). He also ignored lions that repeatedly walked within a few feet of a crippled bull elk and a diseased bighorn ewe in order to kill healthy animals, and parroted the claim by Allen and the Craigheads that large predators cull the sick and behaviorally unfit.

In Hornocker's study, published in Wildlife Monographs in 1970, he claimed lions socially regulate their own numbers below the level that would affect prey populations. That same year Canadian wolf biologist Douglas Pimlott claimed that wolves also socially regulate themselves (see Aug-Sep 2006 Outdoorsman page 4).

#### **Truth Revealed Too Late**

By 1985 these theories had all been disproved by wolf, bear and lion experts' legitimate long-term predator-prey studies. David Mech admitted that his Isle Royale research as a graduate student was largely responsible for the popularity of the balance-of nature myth and said, "Far from being 'balanced,' ratios of wolves and prey animals can fluctuate wildly – and sometimes catastrophically." (see "How Delicate is the Balance of Nature" in National Wildlife Vol. 23, No. 1, or in May 1985 Alaska Magazine)

But the truth came out 15 years too late to change the course of history - or to alter the destruction of millions of animals, birds and fish that might otherwise have benefited Americans both economically and esthetically. In 1971, riding the 1960s wave of environmental activism, President Nixon's Council on Environmental Quality appointed both Hornocker and Durward Allen to the Advisory Committee on Predator Control.

#### **Protection of Predators Mandated**

Early in 1972 the report from this group of activists, called the "Caine Committee" after its chairman, was first published. Determined to protect predators, the Committee convinced Congress and the EPA to remove the toxic chemicals used for coyote control from registration. It also convinced President Nixon to sign an executive order banning the use of all toxicants to control predators on federal land, and on all other land by federal agencies.

This ban did not extend to the prey species so the FS and BLM continued to spread grain laced with Compound 1080 over thousands of acres of Western range land which killed rabbits, ground squirrels and other rodents as well as assorted bird species. Designed as a selective poison to kill coyotes, but not eagles and other protected species, *when properly diluted* at bait stations and retrieved before spring, the 1080/grain mix was broadcast from the air indiscriminately.

#### **Predatory Birds Protected**

Some federal protection of migratory birds has existed since a treaty was signed with Great Britain in 1916 and followed by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act in 1918. Bald eagles were protected by the Eagle Act in 1940 and golden eagles were added by amending that act in 1967.

Most other predatory birds were not protected until March 1972 when hawks, owls, kingfishers, pelicans and cormorants were added to the MBT. At the same time crows, ravens, magpies and most blackbirds were added to the species protected under a 1936 treaty with Mexico, but crows may be killed (only with a shotgun during season) in states like Idaho where they are designated as game birds.

IDFG instantly removed all birds of prey and scavengers from its list of unprotected or predatory wildlife and in 1973, using erroneous information provided by Hornocker and other predator advocates, it convinced the Idaho Legislature to give lions protected status as big game animals. In 1977 legislators removed wolves, lynx and bobcats from the list of predators and also gave unprotected raccoons protection as furbearers.

Protection of foxes and badgers followed and today only three of the many predatory species in Idaho are actually classified as predators in I.C. Sec. 36-201 (coyotes skunks and weasels). The decline of Idaho's pheasant population and harvests is directly tied to the protection of predators, which impacted hunter harvests.

The annual average pheasant harvest in Idaho remained above 500,000 until the increased protection of predators from 1971-1977 provided more predators, which in turn killed more birds. This left fewer birds for hunters to shoot and the harvest declined to 438,900 by 1980.

But instead of reducing the bag limit and late season in 1981 to compensate for the decline in pheasant numbers, IDFG biologists, under the leadership of new Director Jerry Conley, *increased* the bag limit in SW Idaho by 33% (from 3 to 4) and *increased* all season lengths.

Combined with steadily increasing hen and nesting losses to multiple protected predators, the 1981 harvest of 502,500 cock pheasants left too few males so predators killed even more hens. Contrary to F&G biologists' claim that changing farming practices was the *major* cause of the pheasant decline, their own 10-year record of declining pheasant harvests (below) provides a classic example of a prey population being driven into a predator pit:

#### **Idaho 1980s Pheasant Harvests Published by IDFG**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Harvest</u>
1980	438,900
1981	502,500*
1982	329,700
1983	380,500
1984	264,000
1985	238,100
1986	180,100
1987	155,600
1988	111,900
1989	102,700

(\* Bag limit increased to 4 cocks)

Although IDFG biologists recognize Aldo Leopold as the father of wildlife management in North America, they ignore what he taught about pheasant restoration. As Chairman of Wildlife Management in the Department of Agricultural Economics for the University of Wisconsin from 1933 until his untimely death in 1948 he established the Faville Grove Wildlife Experimental Area, working with farmers and graduate students on wild game cropping, food plots, windbreaks, and restoring pheasants.

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Predators were controlled initially to allow optimum survival of pheasant chicks that were raised by farmers' wives who weighed and banded them at eight weeks of age (at that age the young pheasants also quit returning to the brooder coops and remained in the wild). They were fed corn to help them survive severe Wisconsin winters and huntable populations of wild pheasants, quail, Hungarian partridge, ruffed grouse, woodcock, and prairie chickens were restored.

This was exactly the formula used by "Pheasants Unlimited" to restore depressed pheasant populations to South Dakota in the early 1970s, and used throughout Great Britain to maintain world class pheasant and grouse hunting until the recent ban on fox hunting was enacted. Although "Pheasants Forever" and state biologists do not admit it publicly, continuing predator control by private landowners, hunters and trappers facilitates the quality pheasant hunting in South Dakota and neighboring states.

However the extreme federal penalties private citizens face for killing a hawk (Migratory Bird Treaty Act), or even possessing a foot or a feather from one (Lacey Act), discourages some – but not all – from protecting the pheasants that have become a major source of income. This is the legacy pheasant hunters inherited from Boise falconer Morley Nelson and his anti-hunting allies.

#### **IDFG Restores Federal Protection of Magpies**

Biologists acknowledge that magpie predation is a major cause of poor pheasant nesting success and the MBTA provides that they may be controlled to prevent depredations upon ornamental or shade trees, agricultural crops, livestock, *or wildlife* (unless they are protected by state law). But since the F&G Commission approved reclassifying all native reptiles, amphibians and non-game birds as Protected Nongame Wildlife in March 2004 (see April 2004 Outdoorsman), landowners and hunters can no longer legally control magpies to stop them from eating this year's pheasant crop out of the nests.

Not only has this become a misdemeanor offense in Idaho (see IDAPA 13.01.06.300.02.) and I.C. Sec.36-1401[b]), the change to protected status in Idaho also makes the violator subject to federal prosecution under the MBTA and the Lacey Act. Unless magpies are reclassified as an unprotected species or predator in Idaho, the birds and their parts (including eggs, nests, and feathers) will remain fully protected except for control by landowners to prevent health/safety concerns or crop damage.

#### **Snake Collectors Become Criminals**

Before the Commission put all reptiles and amphibians on the protected list, it was legal for Idaho reptile collectors to capture, possess, transport, and swap or sell Idaho reptiles, and turn rattlesnake skins and rattles into hatbands or other souvenirs (see IDAPA 13.01.06. and 10.). But, as with the magpies and their feathers, sale of

live reptiles, amphibians or "parts" became a state misdemeanor offense and a federal felony offense once the Commission approved the recommendation by F&G State Nongame Wildlife Manager Chuck Harris.

Instead of explaining to the Commissioners exactly why collectors could no longer collect, possess or transport Idaho reptiles or amphibians without a special permit and could no longer sell or trade them, Harris vaguely said only that protected status would prohibit illegal trade. He emphasized that collectors would still be able to catch and keep four of every species of reptile and amphibian, but he failed to explain that changing their designation in one rule would prohibit what had been a lawful activity in another (see IDAPA 13.01.10.100.06 and 08).

#### **Violators Given Heavy Sentences**

Immediately after the 2004 rule became effective, IDFG conservation officers began investigating a report that a 27-year-old woman from Mountain Home planned to trade several snakes from her private collection for a live crow. The 2-1/2 year investigation by a group of IDFG and FWS officers resulted in five people reportedly being threatened with prosecution for a series of alleged state and federal violations unless they agreed to a plead guilty to a handful of state misdemeanor offenses.

All of the reptiles were seized and one defendant served three months in jail, paid \$2,988 in fines and restitution, was forbidden to be around reptiles or people with reptiles during two years of probation, and had his hunting license suspended for life. Three friends who were taking care of his snakes for him while he was in jail were given suspended jail sentences or community service, similar probation, fines and hunting license suspensions for possessing the snakes without the appropriate licenses and permits.

According to a Dec. 4, 2006 IDFG news release, because the Mountain Home woman failed to show up for her plea bargain sentencing on two misdemeanors, FWS may charge her with a number of federal felonies they allege she committed. Before Idaho snakes and lizards were reclassified by the Commission most of the activity the five plead guilty to was perfectly legal.

#### **Are Any of These Reptiles Threatened?**

After spending several years and several million dollars classifying and evaluating Idaho plants, insects and assorted nongame wildlife, the battery of IDFG specialists admitted they did not know whether Idaho reptiles were scarce or abundant. The NatureServe information they published for all of the supposedly threatened Idaho reptiles said they were all "Secure: common, widespread and abundant" throughout their range.

"NatureServe" is the parent organization of the "Idaho Conservation Data Center" (IDCDC), one of 78 international groups located in the U.S., Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean. Its goal is to restore what it claims are "healthy", biologically diverse ecosystems.

### Another Product of the 1960s

For those who have not read Outdoorsman articles by Jim Beers, Charles Kay and Valerius Geist warning about groups that advocate biodiversity and restoration of “native” ecosystems, it is part of the 1960s movement to restore apex predators and “manage” entire ecosystems rather than individual species.

NatureServe began when the Nature Conservancy\* established the first “Natural Heritage Program” in 1974. The “Idaho Natural Heritage Program” was established in 1984 under the direction of Jerry Conley, as a cooperative effort by the IDFG Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program, Parks and Recreation, and The Nature Conservancy. (\*an international nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of biological diversity).

### Sportsmen Still Paying Part of Cost

In 1987, the Natural Heritage Program was merged into the Department of Fish and Game and in 1992, the name was changed to “Idaho Conservation Data Center.” This may have sounded more acceptable to hunters and fishermen who were paying most of the program’s costs.

Although the million-dollar-plus salary and program budget of the 24 full time employees is presently funded by a number of sources, including the federal share of the State Wildlife Grant program and the IDFG Nongame Fund, the lion’s share of building, administrative and miscellaneous expenses is still paid by sportsmen. Sportsmen pay more than half the cost of Natural Resource Policy, Administrative and Communications programs.

And unless a special transfer of nongame funds was used to pay a portion of the officers’ salaries, expenses and overhead during the two and one-half year snake investigation described on page 4, those costs would also have been paid by sportsmen. The claim by IDFG officials that the IDCDC benefits game species because it protects habitat for assorted insects, snails, predators and native plants is not supported by facts.

For 22 years the IDCDC and IDFG Nongame Biologists have been content to feed endangered Selkirk caribou to mountain lions and pretend they are working to save the caribou from extinction. But, as with other species, the only thing they have actually done to protect them is restrict man’s use of that ecosystem.

### Blame Humans and “Alien Invaders”

If you read hundreds of pages of CWCS species recovery plans as I have, you will find that human encroachment and man’s alteration of habitat is the common theme for declining populations of any species. The general philosophy of the national organizations that provide leadership and tools to CDCs is, “Enjoy watching wildlife, but do so at a distance. They belong to all of us - but in the wild - not in captivity or being harvested.”

If you check out the websites of those groups (NatureServe, Defenders of Wildlife, etc.) you will see that protecting or reintroducing “native” species to insure

biodiversity, and blaming “invasive” (non-native) species for declines is their common agenda. Despite the fact that bullfrogs are declining in many locations where they were formerly abundant IDCDC is blaming their existence for the alleged decline of native amphibians.

### From Record High Harvests To Record Lows

For the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, IDFG paid bounties on the natural predators of pheasants and mule deer to restore healthy populations and harvests. For the next 15 years, IDFG encouraged hunters and fishermen to control predators while they enjoyed harvesting up to 757,000 pheasants and 100,000 mule deer in a single year.

Today, most of the predators of both species are protected and Idaho hunters are experiencing record low harvests of both pheasants and mule deer. They are also experiencing the longest overall\* hunting seasons for both species that have been allowed since the F&G Commission was first created 69 years ago. (\*includes bonus mule deer seasons from mid-August through December 31<sup>st</sup> in some units).

During the peak period of Idaho’s wild game and fish harvests, IDFG biologists poisoned sockeye salmon in three of the four lakes in the Stanley Basin to protect the popular rainbow trout fishery. Now they are spending millions trying to restore what is probably an extinct sockeye population while they poison rainbow trout because they are classified as an “invasive species,” which “may” be a threat to a subspecies of native cutthroat.

### Other 1970s Disasters

The Marine Mammal Protection Act, which passed in 1972, protected every predatory ocean mammal from killer whales to sea otters. This cost commercial fishermen millions of dollars each year in reduced harvests, shut down Southeast Alaska’s clam cannery and decimated salmon runs in the Pacific Northwest.

The majority of salmon smolts that make it past the protected Caspian terns and cormorants between Bonneville Dam and the Pacific Ocean are killed by protected marine mammal predators while in the ocean. Those that make it back into the estuary on their return from the ocean must run a gauntlet of protected sea lions and seals before they pass through the Bonneville fish ladder.

Results from the first year of a new salmon tagging and tracking study by Kintama Research of Vancouver Island indicate the extent of losses to marine predators as salmon proceed north up the coast along the continental shelf is far greater than has been suggested. Unlike pit-tagged salmon, the use of special receivers in the Snake and Columbia Rivers and the Pacific Ocean allow individual POST\* tagged fish to be tracked all the way from the Clearwater River, and determine when and where the mortality occurs. (\*Pacific Ocean Shelf Tracking that extends from northern Oregon to southeast Alaska)

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### **The CITES Treaty and the ESA**

When 80 nations signed the CITES\* Treaty in Washington, D.C. on March 3, 1973, the U.S. government violated the right of states to manage the wildlife owned by the citizens of those states. The implementing legislation for the U.S. was enactment of P.L. 93-205, the Endangered Species Act of 1973. (\*Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora)

Like all of the wildlife treaties and laws enacted by Congress during the early 70s, the need for the treaty and the ESA was based on academic theories supported by agenda-driven "science" and a wave of environmental hysteria. Many of the listings since then have not been warranted and so few species have been declared recovered that the Act is an obvious failure.

### **The Native American Conservation Myth**

Yet the ESA remains the most powerful weapon in the arsenal of self-anointed protectors of the environment who want us to "look at but don't touch" the wildlife that we paid to restore. Because some explorers reported that wild game was abundant in many western locations in the early 1800s, some academic ecologists theorized that was the result of native-American Indian tribes practicing a "conservation ethic" that perpetuated abundant wildlife harvests.

That popular myth has been dispelled by explorer journals and archeological studies proving just the opposite was true. Estimates of Native American populations in North America before Europeans introduced smallpox, measles and other diseases in about 1500, suggest there were several million hunter-gatherers at that time.

### **Aboriginal Overkill Caused Species Extinction**

Excavations of shell mounds (Indian garbage dumps) between Oakland and San Francisco that dated back 2,600 years revealed that populations of larger wildlife such as deer, elk and sturgeon preferred by Native Americans were decimated over time. This forced the Indians to switch to smaller prey such as geese, and finally to ducks, including cormorant chicks from island nesting colonies which eventually disappeared.

Similar excavations in Oregon and Utah revealed the same story - as larger prey populations declined, increased consumption of smaller prey forced some species to extinction. When the European diseases killed an estimated 90 percent of the Native American population, prey populations had 300 years to rebuild before white explorers recorded what they found.

Even then, journals from Lewis and Clark and other early explorers noted that buffer zones between warring Indian tribes contained most of the game. Smith, Fremont and Ogden described starving Indians who survived on insects, grass seeds, rabbits, rats and the nearly extinct desert tortoise - with one tale of mass starvation and cannibalism during an extreme winter.

### **Settlers Repeat Indians' Mistake**

Like the Indians several centuries before them, white settlers acted as if the abundant game they found in parts of the West was indestructible. Idaho's population totaled only 17,804 in 1870, 32,610 in 1880, and 88,548 in 1890 as a state, including women and children.

Yet this small group of farmers, ranchers and miners using relatively short-range weapons had eliminated much of the game by 1899 when IDFG was formed. Supported by hunters and fishermen during the next 50 years, wildlife managers ignored unsupported theories and used proven tools to rebuild game and fish populations to record abundance.

By 1950, although Idaho's population had increased to 588,637, a record 165,077 licensed resident hunters, checked record numbers of both deer and elk through IDFG check stations. *In 1951-52 hunters checked more deer and elk through Idaho big game check stations than have ever been checked before or since.*

### **Biologists Destroy Deer and Elk**

IDFG biologists had no idea how abundant the game populations were and wrongly assumed they could harvest 40%-60% of a mule deer herd every year based on flawed theories (per written statement by Regional Wildlife Manager Robert Sherwood published in Nov. 1971 *Outdoorsman*). They doubled season lengths for either-sex deer and elk hunting and spent the next 20 years destroying the game herds that had taken up to 50 years to rebuild.

In a marathon F&G Commission hearing in April 1969, hunters and rural legislators described the depletion of Idaho deer and elk herds and asked that seasons be shortened and female harvest halted. But Big Game Chief Roger Williams told the Commission deer and elk populations were healthy and underharvested.

He recommended the Commission increase the annual deer harvest to 140,000-150,000 and claimed that harvest could be maintained without impacting the mule deer population. The Commission agreed with him.

### **F&G Published Exaggerated Harvest Stats**

In 1970 F&G checked only 12,505 total deer at big game check stations (only one-third as many as had been checked in 1951) but F&G altered the harvest survey results to claim a "record" harvest of 83,125 deer. In 1971 Idaho hunters checked only 6,303 deer (only half as many as in 1970) but biologists claimed hunters still harvested 61,826 deer (only a 26% decline).

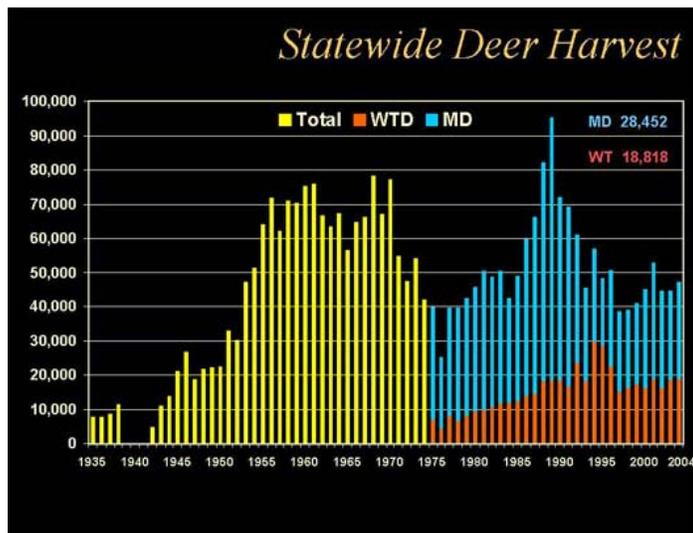
The claimed annual deer harvests in the *best* deer units from 1969-1971 were higher than the total number of deer counted by helicopter in those units. When a Legislative Performance Audit for FY1969-71 confirmed that IDFG had knowingly published exaggerated deer and elk harvest figures, new Director Joe Greenley replaced the inflated harvest figures for the preceding 11 years with the total number of deer and elk reported killed by hunters in voluntary hunter report cards.

He pointed out that although the harvests reported by hunters were less than the total deer and elk harvested they, like the smaller check station numbers, represented an accurate trend while the survey figures did not. His figures for the 11-year period were published in Annual Reports and Summaries of Operations until after he retired.

### Population, Harvest Distortions Continue

But after his boss left, Big Game Manger Lonn Kuck replaced them with the exaggerated figures. The "Big Game Harvest History" Kuck later prepared is a grossly distorted picture of deer and elk harvests comparing: check station records; a mail-in survey of 5% of hunters; the exaggerated harvests used to cover up the decline from the mid-1960s through the early 70s; returns from voluntary hunter reports to magnify the decline in 1976 when antlerless harvest was eliminated; two different inaccurate phone surveys; and, finally, returns from the Mandatory Hunter Harvest Report.

The following graph, provided on the IDFG website and presented to the Commission by Mule Deer Initiative Biologist Toby Boudreau, uses Kuck's highly inaccurate deer harvest statistics which ignore the all-time record high deer harvest in 1951 and hide the record low deer harvests in the late 1960s and early 1970s:



Comparing reports from scattered check stations in the 1930s, 40s and early 50s (which represent only a fraction of actual harvests) with admittedly exaggerated and inaccurate survey estimates is dishonest and self-serving.

More than a dozen years after Greenley retired, IDFG Big Game Biologists Lonn Kuck, Lou Nelson and Jon Rachael provided highly exaggerated deer and elk population and harvest figures indicating an adequate prey base for wolf reintroduction in Central Idaho. Their deer harvest estimates were six times higher than total deer counted in helicopter surveys in the most productive units.

Knowing that the Mandatory Hunter Harvest Report would expose their exaggerations, these three big game managers wasted several years and several hundred

thousand sportsmen license dollars trying to prevent the Commission from adopting it to replace the telephone survey. After it was adopted, Nelson added thousands of fictitious deer and elk harvests to the totals reported by hunters until we exposed the practice.

### So What? Why Beat A Dead Horse?

Our wildlife managers cannot provide a sustained yield of wild game and fish for Idaho citizens to harvest without accurate population and harvest information. So why have Department officials allowed this deception to continue?

The obvious answer is they have no intention of obeying Idaho law and restoring abundant populations of wild game and fish. They are the same people who pocket dedicated sportsmen dollars for emergency feeding and predator control, yet refuse to spend those dollars to perpetuate our wild game harvest.

After the Craigheads, Allen and Hornocker twisted facts in brief "studies" to fit preordained conclusions, they each spent years overseeing graduate student wildlife research programs at various colleges or universities. The agenda-driven "research" they promoted has spread like a cancer among wildlife professionals despite the fact that their hands-off "natural management" theories were disproved more than two decades ago.

Although IDFG officials pay lip service to managing wild game and fish for hunters and fishermen, they refuse to use any of the tools their predecessors used to restore abundant wildlife during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Instead they repeat the same tired cliches they learned from their college professors (e.g. "predators and game have co-existed for thousands of years" and "feeding game takes the 'wild' out of wildlife").

### Enablers Support IDFG Mismanagement

Several years ago, at our statewide meeting of winter feeding advisory committees, IDFG Mule Deer Research Biologist Jim Unsworth and his former U of I professor Jim Peek gave presentations to the group. Researcher Unsworth began his presentation by looking at Peek and saying, "You didn't teach us the truth about the impact of predators on mule deer populations."

Unsworth's comment was seen as a ray of hope by those of us hoping for a return to science-based wildlife management, but scientific management is now at the bottom of the list of priorities for this agency. As the Wildlife Bureau Chief (who also came in second in the selection of a new Director) Doctor Unsworth now sits and listens politely while Peek tells the Legislature there is insufficient evidence that wolves are causing a decline in Clearwater elk populations.

Peek, who was chosen as the professional authority on wolf-elk relationships in Idaho by Defenders of Wildlife, is one of a group of enablers that allow F&G to ignore the law and pursue its preservationist agenda. Other

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enablers include such groups as the Idaho Wildlife Federation and Sportsmen's Caucus Advisory Council - which claims to represent thousands of Idaho sportsmen yet blindly supports IDFG's exploitation of our game.

### **HSUS Is Not the Greatest Threat**

Most national sportsmen groups believe that the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), with its nine million dollar annual budget, represents the greatest threat to our hunting heritage for our children and grandchildren. Although its leader, Wayne Pacelle, once vowed to end all hunting in the United States, HSUS is not the greatest threat for three reasons.

First, HSUS clearly identifies its beliefs, its agenda and its goals. Second, the 2006 nationwide survey published in our last issue indicates 77.6% of Americans approve of legal hunting and only 16.3% disapprove. Third, Idaho legislators surely would never allow our heritage of hunting to be destroyed - or would they?

### **Personal Experiences Show Real Threat**

Twenty-five years ago we moved off the side of a mountain where game was abundant to our home on Porter Creek in a narrow valley called Jerusalem. Except in the Panhandle and backcountry outfitter units, the general elk hunting seasons opened on the same day in October statewide and the general deer hunting seasons also opened on the same day shortly after the elk season closed.

The local units we hunt in had a five-day bulls-only elk season and a 26-day bucks-only deer season, with a 5-day either-sex season included in the second week. These either-sex deer seasons were closed from 1982-85 and some buck seasons were shorter, yet Idaho hunters still killed twice as many mule deer during those short bucks-only general seasons as they do now with general buck and either-sex seasons for different weapons that are three times as long.

There was one controversial two-week Nov.-Dec. general archery season in the unit we live in, but no special weapons seasons or special permit hunts in the three adjacent units a short distance from our house. We easily killed choice mule deer that were not spooked early in the season - as we were the first to hunt them - and healthy deer and elk populations steadily increased for the next 10 years.

Although we sometimes hunted the backcountry with our saddle horses and pack stock to take advantage of the long season, killing at least a small bull elk in a local unit we knew intimately was easy. I carried a .22 pistol when I hunted big game, and abundant blue and ruffed grouse were a delicious addition to hunting camp fare.

### **F&G Advertised Our Deer, Pheasants**

None of the private land along the eight miles of gravel and dirt road from the Payette River to the summit was posted and several years later an IDFG employee drove by during pheasant season and counted 49 rooster

pheasants less than 50 yards from our house. In his next weekly radio program, IDFG Director Conley suggested hunters "drive up Porter Creek Road to hunt deer and then stop by on your way home and collect a limit of pheasants."

That was the beginning of the end for our local pheasants and mule deer. The next morning several hundred frustrated pheasant hunters from the Boise Valley descended on our area and began ground-sluicing assorted birds and irrigation pipes, while someone also blinded my favorite saddle horse in one eye with birdshot.

### **Extended Seasons Closed Private Lands To Hunters**

In the unit we live in (Unit 39) IDFG added lengthy archery and muzzleloader seasons, a special cow elk hunt lasting from Aug. 1 through Dec. 31, and special privilege bonus draw hunts for deer beginning on Aug. 15, and ending on Dec. 16. As August 1 approaches, dozens of hunters hauling 4-wheelers with pickups and flat bed trailers travel the hot dusty road to the 640-acre State "School Section" (Endowment Land) on the first summit.

They no longer hunt along the way because the entire eight miles of private land on both sides of the road is now closed to hunting. Landowners around the state reacted to the unprecedented extended seasons by closing hundreds of thousands of acres of private land to hunting.

The five-month cow/calf elk season decimated the local elk herd several years ago, but IDFG continues to offer 600 antlerless elk permits to anyone with a landowner permission slip who is willing to pay \$44.75 for a tag and permit fees. Fewer than half of the 600 permits are purchased each year and, despite the 153-day season (including a three-week "any-elk" archery season in November) success is below average for a limited hunt.

### **Horseback Hunting No Longer Prudent**

The scarce game animals that were chased by hunters from mid-summer until the general season opened in October generally offered only a hasty running or long distance shot. It was no longer prudent for my wife, Patti, to ride her buckskin mare up there under those circumstances so we began hunting on the side of the mountain above Banks in Unit 32A where I used to live.

But even when we saddled up and left before daylight, we met hunters riding 4-wheelers down an impassable road at first light. We successfully hunted my "secret places" on foot for several years but in both 2003 and 2004 a long hard uphill stalk on opening day was cut short by hunters on ATVs illegally riding on such a "road" and blasting away at the bucks we were stalking.

In 2004 a party of four on two ATVs jumped off and wounded two bucks, and looked for two hours but never found them. This happens all too often when deer become scarce and hunters switch to road hunting to cover more ground and increase their odds of seeing deer.

On the last day of the 2004 deer season, a pair of orphaned female fawns found refuge and cover in the

field behind our house. One of the fawns was bred and dropped a single fawn the first week of May 2005 and they remained on our property, along with several other deer including three antlered bucks.

### **Effect Of Early Special Weapons Seasons**

Three mild winters in a row plus the refuge provided by our neighbors' posted property had resulted in good fawn survival and a noticeable increase in local deer numbers. But when the either-sex archery season opened less than a mile down the road on Aug. 30, someone shot the dry yearling doe inside our fence with a target arrow.

On September 8, 2005 we heard muzzleloaders fired near the road and found someone had killed the doe's twin sister with the single fawn. By Sept. 15, the only deer left on our property was the small orphaned fawn that remained in the heavy cover along the creek bottom.

Hunters with muzzleloaders rode 4-wheelers up and down both roads that cross our land and one large man wearing a T-shirt, with a muzzleloader slung across his back in the 95 to 100 degree heat, hardly represented "primitive" hunting. The little fawn disappeared and, except after dark, the only deer we saw on our property were those running away from hunters that didn't stop to look back until they were a mile away on higher ground.

Patti had planned to hunt on our property but instead she angrily posted it – the first time in my life my property has ever been closed to hunters. We drove to Unit 32A on opening morning and climbed to the top of the mountain on foot at daybreak, observing five whitetail does and fawns on private land and a single mule deer doe with three fawns - one of which was an obvious orphan.

### **Another ATV Episode**

Just under the top, Patti positioned herself at the appropriate place for a shot at deer traveling any of the three trails they use in their south-to-north feeding pattern each morning. I circled to the south for a half-mile and climbed to a spot where I could watch two of the trails.

A small mule deer buck appeared slightly above me, casually feeding and working his way along the trail toward Patti. Suddenly he lifted his head to watch his back trail and within a minute began moving rapidly along the trail toward her.

In another minute I heard the 4-wheeler, which appeared shortly, with the driver stopping where the buck had stopped to hastily glass the country ahead of him. He followed the buck tracks along the trail (which had been a forest road many years ago) and I heard a single shot several minutes later.

The shot was not fired by my wife so we hunted several miles of that mountain from the river to the top for another week and saw far fewer deer and tracks than I had ever seen in several decades of living, working and hunting there. Most of the deer we saw were extremely spooky once we let them see us (a result of the popular 32-day Aug.-Sep. either-sex bow season in units 32, 32A and 33).

We also hunted for several days across the river on public land in Unit 39, walking and glassing from multiple "finger" ridges to the hillsides where mule deer traditionally bed. The people we encountered on ATVs inevitably asked us how we got up there and commented about how scarce the game was on public land.

### **Biology Ignored – Breeding Females Destroyed**

In 1999 IDFG helicopter counts showed the deer population in Unit 39 was only half recovered from the extreme 1992-93 winter losses, yet the Commission approved adding 900 antlerless rifle permits in the unit to increase the already excessive harvest of does and fawns by archers. The 4-week hunt resulted in 847 hunters killing 658 does and fawns (78% success) in 1999.

By 2004, doe/fawn harvest in that hunt had steadily declined to 466 for 842 hunters (55% success). The steady decline in antlerless harvests reached 29% by the sixth year and was evidence of too many productive females and replacement fawns being killed by hunters.

The biological options were: (a) immediately cut the number of permits by a minimum of 50%; (b) shorten the 4-week season to one week; or (c) eliminate the killing of does/fawns until the population was restored. Instead, SW Region Wildlife Manager Jon Rachael increased the number of antlerless permits by 33% to 1,200, and told the public the deer herd was healthy and increasing.

Ten days after the general buck, youth either-sex, and antlerless CH seasons ended on October 31, 2005, the archery hunters began shooting at mule deer of any size or sex during the peak of the rutting season through Nov. 30. Bowhunters who wanted to assure harvest odds of 33% or higher, with more than half of the bucks killed having 4 points or better, applied for the late hunt that ends Dec. 16.

### **Vows To Stop Supporting Mismanagement**

My wife of 10 years is a lifelong Idaho hunter with sharp eyes that are trained to spot game and the proven ability to consistently make one-shot kills on deer and elk. Twice she has vowed to give up hunting rather than continue to support the agency that is destroying our wildlife resource and our hunting heritage with its hands-off preservationist philosophy.

Yet a lifetime of hunting is in Patti's blood and, following another optimistic F&G report on deer survival in our immediate area, she purchased her 2006 deer tag and another \$44.75 cow elk permit. But there were few deer left in our units by Summer 2006 due to does and fawns being overharvested in 2005 and many of the rest dying from the combination of excessive loss of stored body fat and F&G's refusal to feed.

Two of my sons and one grandson have hunted with bow or muzzleloader for several years to take advantage of the special-privilege seasons when the game is far more vulnerable. But as the game gets increasingly scarce in their area they are forced to hunt more remote

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## The Real Threat... *continued from page 9*

locations where game is harassed less, and/or take marginal shots they would normally pass up.

For two years Patti and I purchased extra whitetail tags and took advantage of a gracious invitation from friends to help reduce the whitetail population on their private land north of Grangeville. But in 2006, our local area deer and elk populations were so obviously depleted that Patti refused to hunt.

### **Recruiting Young Hunters – Or Driving Them Away?**

Just before the October 2006 general deer season opened, one of my granddaughters who lives on the mountain in Unit 32A, called and said they hadn't seen any mule deer where they were fairly abundant several years ago. She asked if her 12-year-old daughter, a first time deer hunter, could at least see a few deer to hunt on the mountain above our home.

I explained that the only deer she might see that were not on posted land would be in less accessible spots where they were very difficult to stalk, or those that were harassed by dozens of pickups or ATVs traveling every road or forest trail in the State school section. While a few youngsters kill a mule deer that way, most come home empty-handed and soon lose all interest in hunting.

My granddaughter already knows that declining forest grouse have become the favorite target of frustrated deer hunters and that pheasants in our area are almost extinct. She sees far more magpies, hawks, horned owls, coyotes, skunks, foxes, rattlesnakes and raccoons than she does mule deer or upland game animals or birds that are legal to hunt.

On the mountain, where her brother grew up making pets of snakes and lizards and honing his hunting and shooting skills on rodents and predators, it is now a crime for her daughter to even possess a rattlesnake rattle or a magpie feather to adorn her "dream catcher." In school, F&G taught her daughter that magpies are beautiful songbirds, but did not tell her that they destroy tens of thousands of unhatched pheasants, or that the only healthy ecosystems are those where predators are not allowed to overwhelm and depress their prey populations.

An alarming number of friends, family members, and others in the young adult to age 55 group who contact me have either quit hunting entirely, or no longer take a hunting vacation with their family or friends. Unless you're willing to swap your rifle for a muzzleloader or bow and arrows, hunting with a group has largely become a spectator sport for all but the person who was lucky enough to draw a special privilege permit.

### **Who Do F&G Commissioners Represent?**

The Idaho F&G Commissioners who listen only to organized sportsmen seeking special treatment for special interest groups, appear unwilling to admit what is happening to our wild game and to the majority of hunters. How little they care is obvious from their failure to even

discuss the testimony from hunters concerning declining wild game populations in the meager 10 minutes that is allowed for discussion of public input.

At least one Commissioner is already questioning the need to continue funding the mandatory hunter harvest report for every hunter – suggesting that it would be "cheaper" to turn it into yet another survey of only 40% of hunters that can be manipulated to hide declining harvests. That is the one reliable tool Idaho citizens have to combat self-serving claims by dishonest resource managers.

### **Idaho Wildlife Policy Ignored**

The Commission's refusal to give all Idaho citizens who want to hunt an equal opportunity to harvest the wild game it is managing on their behalf, would appear to violate Idaho Wildlife Policy (see I.C. Sec. 36-103) as well as the citizens' civil rights. The Commission's unanimous decision not to support SJR106\* during the last legislative session confirms its intent to continue to take reasonable harvest opportunity away from most Idahoans and sell it only to those who will pay extra for the "privilege". (\*SJR 106 would have allowed Idaho voters to decide whether harvesting Idaho game, fish, and furbearers should be a Constitutional right for all – or remain a privilege that can be taken away, without cause or due process, at the whim of the Commission.)

### **The Way It Was**

Traditionally, the opening day of deer season was the most important day of the year for up to 155,000 resident Idaho hunters. If it fell on a weekday, it became a school holiday in many rural counties, and the most hotly debated issue among hunters and wildlife managers was whether to open the season on a specific October date every year or on the same Saturday in October.

In a general "any weapon" October mule deer season, the highest daily harvest occurs on a Saturday opening day, and most of the total harvest generally occurs during the first 5-7 days. The hunters in a family, and the non-hunting family members who accompanied them on their vacation, thoroughly enjoyed seeing and having the opportunity to hunt abundant wild game before it was spooked by hunters for several weeks.

Hunting in units less than an hour's drive from Boise we almost never encountered another hunter during a weekday after the opening week. Hunters who hunted after the first week included those whose work schedule prevented them from hunting earlier, or youngsters and a few adults taking advantage of the short either-sex season.

In the few units that had an early archery season, it lasted three weeks followed by a three-week closure before any other hunting was allowed. There were so few archers hunting these units that they had limited impact on the deer or on the traditional deer season opener.

### **Rifle Hunters Second Class Citizens**

But once the archery lobby convinced F&G to extend its early either-sex general season to 28 days and

give bowhunters more general seasons than rifle hunters had, Idaho's traditional rifle deer hunting families became second class citizens. To justify the gift of special privilege early and late bonus hunting seasons to bowhunters statewide, biologists and archers came up with the false claim that archer's deer hunting success was only one-tenth as high as that of rifle hunters.

Using the phone survey to "substantiate" that claim, SW Region Supervisor Al VanVooren and two friends lobbied the Commission to "make archery seasons fair" by increasing them so they were ten times longer than rifle seasons. Despite the fact that this absurd claim was proven false, anyone who purchased a hunting license, an archery permit and a regular deer tag in 2006 could hunt deer of either-sex and either species in various **general** archery seasons from Aug. 30 through Dec. 31.

As if that special privilege weren't enough, that archer could also compete with rifle hunters using any weapon in general rifle seasons - and with muzzleloader hunters using a muzzleloader in any of their assorted general seasons by buying a muzzleloader permit.

#### **Bowhunters Get Special Privileges**

I have watched enough big game animals killed with both longbow and compound bow to know that, in the hands of a skilled hunter and stalker who will pass up marginal shots, they are efficient weapons up to 50 yards, or further with a rangefinder. But pretending that today's precision engineered recurves or compound bows and arrows with razor-sharp broadheads are "primitive" weapons, which somehow entitle the user to kill scarce female animals during periods when they are most vulnerable, defies logic.

Yet the Commission reportedly just approved SW Region Wildlife Manager Jon Rachael's recommendation allowing bowhunters to continue killing declining mule deer does and fawns in Units 33, 34 and 35 based on his written "justification" - "Few does are taken by archers. Not a population concern." Those are the three units where, less than 10 months ago, IDFG reported that 96% of the winter-collared fawns and 38% of the winter collared adult does had already died.

Remember that an unknown number of does and new fawns died from all causes - including hunting - from May 2005 until January 2006 when these animals were first collared. In other words these are animals that survived for eight months and then began dying from malnutrition or were killed by predators shortly after they were collared in early winter.

#### **2003 Bowhunter Success 16%**

These are the same fawns that Rachael said did not need feeding last March when **87%** of them had already died (see [http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/hunt/MDI/fawn\\_mortality3.pdf](http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/hunt/MDI/fawn_mortality3.pdf)). I was not sure what Rachael meant when he said "(only a) 'few' does are taken by archers," so I checked the IDFG harvest reports for the three units in

2003 and found that 482 bowhunters killed 76 deer in the early general bow season in those units.

The 76 deer represented a **16%** bowhunter success rate and 46 of the 76 (61%) were does and fawns. Occasionally the archery antlerless kill is lower but for the last five years or the last 15 years an average of 60% of the deer killed in this early general season archery hunt in these three units have been does and fawns.

By comparison, 2,727 rifle hunters killed 409 deer for a **15%** rifle hunter success rate in 2003 and only 85 (21%) of those were does or fawns. All 85 were apparently killed by youth hunters since adult rifle hunters and muzzleloader hunters are not allowed to kill does or fawns in the units due to the extreme decline in the mule deer population.

In both 2006 and now in 2007, Rachael took the opportunity to hunt and harvest does or fawns away from youth rifle hunters - yet still gave it to bowhunters. This recruits more archers but is unfair to young rifle hunters.

#### **The Late Muzzleloader Buck Hunt**

In the Nov. 2003, limited controlled muzzleloader buck hunt during the rut, 141 hunters killed 52 bucks for a muzzleloader success rate of **37%**. In 2005 the success rate in that hunt increased to **65%** with 92% of the 91 bucks having four or more points.

Because the muzzleloader hunters were allowed to kill the bucks during the rut and on winter range (the two periods when they are most vulnerable) **59%** of the 143 hunters killed 4-point or better bucks. By comparison only **4%** of the 2,226 rifle hunters killed 4-point or better bucks.

The fact that a disproportionate percent of F&G employees participate in this late muzzleloader buck hunt and at the same time hunt elk in the late general season elk hunt is no accident. Following a normal Thanksgiving week storm, it is usually possible to shoot both deer and elk above the plowed state highway without much effort.

Allowing this late mule deer hunt causes the following problems: (a) accelerates November loss of stored body fat, significantly decreasing winter survival in bucks does and fawns; (b) delays uniform conception, increasing fawn losses to predation and malnutrition; (c) significantly reduces the average age of remaining bucks available to breed the following year; and (d) reduces the number of mature bucks and total bucks available to archers, rifle hunters and youth hunters the following year.

#### **Antlerless Thresholds**

In 1998 when we convinced the F&G Commission and Director Steve Mealey to start managing Idaho deer and elk with realistic objectives based on actual populations and carrying capacity, mule deer harvests were at record lows. But when regional wildlife managers began establishing population minimums below which no females or fawns could be harvested, they did not use carrying capacity as was intended.

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## The Real Threat... continued from page 11

If they had, this would have meant that every mule deer management unit in Idaho was below objectives, so no antlerless mule deer could have been harvested. It would also have been an admission that they had allowed mule deer numbers in their regions to remain at record lows by continuing to kill does and fawns following the massive 1992-93 winter losses in southern and central Idaho.

Mule Deer Analysis Area 6 where we live is made up of nine units, including Units 33, 34 and 35. But in the 1998-2003 Mule Deer Plan, aerial census counts were only published for Units 22 and 31, which were the only units where minimum antlerless harvest thresholds were originally established (both were below their minimums).

Subsequently an antlerless harvest threshold of only **2,000** total deer was established for unit 33 but even that low population goal was only exceeded in one year, 1998, by a mere 50 deer. When the 1998-2003 Mule Deer Management Plan was replaced (upgraded) in 2004, the new deer count totaled only **1,548** yet the antlerless harvest by both youth hunters and bowhunters continued.

To put this in perspective, historical estimates of the deer population in the 1,648 square miles of these three units from 1933-1992 varied between 10,000 and 30,000. And except during record low years, recorded annual harvests ranged between 1,242 and 2,648.

In 1992, Kuck, Nelson and Rachael estimated the deer population exceeded eight deer per square mile (1,648 sq. miles multiplied by eight deer equals a minimum of 13,184 deer). Allowing antlerless harvest with a deer population goal of only 2,000 guarantees that the mule deer herd will never recover.

But even with the unreasonably low antlerless threshold of 2000, deer biologists ignored it and, with deer densities of less than one per square mile, continued to allow the killing of breeding does and replacement fawns. Biologists in SE Idaho did the same thing using the same excuse (i.e. that bowhunters do not kill enough does to affect the population).

In a healthy mule deer herd that is not limited by inadequate forage or *excessive* predation, and where no antlerless hunting is allowed, each female has the potential to produce an average of 1.6 fawns per year. If half survive to become replacement yearlings (of which at least half are females) the number of females could increase 100% in three years and up to 1000% or more in 10 years.

Although excessive losses to predators, severe winters, drought, wildfires and other natural causes can reduce the degree of gain, **each female that is killed** from a herd that is not meeting its quota represents **dozens fewer bucks and does down the road**. The antlerless mule deer that have been killed by hunters since the mule deer recovery plan was adopted in 1998 would have restored mule deer populations if they had been left alive to increase the herds.

## Antlerless Mule Deer Hunt Violates Law

During the past two years Wildlife Bureau Chief Unsworth has repeatedly stated that the existing habitat in Idaho will support a population of 600,000 deer - an average of eight deer for every square mile of habitat throughout Idaho. With a population of less than one deer per square mile in 1,648 square miles of top mule deer habitat, I.C. Sec. 36-103 and 36-104(b)1-4 prohibits the F&G Commission from allowing any antlerless mule deer to be killed in those units.

Although I have used several units in the SW Region and some personal experiences to illustrate how IDFG biologists are destroying our hunting heritage by leaving us few animals to harvest, the same situation exists in most of Idaho. The failure of IDFG to maintain healthy buck:doe:fawn ratios in SE Idaho, with input from several sportsmen, is addressed elsewhere in this issue.

Because I receive from a few to dozens of emails and letters from concerned hunters every day, I know that the threat to our hunting heritage from IDFG is very real. In one-on-one in-person conversations with me, parents express their desire to insure that their children's first big game hunts are the type of enjoyable experience they had - rather than a scramble to jump out of a vehicle and race across a road right of way to get a hasty shot.

Instead of addressing these problems they created, IDFG biologists, with Commission and Legislative approval, have stopped managing wild game and fish to provide continued supplies (sustained yields) for harvest. Instead they have switched to providing tame "invasive species" like "catchable" hybrid rainbow trout and pen-reared male pheasants that do not reproduce in the wild.

This unfairly competes with commercial shooting and fishing facilities because F&G charges shooters and anglers far less than cost to shoot or catch these species that are reared entirely in captivity. The vast majority of hunters and anglers receive no benefit from this yet they are forced to subsidize these activities with their license dollars (which then become ineligible for matching federal excise tax dollars because they are not being used to **restore** game and fish populations as federal law requires).

## F&G Serving Two Masters

IDFG biologists are unsuccessfully trying to serve two masters - the sportsman conservationists who paid to rebuild a resource that provided sustained harvests, and the preservationists who intend to prohibit consumptive use of that resource. However the F&G Commission has the legal mandate to restore wild game and fish management to provide continued supplies for Idaho citizens to harvest.

But until the Commission admits that it is has become the problem - rather than the problem solver, there is little likelihood that honest game and fish management will be restored statewide. Meanwhile what does the future hold for Mattie Dovel (see photo on page 1) who hopes to follow in her Dad's and Granddad's footsteps?

# The High Cost of Predation

By Dr. Charles Kay

“Mountain lions, wolves, and other predators, and their supporters, simply do not and will not foot the bill.”

(For new readers who are not familiar with Dr. Kay's background, he has a PhD in wildlife ecology from Utah State University and is an adjunct professor and senior environmental scholar there. As a researcher in the Northern Rocky Mountains for 20-plus years, his 1993 predictions concerning the number of wolves that would result from introduction, their impact on game, and delisting delays that would occur have all come true.

This article appears in the current issue of MDF, the Mule Deer Foundation Magazine, and is reprinted here with permission from Dr. Kay and MDF. Previous articles on the subject of mule deer and predators by Dr. Kay that were also published in MDF appeared in the Dec. 2005-Jan. 2006 Outdoorsman and the Aug.-Sep. 2006 Outdoorsman.)

In an earlier MDF article, I discussed the biological costs of predation, but there are also economic and social costs. However, before we even begin to consider what a mule deer is worth, we need to understand how Fish and Game agencies are funded, especially here in the West.

Most state wildlife departments do not receive general fund appropriations from their respective legislatures. Instead, Fish and Game agencies are funded almost exclusively by hunter license fees and federal excise taxes on hunting equipment under the Pittman-Robertson Act. The federal government then allocates P-R funds back to the states based on their area, population, and the number of hunting licenses they sell.

There is also a requirement in the Pittman-Robertson Act that all hunting license fees must be earmarked for exclusive use by the state wildlife departments, if the state agencies are to receive P-R funds. Hunting license fees cannot be deposited in state general funds, but only into special accounts and those dollars spent only on wildlife.

These funding mechanisms, along with independent wildlife or game commissions, were established at the birth of modern game management to take politics out of wildlife management. If you think things are bad today, just imagine how it would be if wildlife had to compete with starving orphans or highway projects for state general funds each and every year.

**Non-Hunters Do Not Support Wild Game Management**  
This is also why state legislatures have delegated most wildlife regulatory powers to independent commissions or boards appointed for fixed terms by state governors. So,

what this means is that if you do not buy a hunting license or guns or ammo, you do not support wildlife management in your state.

Only state agencies manage wildlife, federal agencies manage habitat – except for ESA and treaty species such as migratory waterfowl. Moreover, without non-resident hunter license fees, many state wildlife agencies would be forced to close their doors.

Take Montana for example. Non-resident big game hunters pay over 90% of the hunting license fees collected by the state, while accounting for less than 10% of the deer and elk harvested each year.

Montana then uses those non-resident fees to subsidize its sport fishing and non-game programs, all of which do not pay their own way. This is true in most other states as well – big game hunters, not fishermen, are the only people who pay their own way.

So if predators lower game numbers and force state agencies to reduce hunting quotas, then hunter license revenues fall. This, in turn, forces wildlife departments to either cut back on staff and programs, or raise the cost of hunting licenses.

## How Much Is A Mule Deer Worth?

Which now brings us to how much a mule deer is worth. Surprisingly there is little hard data on this subject and the available numbers are all over the place.

Some economists I have talked to have told me that a mule deer is not worth anything! (That may be one reason why people consider economics a “dismal science”).

According to those economists, a mule deer is worth nothing because what we spend on the hunt is called discretionary spending. That is to say, if we did not spend our dollars chasing mule deer, we would spend them going to the movies, or out to dinner, or on some other activity.

On the other hand, individual hunters have paid more than \$150,000 for a single governor's permit to hunt a single mule deer! A non-resident wishing to hunt mule deer in Montana must pay anywhere from \$343 to \$795 for just a general season license, while a non-resident general season mule deer tag in Idaho will cost you nearly \$400.

It must also be remembered that hunting success for mule deer runs from 30% to 50%. So every mule deer harvested by non-resident hunters in Montana is worth from \$1,000 to \$2,400 to the state wildlife agency just in license fees.

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## High Cost of Predation *continued from page 13*

And this does not include the cost of guides, guns, ammo, food, lodging, travel, ATVs, horses or taxidermy fees. Resident expenditures are generally less and pay lower license fees but we are all paying nearly \$3.00 a gallon for gas or diesel!

### **Answer “At Least \$1,000”**

So again, what is a mule deer worth? My best guess, based on all the studies I have seen, is that each harvested mule deer represents at least \$1,000 in economic activity.

Recall in an earlier MDF article I estimated that mountain lions alone are killing approximately 1.2 million mule deer each year. If those deer had instead been taken by hunters, that would have generated \$1,200,000,000 in economic activity, which translates into 60,000 additional jobs. In my home state of Utah, Mountain lions are killing around 100,000 mule deer each and every year, while hunter success hovers near 33%. Now if hunters had the opportunity to take those 100,000 deer, instead of predators, the state could sell an additional 300,000 general season mule deer tags. At \$45 per resident license, the state is losing a minimum of \$1,350,000 per year not counting non-resident sales.

For those who think this may sound too optimistic, during the 1960s when widespread and effective predation control actually held predators at low numbers, Utah hunters took home nearly 130,000 deer a year. For comparison the 2005 mule deer harvest was under 25,000.

The social costs of predation are even higher, for hunters are the only people who actually pay to buy and maintain habitat, as well as actively opposing projects that damage the resource. And as every politician knows, hunters vote!

### **Nongame Supporters Don't Fund Wildlife**

There are all sorts of opinion surveys telling us how the general public supports wildlife. But those studies are virtually worthless because they tally only accepted social norms, not what people actually pay to support wildlife.

Look at the Mule Deer Foundation and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, for instance. They have thousands of members, who have donated millions of dollars and countless hours, to preserve mule deer and elk and to preserve and enhance habitat.

Now compare that with the Great Bear Foundation, which has been around for just as long, but which barely gets by – and which you have probably never heard about until now. So while opinion poll after opinion poll shows that the public loves grizzlies, mostly those who do not actually live with the bears, virtually none of these people dig into their pockets and fund wildlife.

And only hunters fund habitat protection. As you may have guessed, the Great Bear Foundation does not promote hunting as a management tool.

Utah recently developed a state management plan for wolves if those animals ever become established in the state. At one of the wolf meetings, a pro-wolf advocate got up and said, “So what if wolves decimate mule deer populations, hunting is on the decline, so who cares?”

True, deer permits sales have fallen as the state has had to institute a draw for general season tags. But is this because mountain lions and other predators are severely impacting Utah's deer herds, or because no one wants to hunt mule deer anymore?

By checking the draw statistics, I would have to live to be 300 years old before I would have a chance of drawing the best limited-entry mule deer permit in Utah! 100-to-1 odds are common in other western states, so the idea that big game hunting is on the decline is also false.

Total license sales in the U.S. have declined, but that is entirely due to falling interest in bird and small game hunting. Big game license sales continue to increase year after year.

It is true that most of that upward trend is fueled by eastern whitetail hunters who do not have to contend with either mountain lions or wolves. But mule deer license sales have fallen only because there are fewer mule deer to hunt, not because of a general lack of interest.

Which brings us to another problem, how do we recruit the next generation of mule deer hunters? I have a friend who lived in Arizona for years and he was able to draw only one mule deer permit in 10 years.

He has since moved to Nevada and there he has been luckier for he has drawn two mule deer tags in 10 years!! While I have not drawn a non-resident mule deer permit in Wyoming in the past 16 years.

Personally, as a young adult, I would never have gotten interested in mule deer hunting if I had to wait years between permits. Some states have special youth hunts, but with ever increasing mountain lion populations and wolf recovery looming in every western state, is that really a good long-term solution to hunter recruitment?

The opposition's long-range plan is clear. First they run mountain lions down our throat, which they have done. Then they finish off our hunting opportunities by promoting wolf recovery – this time with the full support of the federal government under the Endangered Species Act.

After that it is a simple matter to ban hunting since no one is “interested” in hunting anymore. Under the guise of “saving” elephants, Kenya banned all hunting in 1977 and their game populations have been in serious decline ever since.

As hunting opportunities fall, there is less and less support for wildlife because hunters, and the economic activity they generate, are the only ones who support wildlife to any significant degree. Mountain lions, wolves and other predators, and their supporters, simply do not, and will not, foot the bill.

# How Wolves Kill Deer, Moose

By George Dovel

Beginning on Feb. 12, 2007, four photos of wolves pursuing, pulling down and eating what, at first glance, appeared to be a female moose were widely circulated on the internet. The photos were taken shooting down from above and were captioned "From A Tree Stand."

As often happens, people's imagination replaces the unknown and the photos were soon described as a cow moose being pulled down by wolves in a specific location in North Idaho, while being photographed by an unidentified photographer in a tree stand. These photos, and photos published at about the same time in *Outdoor Life* of a single wolf pulling down and eating a meal from a live white-tailed doe, illustrate how wolves, coyotes and other canids kill their prey.

## Death Rarely Comes Easy

During the years I lived in what is now the Frank Church Wilderness in Central Idaho, I traveled many miles alone and often on foot, carefully observing things that few visitors ever see. I learned that death rarely comes easy or painlessly to the wild creatures that inhabit that area but with some it is quicker than with others.

One summer day I was riding alone up Coxe Creek and saw a golden eagle swooping down in the timber. When I got closer I saw that two eagles were harassing a mule deer doe that was working her way upstream near a rockslide.

I dismounted and circled around to get a better view and when I next spotted them the doe was down in the rockslide with muscles still twitching and one of the eagles was already tearing the flesh from the inside of a hind leg. When I examined her, her neck was twisted in a "crook" – a sight I have seen on other occasions when antelope or deer hit a fence or mesh net the wrong way.

Another day in January, two of my sons and I were on the former Hood Ranch on the Middle Fork of the Salmon when we spotted a cougar angling away from us along a small flat just above the river. There were several mule deer on the flat but the lion did not appear to pay any attention to them or us as it headed up a draw\* (\* a ravine or gully).

As we headed back to the cabin a yearling buck that had already lost its antlers headed uphill between us and the draw. My younger son Mike took off uphill with a single shot 20 gauge to shoot some chukars while Bob with his .22 rifle and I with my camera angled uphill toward the ravine hoping we might get another look at the cat.

The deer was still traveling uphill, between us and the ravine, when the cougar suddenly raced up out of it and bounded toward the small buck (and us). The deer tried to switch directions twice and each time the lion flipped its tail sideways like a rudder to change direction.

The lion's rush covering ~35 yards was extremely fast and when it hit the deer they both slid about 30 feet in the foot-deep snow. When the slide ended the cat pulled the deer about 6-8 feet without changing its grip on the top opposite side of the neck from where its body hit the deer.

The cat continued to bite that spot for a long time as it lay beside the deer. When I examined the deer later, I put my fingers in the two tooth holes, one at the top of the shoulder and one lower down in front of the shoulder, and removed three pieces of bone about a half inch long.

At no time did Bob or I detect any movement from the deer so I concluded that it was paralyzed by the spinal cord bite and subsequently killed by separation of and damage to the vertebrae and spinal cord. This lion was a very small female yet Rob Donley, who was hunting cougar in the area, confirmed my observation that this was the third mule deer she had killed in three days.

On Monumental Creek where I lived, a number of evening grosbeaks nested every summer. They were a favorite prey of sharp-shinned hawks, which caught them easily as they zig-zagged through the thick lodgepole stands trying to escape. As they were skewered and then eaten alive, they briefly made a screaming sound similar to the rabbits and other animals that were killed by horned owls and other predators during the night.

As the preservationists point out, killing is what all predators and most scavengers do to survive. But for some of the predators I have observed over time, the pursuit and "savaging" the prey appears to be an exhilarating sport as well as the means of surviving.



Many species like this golden eagle, red fox and magpie share the role of both scavenger and predator.

In my experience killing by canids (canines) such as coyotes and wolves involves a longer period from start to finish and can be especially brutal by human standards.

*continued on page 16*

## How Wolves Kill... *continued from page 15*

### Graphic Outdoor Life Photos

According to the story in Outdoor Life, Michael Veine was grouse hunting in Michigan's Upper Peninsula last October when he heard agonizing bellows in the distance. Traveling cautiously toward the noise he crept up on a wolf attacking a whitetail doe, lunging at her and biting her hind legs on the opposite riverbank.,

The wolf hamstringed the doe, pulled her down and began feeding on a hindquarter. The doe continued to bawl and tried to escape numerous times but, with her hind legs crippled, the wolf would bite her on the face and neck and easily pull her down again.

Veine was able to sneak within 100 yards and began taking pictures with a telephoto lens. He said the wolf appeared nervous from the bawling and left the scene several times but always returned.

### Doe Played Dead In Water

He described how at one point the doe lay in the water for 10 minutes and he thought she was dead. But when the wolf did not come back she picked up her head, looked around, and used her front legs to drag herself from the icy river back onto the bank.

When he couldn't stand to watch any more he left and returned the following morning but couldn't find the deer. Veine discussed this with Isle Royale Wolf Researcher John Vucetich who said wolves customarily eat their prey when it is alive, and death sometimes comes faster when an entire pack feeds on a single animal.

They also discussed "Surplus Killing" - wolves sometimes killing far more than they can eat. Vucetich said it's like a short circuit in the wolf and typically occurs in the winter when snow is deep and prey is easy to kill.

In addition to showing various stages of the attack, two of the published photos graphically show the large quantity of muscle, hide and hair that was eaten by the wolf before it left the live doe the last time.

### The "Tree Stand" Photos

Because the wolves pursued the moose some distance in the so-called "From A Tree Stand" photos, it seemed fairly obvious they were taken from the air. With help from Julie Smithson [www.propertyrightsresearch.org](http://www.propertyrightsresearch.org), I learned the wolves killing the moose were photographed in Isle Royale National Park from an airplane by wolf researcher Vucetich just over a year ago.

His article, containing the photos of the incident was published on Feb. 12, 2006. Readers with internet access can view all four photos and read the article at: [http://www.isleroyalewolf.org/photo\\_ess/pe\\_EP\\_kills\\_moose.htm](http://www.isleroyalewolf.org/photo_ess/pe_EP_kills_moose.htm).

Vucetich described how he and his pilot spotted a pack of wolves moving toward the bull moose and circled to see what would happen when they met. The moose turned and ran and the wolves chased it until it reached some trees and stopped to make a stand.



The wolves were biting at its hindquarters and each time it spun around to fight those wolves others would grab a hind leg and hang on.



Wolves pulled the moose down four times in a 40-minute period and the snow was soon red with blood where the moose had made its stand. When it was still alive but could no longer get up all eight wolves ate their fill.



# Winter Feeding Letters

(NOTE: In an article in Pocatello's *Idaho State Journal*, IDFG SE Region Communications Specialist Jennifer Jackson wrote, "We all want what is best for wildlife. When Fish and Game [under the guidance of the Winter Feeding Advisory Committee] makes the choice NOT to feed wintering wildlife, it is a decision made in the best interest of wildlife for biological reasons."

"Idaho Fish and Game doesn't want to feed elk or deer for a day, we want them to be able to truly have the means and abilities to sustain themselves for many lifetimes to come--naturally. Bottom line — feeding presents more problems for wildlife than it solves, and that goes against Idaho Fish and Game's mission."

The following response to Jackson's article by David McAtee was submitted to the *Journal* but was only published on its internet blog. It was since forwarded to us for publication as a letter to the editor. — ED)

Editor, *The Outdoorsman*:

In the Jan. 28 *Idaho State Journal*, Idaho Department of Fish and Game spokesperson Jennifer Jackson laid out, for the second time this winter, the official "party line" of the department regarding supplemental winter feeding for deer and elk.

Once again she persists in perpetuating the identical litany of myths, misconceptions and outright falsehoods that the department has been peddling to sportsmen for decades in order to disguise the fact that the IDF&G utilizes winter kill (starvation) as a means of population control.

She tells us that the department feeds big game "under the guidance of the Winter Feeding Advisory Committee" but neglects to disclose that the members of said committee are picked by the department from among the group of puppets who are known to be willing to rubber stamp whatever policy the department sets forth.

She tells us about "studies conducted in various states" which purport to show that concentrating animals increases the potential for transmission of communicable diseases. I shudder to think how many sportsmen's dollars went into those studies because actually that's a total no-brainer.

Of course, disease transmission potential increases when critters congregate, but what we sportsmen want to hear, even those of us who are not accountants, is the infamous "bottom line." And this bottom line, which Jackson neglects to reveal, is that the increase in survival rates of winter-fed animals exceeds by far the potential loss of fawns and calves due to the small decrease in reproductive rates.

The way the department trumpets the increased disease transmission factor, we should expect the elk in western Wyoming and northern Utah to be close to

extinction after a century of disease transmission and reduced birth rates while congregated on their winter refuges.

Nothing could be further from the facts. Elk herds in both states are thriving. Perhaps Jackson could explain in her next article just when we should expect the dire consequences of winter feeding to show up among the herds of our neighbors to the east and south?

She tells us that winter feeding can "disrupt migration patterns" knowing full well that deer and elk are not even migratory creatures. The fact that nomadic animals tend to follow "predictable" routes, basically from higher to lower elevations on a seasonal basis when they run out of forage is simply a reflection of the fact that Idaho's topography is not subject to annual change (another no-brainer).

Each year the high country and the low country are always in the same places they were the previous year. It has absolutely nothing to do with pregnant does or cows seeking out the same spot to drop their fawns where they themselves hit the ground as newborns.

One can't help wondering whether Jackson is confusing our deer with salmon, which truly are migratory animals. Our deer, however, are perfectly capable of thriving anywhere they can find an adequate food supply, whether natural or manmade.

Interestingly, Jackson gives her tacit blessing to the elk feeding operation at the National Elk Refuge in Jackson Hole, due to the fact that "only 25 percent of the historic winter range remains in the Jackson Valley." This begs the question, how much of the historic winter range survives in Idaho? My guess would be far less than 25 percent.

The first white settler in Idaho homesteaded the very choicest piece of big game winter range. The second one grabbed the second best, and so it went. Now there are close to a million of us, each and every one squatted on a piece of historic winter range. If it's true that Wyoming has lost 75 percent of its historic winter range, surely we've lost 99 percent!

Jackson concedes that "budgetary constraints" do play at least a minor role in the department's notorious preference for seeing our deer herds starve rather than feeding them.

But she fails to mention that the department collects tag fees specifically earmarked for winter feeding amounting to close to a half million dollars annually, and that its actual expenditures on hay and other food are invariably far less than 10 percent of what they collect from us sportsmen. The other 90 percent-plus goes for salaries or motor vehicles, of which they have more than they have employees.

*continued on page 18*

## Feeding Letters *continued from page 17*

She happily informs us that many other state F&G departments are opposed to winter feeding. Big surprise! Most any bureaucrat, given the choice of expanding his empire or feeding starving deer can be counted on to do as ours have done. A bureaucracy is a bureaucracy, no matter which state it calls home.

Jackson quotes "an old Chinese proverb" about the wisdom of teaching a man to fish and thereby taking care of him for life, as opposed to giving him a fish to take care of him for only a day. Where her analogy breaks down is if the starving man dies that first day, all her teaching goes for naught.

The IDF&G plan for managing our deer and elk is equivalent to that of the cattle rancher who, explaining to his banker why he went broke said, "I just barely got them damn cows trained to get along without any food and they up and died on me."

For at least the last 20 years the emergency feeding efforts of the IDF&G have been a long story of too little, too late, a clear-cut case of treating vast problems with half-vast solutions. If we keep going another 10 years the same way, one tough winter is all it will take and our southeast Idaho deer herds will be just like the "great abundance of elk" Jackson says the Indians told Lewis and Clark were living along the "Kooskooskee" in 1806 — nobody will ever see one.

### **Dave McAteer - Chubbuck**

(NOTE: Following formation of our SW Region Winter Feeding Advisory Committee late in 1994, our chairman sent a letter to other western state F&G agencies requesting answers to questions we had concerning emergency big game feeding programs. The following letter, dated Dec. 12, 1994, is the response we received from Dr. Dan L. Baker who was involved in feeding research with the Wildlife Research Center in Fort Collins, Colorado for more than a decade.

Dr. Baker provided a mule deer matrix that allowed determination of the stage of malnutrition from a quick glance at a distance, and research material resulting in our development of Wildlife Energy Blocks as an alternative to feeding and baiting. IDFG received copies. — ED)

### SW Region Winter Feeding Advisory Committee:

I will try to provide you with the information you requested.

We recognize that habitat improvement of critical deer winter ranges is an important long-term solution to supplemental feeding. To accomplish this requires cooperation with other land use agencies such as the BLM and Forest Service. We are working with these agencies whenever possible to enhance the plants (particularly shrubs) important to deer survival.

Unfortunately, the type of winter situations that our feeding policy is intended to address are so severe that

carrying capacity for deer is virtually zero. Mortality is generally density independent.

*When to feed?* The biological criteria regarding "when to feed" is based on a simulation model developed by Dr. Tom Hobbs, a scientist at our research center here in Ft. Collins. I've enclosed a reprint of this publication and a disk copy of this model for your use, which allows wildlife managers to make herd specific or location specific decisions if and when to begin supplemental feeding based on site specific weather conditions.

*What to feed?* Several years ago I was given a research assignment to develop and test a supplemental ration for winter feeding of small ruminants such as deer and antelope.

*How to feed?* During the winter of 1983-84 we fed approximately 30,000 mule deer, 10,000 antelope and 5,000 elk. The logistics of the operation were overwhelming but we were generally successful and we learned a lot about what works and what doesn't work when it comes to providing adequate amounts of feed to starving deer.

*Public attitudes toward winter feeding?* We conducted public attitude surveys following the winter of 1983-84 to see how the public felt about the winter feeding program. We found that the vast majority of the general public supported our decision to feed starving deer and antelope. However the public must be constantly educated and reminded that it is a normal process for deer to die (average mortality is about 10-15%) and that our policy is not to feed during normal winters. It is the infrequent severe winter that we are concerned about (mortality predicted to be 30% or greater for adult females).

*Economics of winter feeding?* We make a very superficial attempt to address this question in the enclosed manuscript. This is a complex question that needs the attention of a natural resource economist. While it is relatively straightforward to calculate the direct costs of feeding deer in the winter, it is something else to put a value on a deer and determine the cost/benefit of saving them.

In summary, it's my opinion based on our studies and experiences that the long held view of most wildlife managers that you cannot successfully feed big game is largely a myth. Our studies support the conclusion that you can feed deer artificial rations and have a significant impact on body condition and mortality. There may be other reasons not to feed starving deer in winter (economical, social, philosophical) but from a biological standpoint, it works.

In conclusion, the general attitude here in Colorado is that winter feeding is no less valuable than any other wildlife management tool when applied to the right circumstances at the right times in the right places.

**Dan L. Baker**

**Wildlife Research Center, Fort Collins**

# Domestic Elk Update

## **HSUS – IDSCAC Demonstrate Together**

A couple of weeks before its planned “Camo Day” demonstration on the Statehouse steps in Boise on Jan. 16, the Idaho Sportsmen’s Caucus Advisory Council (ISCAC) realized it was hopelessly short of meeting its goal of 3,000 members to demonstrate. On January 2, 2007, the following bulletin was posted on several Idaho Websites:

### **Please Join Us for Camo Day to Help Stop Canned Hunts in Idaho** - January 2, 2007: 12:00 AM

Please join The Humane Society of the United States (on Tuesday, Jan. 16, 2007 from Noon – 2 P.M.) for an important day in Idaho to help animals

The Humane Society of the United States and the Idaho Sportsmen’s Caucus Advisory Council will be teaming up to stop canned hunts in Idaho. Animal protection advocates will be meeting with their legislators, lobbying and rallying alongside Idaho hunters and fisherman. Idaho sportsmen will be arriving dressed in camouflage; animal protection advocates can receive their free Camo Day HSUS T-shirts between 10 a.m. and noon at the Thomas Hammer Coffee Shop in Boise (see sidebar for address and map). If we work together, we can stop canned hunts in Idaho and protect animals from cruel hunting practices.

An RSVP is not essential but requested. Please RSVP to Jake Oster at 202-955-3672 or email to joster@hsus.org. This event is free of charge. Hope to see you there! Jake Oster and Kelley Dupps Grassroots Team, The HSUS Government Affairs.

Possibly because of criticism from several ISCAC members who learned of this unusual alliance before the demonstration, the anti-hunting HSUS members were reportedly asked not to stand on the Capitol steps with the ISCAC demonstrators. About 80 demonstrators, including retiring IDFG Director Steve Huffaker, stood on the steps and about the same number stood on the sidewalk below.

### **Bills Supported By ISCAC Fail in Committee**

On Feb. 13, 2007 the Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee heard testimony opposing elk ranching from the ISCAC lobbyist and members, Nate Helm representing Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife, and Bill London representing the Idaho Conservation Officers Assn. Most of the 32 people who testified supported elk ranching but they were divided on support for existing regulations versus Senate Bill 1074.

S1074, reportedly written by Idaho Elk Breeders lobbyist Stan Boyd and former Sen. Laird Noh, would add licensing requirements and allow strict penalties, including loss of license, at the discretion of Idaho Ag officials. Two bills by Sen. Langhorst would have required double fencing, prohibited importing domestic cervidae, placed a moratorium on elk ranches and made domestic elk importation or hunting felony offenses.

A fourth bill by Sen. Schroeder would have imposed a five-year moratorium on domestic elk farms. On Feb. 9, Boyd sent an email to a group of elk breeders advising that, during lunch with Senators Langhorst and Stennett, they said if the elk breeders bill made it to the Senate floor they would vote for it.

### **Many Elk Breeders Opposed S1074**

On Feb. 15, three of the bills failed to get out of Committee and the elk breeders’ bill was sent to the Senate floor with a “do pass” recommendation. It passed the Senate by 24-9 with one absent and Sen. Siddoway excused from voting too avoid a conflict of interest. Neither Langhorst nor Stennett voted for it

Because a majority of elk breeders strongly opposed S1074, it was held by the Speaker of the House for further discussion and consideration of amendment. On March 14 it was sent to the House Ag Committee with a single word change that provided elk ranchers could only lose their license if they were aware they were breaking the law.

A copy of a proposed “bad actor” amendment to the existing elk farm statute was included which provided progressive stages of penalties that required licensing and then loss of license and up to \$100,000 in fines for a fourth offense. On March 16 a number of elk breeders and others testified in opposition to passage of any version of S1074, including Rex Rammell who said that he was the bad actor and existing regulations had forced him out of business.

The bill died in Committee on a split 5-5 vote so the domestic elk status remains unchanged. Meanwhile Rammell was acquitted of the obstruction charge by IDFG for straddling one of his elk that had been shot, and he has filed a \$1.3 million tort claim against the state alleging it was negligent in its response to the elk that escaped from his hunting facility.

### **Ranchers Charge F&G Hypocrisy**

The elk breeders who opposed S1074 pointed out the apparent hypocrisy near the Idaho border in Oregon where the Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife operates its own high fence elk hunt, selling lottery chances to hunt elk in the Starkey research enclosure. The elk are born and raised inside the enclosure and driven into small fenced pastures and corrals where they are fed in the winter and “worked” and medicated in squeeze chutes once a year.

Each year successful elk permit applicants are congratulated on drawing the hunting permits and are allowed to hunt and kill these domesticated elk in the largest of four high-fenced pastures. Recent hunter success is 36%-54% for archers with a ratio of **20** mature bulls (age 3-11) per 100 cows. Surplus elk are loaded into trucks and shipped to other locations in Oregon to supplement and improve wild elk herds.

# A Warning to Outdoorsmen

By Dr. Valerius Geist

Now that cysts of *Echinococcus* have been found in a Yellowstone Park elk, there is no point “catching religion” over that. That find is trivial. What is not trivial and has to get out to all outdoor people is:

### Do not fool around with wolf or coyote or fox feces!

Do not poke it with a stick to find out what kind of hair or bone fragments are inside! It is the feces that are so dangerous to us!

The feces may contain huge masses of dried, easily airborne eggs of *Ecchinococcus granulosus*. If you poke dry feces – and the surface dries fast! – you are likely to liberate the eggs and make them float about you in the air.

You can inhale or ingest airborne eggs, which will develop inside you into cysts in lungs, liver or brain. If you ingest enough of these you may get a fatal load. Worse still, it might be *Echinococcus multilocularis*!

Secondly, make sure your dog never eats deer, elk or moose offal. If the offal has the cysts, these liberate tapeworm heads inside the dog’s gut. These grow into tiny tapeworms, which produce eggs.

The eggs go out with the poo of your dog, into your yard. You put the family and yourself at risk ingesting these tiny readily airborne eggs and wind up disabled or dead.

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I have practiced these precautions for 50 years. It is nothing new. If you see wolf or coyote feces do not pick berries or mushrooms close by. The parasite’s eggs are easily spread by air or rain onto the surrounding vegetation (that’s how elk pick it up).

Already someone is proclaiming that *Echinococcus* infections are rare, in short somebody is trying to mollify or placate the reader. That is unprofessional! That’s not scholarship or science, but irresponsible advocacy!

The professional thing to do is to explain when *Echinococcus* is not a threat, as well as when it is a threat! And let the client decide! A kid kneeling down to poke around in dry wolf feces to see whether it’s deer or elk hair or whatever is very much at risk of catching a deadly dosage of *Echinococcus*!

In a similar vein, today it’s unprofessional to declare wolves as harmless. It is professional to explain when they are harmless and when they are everything but!

Our colleagues studying urban coyotes in California developed a system of behavioral indicators that lead progressively to an attack by coyotes on children. Anyone reading that is prepared to judge the danger level and prevent the, otherwise inevitable, tragedy. That’s professionalism at its best!

Wolves, by the way, follow much the same predictive pattern! I really appreciate the fine work on urban coyotes done by Rex O. Baker and Robert M. Timm. Please spread the word!

**Cheers, Val Geist**

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