

The Outdoorsman

Bulletin Number 27

April 2008

Idaho F&G Defies Emergency Feeding Criteria – Lets Deer and Elk Starve to Death Again

by George Dovel



One of 14 dead deer photographed by Harvey Peck and Steve Leaman over a distance of 75 yards. These animals starved less than 10 miles from Walton's Feed in Montpelier, Idaho.

Although Idaho did not experience the widespread abnormal precipitation in November and early December that often signals a severe winter, continued below average temperatures resulted in the freezing levels steadily lowering and an abnormal accumulation of deep snow. This meant that few, if any, bull elk were trapped in the high country as often happens during a severe winter.

Excuses Instead of Action

But as freezing levels steadily lowered on big game winter range and snow failed to melt due to lack of sunshine, big game animals in some locations were trapped at the lower elevations in belly-deep snow with their forage covered by several feet of snow. When knowledgeable outdoorsmen from the area asked SE Region officials to begin emergency feeding they ignored the IDAPA Rules that require them to feed and offered the following excuse:

"It is important to remember that deer and elk carry their 'kitchen pantries' on their backs during the winter – as long as they have sufficient fat reserves and

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Signs posted by landowners in the Southeast Region prohibit hunting and fishing access in protest of IDFG failing to feed starving deer and then increasing deer harvest opportunity.

minimal disturbance, the animals need very little feed to get them through the winter."

A Little Knowledge Can Be Dangerous

Although it is gratifying to finally hear IDFG tacitly admit that depleting the fat reserves (with late hunting seasons, wolves or other stress factors) reduces the animals' chance of surviving the winter, they failed to add "during a normal winter." They also failed to translate the ambiguous term "very little feed" into the amount of energy-producing nutrients that will still be required.

But 2007-08 was not a normal winter. As Colorado Research Biologist Dr. Dan Baker pointed out emphatically to Idaho winter feeding committees in his December 1994 letter, when winter forage is covered with more than a foot of snow and ice, even mule deer in good condition that are not fed supplemental rations will rarely survive.

Regardless of body fat, when the rumen of a deer, elk or other ruminant is empty, it will eat whatever forage

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F&G Defies Feeding Criteria - *continued from page 1* is available to satisfy its hunger. If digestible nutrients are not found, it will eat such indigestible items as yellow pine bark, woody branches, or anything else that may take hours or days to even partially digest.

When that happens, the microorganisms that normally assist in digesting a variety of forage quickly begin to die. At this point it is extremely important to provide adequate nutrients immediately – not several days or weeks later – to allow the animal to be able to continue to digest the kind of forage it requires in order to survive until spring green-up.

Regional Supervisors Brazenly Ignore IDAPA Rules

But this article is not about the biology of winter feeding – that subject has been thoroughly addressed in previous issues which are available on request. It is about IDFG Regional Supervisors, in at least five of the seven regions plus the McCall Sub-Region, brazenly ignoring their lawful mandate to stockpile feed on site in locations where emergency big game feeding has traditionally occurred, in order to begin feeding immediately when any one of four criteria exist (see IDAPA 13.01.18.103. “Feed Stockpiles”).

It is about all of the Regional Supervisors brazenly ignoring their lawful mandate to declare a feeding emergency and begin feeding immediately when winter forage is limited or unavailable due to fire or unusual weather – i.e. unusually deep snow (see IDAPA 13.01.18.100, 101 and especially 102 d.).

Want Written Proof? – Here it Is

Read the “IDFG Headquarters News Release” dated February 11, 200, titled “Emergency Winter Feeding.” It described how snow depths along the entire South Fork of the Payette River winter range were two and one-half to three times as deep as normal, exceeding 36 inches at Garden Valley and more than 48 inches at Lowman, and how the criterion for winter feeding – a minimum snow depth on the south facing slopes of 18 inches – had been exceeded since **January 7, 2008**.

Then it announced the **February 11th** decision by IDFG Southwest Region Supervisor “Scott Reinecker, “in concurrence from the Regional Winter Feeding Advisory Committee,” to “declare a winter feeding emergency for deer in the Boise County area.” It added, “Fish and Game will commence with winter feeding activities (and) is preparing for emergency winter feeding.”

The news release admits that Reinecker stalled around for a month after the criterion of when to feed (established by IDFG in 1993, passed by Commission Rule in 1994, and adopted with full force of law by the Idaho Legislature effective April 3, 1995) had been met. It also implies that none of the other F&G requirements had been complied with (i.e. feed and troughs stockpiled on site by December 1st and feed sites plowed and prepared when possible feeding was anticipated).

Delay Guaranteed Most Unfed Deer Would Die

Regardless of whether or not this delay was dictated by Boise Headquarters – as is usually the case – it meant that most of the deer in deep snow areas not already being fed by private citizens during that month would die before spring. Every time abnormal weather conditions create a similar crisis it is private citizens – not IDFG – who respond in time to preserve a healthy core population.

Late in December, private citizens in the Garden Valley area began asked both IDFG and Winter Feeding Advisory Committee members to begin feeding hungry deer and elk that had invaded their community searching for food. The abnormal snow depths were obvious to everyone but their requests fell on deaf ears.

The same situation was occurring in the Lowman area and in other specific deep snow areas across southern Idaho and as far north as the Canadian border. F&G officials responded – not by feeding – but by closing isolated problem areas to the public.

Anti-Feeding Presentation Not Accurate

Five months earlier, on August 4, 1997, IDFG conducted a Mule Deer Management Workshop at Idaho State University pushing its anti-winter feeding message. Invited speaker, Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) Biologist Richard Kahn, claimed that Colorado no longer feeds mule deer during a severe winter, relying entirely on improved natural forage for mule deer survival.

Yet five months later, on January 9, 2008, CDOW’s Gunnison Area Wildlife Manager, J. Wenum, announced that although mule deer were in good condition, deep snow and colder temperatures in the Gunnison Basin were causing deer to deplete their energy reserves too early. “We know from experience that the snow conditions could soon start to take a toll on deer.”

From 20-30 CDOW employees and 80 volunteers fed pelletized feed to a maximum of 9,500 deer at 134 sites and nearly 600 antelope at 12 sites. They used snow cats and a helicopter to feed 14 tons of hay daily to 3,200 elk.



Weekly aerial monitoring of mule deer in other areas by Colorado biologists indicated snow depths still allowed these deer to move separately and forage (note buck has not yet shed antlers).

Unlike Idaho, Colorado biologists monitored deer and snow condition in other areas from the ground daily and by flying, including over remote areas, at least once a week. In addition to visually determining body condition up close and checking bone marrow content on road kills, seeing deep snow and the animals using a single beaten trail rather than foraging in separate trails from the air indicates the immediate need for emergency feeding in areas where the animals can be accessed.

On February 15, 2008, after CDOW determined that a smaller number of mule deer in the Eagle Valley in northwestern Colorado needed feeding, the Commission promptly approved it and the feeding began immediately. Once again CDOW advertised for volunteers to donate their time, equipment or money (see photo below),



Although the temperatures were warming and the south slopes beginning to bare up on April 1, CDOW was still feeding pelleted feed to 9,100 deer at 114 sites in the Gunnison Basin plus about 500 antelope. Although they were only able to feed about half of the estimated 21,000 deer in the Basin, the deer they saved provided a healthy core population to quickly rebuild the herds.

They used snow cats to pack the snow and provide a solid base for feeders on snow machines to distribute the feed in a series of free choice piles exactly as they had done in 1984 and 1997. The pelleted formula is still manufactured as “wafers” so it will remain on top of the snow and by feeding free choice in individual spaced piles, most of the replacement fawns and mature breeding bucks are saved.



The Truth about Colorado’s Feeding Policy

But what about Biologist Kahn’s claim that Colorado no longer feeds mule deer? In reality Colorado has the same big game winter feeding policy that has existed for more than two decades, and which has allowed Colorado to quickly rebuild its mule deer herds following abnormal deep-snow winters in 1978-79, 1983-84, 1996-97 and now in 2007-2008.

That policy is: “Emergency feeding of big game ungulates may be used as a last resort to reduce unusually severe winter-related mortality in cases where the anticipated winter-related mortality exceeds thirty percent (30%) of the adult female segment of a major big game population. Compared to small game, big game populations recover more slowly from significant winter mortality. Therefore, consideration should also be given to the effects of mortality on population recovery and associated impacts to local economies, license numbers, etc.” (emphasis added)

CDOW openly discusses the fact that, left to the whims of nature, there would be massive die-offs during an extreme winter in some areas which would require many years to restore healthy productive herds. Although its feeding policy addresses severe winters where more than 30% of does might die from all causes, a Colorado study published in 1985 by Baker, Hobbs et al confirmed the necessity to also feed and save replacement fawns, mature bucks, and does with healthy fetuses in order to retain a viable core population.

During 1983-84 with Colorado’s worst winter in modern times, CDOW fed 30,000 mule deer statewide in the worst areas. In many areas forage was available and mule deer and elk survived without major losses yet a comparison of surviving deer fed in the worst area with surviving deer where some natural forage was available still revealed a significant difference in survival as follows:

1983-84 Deer Mortality in Colorado per Amount Fed Daily

Age-class	None	Two pounds	Unlimited
Fawns	74%	39%	38%
Bucks	54%	46%	16%
Does	38%	22%	14%
All	53%	33%	24%

An intensive study by Baker published in 1985, involved 5,000 deer and those that survived were carefully counted through the month of June. Constant monitoring and recording the percentage of deer classified as being in “good,” “fair” or “poor” condition confirmed other benefits of feeding properly that are too often ignored.

In February, March and even April, the percentage of deer in “good” condition continued to decline in both the unfed group and the group that was fed an average of only

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two pounds daily. Among adult females, this results in absorbed or aborted fetuses or a generation of stunted fawns and yearlings. But in the herds that were fed free choice, body condition continued to improve from February on, resulting in a healthy fawn crop in May-June.

These deer also had only one-third as many buck fatalities as the group fed only two pounds, which assured uninterrupted healthy buck-to-doe ratios. But it would take at least 2-3 years for the group fed only two pounds to even restore normal production rates in a reduced deer population.

The Economics of Emergency Deer Feeding

A subsequent study by Lubow et al published in Nov. 1996, found that feeding on only five percent of Colorado mule deer range only during extreme winters about once every 12 years resulted in a long-term annual gain of 2.6% in the number of mule deer bucks harvested in the entire state. Using only the \$250 carcass (food) value of each extra buck harvested, the study reported an economic benefit of \$3.6 million resulting from total feeding costs of only \$1 million.

That study also reported a maximum economic benefit of \$1,268 to local communities for each extra buck harvested as a result of feeding. This represented a potential gain of more than \$18 million from a \$1 million investment yet IDFG claims that emergency feeding programs are not justified because they reach such a small percentage of the total number of animals statewide.

The most obvious difference between feeding in the two states is that Colorado puts the feed where it can do the most good while Idaho feeds only in areas where the starving animals are most visible to the public and the media. Idaho's policy of not feeding until fawns are dying defies logic since that also means the prized trophy breeding bucks, weakened by the rut, will also die.



Starving mule deer fawn struggling in deep snow in southeast Idaho is evidence that feeding programs are too late.

Origin of Idaho's Mandatory Feeding Rule

From the early 1920s through 1950, IDFG stored hay, and later also cubes, in barns on various winter ranges and used the stored feed to prevent massive mule deer and elk losses during the occasional extreme winter. During the 1948-49 winter, IDFG distributed **1,770 tons** of cubes and 511 tons of baled hay to 15,000 deer and 1,750 elk.

To survive over the four-month-long winter the deer required 2,700 tons and the elk required 840 tons so those that received the minimum ration thrived and many of those that did not die. The following photo shows fat mule deer that were fed hay and cubes during that extreme deep-snow winter of 1948-49 on the South Fork of the Payette River winter range near Garden Valley.



Fat mule deer doe with twin fawns being fed near Garden Valley, Idaho during the extreme 1948-49 winter.

Despite the abnormal snow depths, the feed was evenly distributed along the narrow road above the Payette River so that every animal had access to hay or cubes. In the following photo note how the deer are evenly spaced behind the Power Wagon that is able to "bulldoze" its way through the drifts that occurred since the previous feeding.



Fifty-nine years ago the equipment was more primitive but the animals were fed properly.

With a few minor exceptions IDFG failed to feed in the Clearwater and Panhandle Regions in 1948-49 and the elk death toll was heavy along the Lochsa and South Fork of the Clearwater Rivers. Although feed was stored the following winter, the weather was also severe until mid-February and a group of 200 outdoorsmen from towns along the upper St. Maries River, established 32 feed sites, organizing loggers, ranchers, merchants and even railroad crews to donate hay, machinery and equipment for experienced volunteers to feed.

Wardens Fired, Demoted for Feeding Starving Deer

The following winter was relatively mild but the 1951-52 winter produced record snowfalls in December, January and February. Although IDFG barns were filled with hay, IDFG Director Murray refused to feed, claiming that feeding caused more death losses than not feeding.

Finally, unable to condone the wanton waste of thousands of animals, local game warden Karl Dresser unlocked the storage barns from Garden Valley to Grandjean and he and two other wardens began feeding. Murray responded by firing Dresser and demoting the other two wardens while thousands of deer died.

Idaho hunters were outraged and demanded a hearing to insist that Murray be fired. Well-known outdoor writer Ted Trueblood wrote an editorial in his *Statewide* column charging that Murray and the F&G Commission had violated the public trust and should all be replaced.

Twenty years later former fisheries biologist Dick Woodworth was forced to resign as IDFG Director following his failure to feed properly after authoring a booklet claiming that feeding deer hay will kill them. His replacement fed timely and properly but in the severe 1983-84 winter, a new Director, former fisheries biologist Jerry Conley, allowed hundreds of deer and elk to die before he finally was forced to feed.

Feeding Delay Blamed on Lack of Funding

For the first time in 50 years IDFG blamed its failure to feed properly on lack of money and convinced the Southeast Idaho Rod and Gun Club to support a deer, elk and antelope tag fee increase that would raise nearly half a million dollars every year solely for winter feeding. Realizing that big game required feeding only once every few years the 1984 bill, HB 596, was amended to include winter range improvement, depredation control and predator control as alternate uses of the dedicated fund.

F&G claimed to be feeding 16,500 deer, 600 elk and 500 antelope while the bill was being considered and it passed with widespread support from hunters who saw it as the solution to IDFG's failure to feed timely. But the Department quickly used the dedicated winter feeding money for routine vehicle maintenance and to hire six new full-time employees with six new 4WD pickups.

1988-89 Winter - Same Failure, Different Excuse

Five years later another severe winter hit southern Idaho but Southeast Region biologists claimed the deer

didn't need feeding despite entering the winter in poor condition following five years of summer drought. When Rep. Pete Black finally forced them to feed they spent less than \$5,000 and later admitted losing 20,000 deer to starvation that winter.

Refusal to Feed Cost \$Millions in Losses

Based on their carcass value alone, the loss of 20,000 deer at \$200 per deer resulted in a **direct loss of four million dollars** to Idaho citizens in just one region! If IDFG had saved 5,000 of the deer that starved to death they could have quickly repopulated the SE Idaho herds.

But instead of even trying to mitigate the loss, Conley and his biologists further decimated the mule deer population by continuing to sell thousands of extra antlerless permits allowing extra does or fawns to be taken. When they killed most of the remaining mule deer and thousands of elk by refusing to feed during the 1992-93 winter, several thousand Idahoans and many of their elected officials expressed outrage.

In a 2004 joint legislative hearing former SE Region Supervisor Tracey Trent told legislators he had personally participated in feeding large numbers of deer properly in the SE Region and claimed there were no abnormal losses. But when legislators examined his feeding records they found the Region had spent \$46,700 from the feeding fund on panels to try to prevent the starving animals from eating ranchers' hay – but had spent only \$3,648 to feed the thousands of starving deer and elk.

Token Feeding Efforts to Mislead Public

Only \$2,400 of that amount was actually spent for feed and transportation, providing 13 tons of pelleted feed to only 560 deer – and no elk or antelope – at only seven sites. Dividing the 26,000 pounds of feed by the 560 deer averaged only 46 pounds per deer – only **15 days worth of feed** for each deer at the *minimum average* daily ration of three pounds per deer!

In other words, unless private citizens donated eight times that much additional feed for those deer, most of them starved to death and most of the \$3,648 was thus wasted. Once again IDFG had used a token feeding effort to mislead the media, the public and elected officials into believing it was feeding properly.

Although key F&G supporters in the Legislature tried to perpetuate the deception, most legislators representing rural counties where thousands of deer and elk had starved to death weren't buying it. By November 1993 the Boise County Commissioners and Prosecuting Attorney had already forced F&G officials to admit the truth and come up with mutually agreeable criteria that would prevent such a disaster from happening again.

Armed with that knowledge, rural legislators ordered the F&G Commission to provide statewide winter feeding rules that must be followed by F&G officials and which would be approved and adopted by the Legislature

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F&G Defies Feeding Criteria - *continued from page 5* as IDAPA Rules with full force of law. The Legislature also approved creation of citizen winter feeding advisory committees to act as an independent liaison between local residents and IDFG.

Overwhelming testimony and evidence indicated that IDFG personnel lacked the knowledge or ability to determine when local conditions indicated the need to feed – and were not able to assess the stage of malnutrition in a mule deer from a quick personal observation. The feeding committees obtained that information from the appropriate citizens and/or officials in each area and relayed it to the Regional Supervisor.

The Committees also inspected and verified that feed and troughs were stored in the respective areas where they might be required by December 1st of every year. They also inspected both private and public feed sites and determined the readiness of county road maintenance crews or private volunteers to plow access to these sites.

Rules Require FG to Feed – Regardless of Committees

But regardless of how well the feeding advisory committees perform their function, the Rules adopted by the F&G Commission and approved by the Legislature emphasize the need for the Regional Supervisor to be prepared to feed immediately once any of four specific criteria exists. To expedite feeding, IDAPA Rule 13.01.18.101 deliberately bypasses both the Commission and the Director and gives each F&G Regional Supervisor the authority and the duty to declare a feeding emergency and spend the dedicated feeding funds.

Instead of holding a special late hunt to kill does and fawns when wildfire or drought reduces the availability of winter forage as happened following the “Foothills Fire” in Unit 39 above Boise in 1992, Rules now require Region Supervisors to declare a feeding emergency and feed the deer and elk. And when unusual snow depths cover the winter forage as happened in many areas by early January 2008, Region Supervisors are required to declare a feeding emergency and feed the deer or elk immediately – not just close roads to the public as occurred during the 2007-08 winter.

While CDOW Feeds IDFG Let’s Animals Starve

Colorado has no Rule, Regulation or Law requiring CDOW to feed – its Feeding Policy states: “Emergency feeding of big game ungulates may be used as a last resort to reduce unusually severe winter-related mortality.” Unlike Idaho it also has no dedicated feeding fund – yet it uses snow cats to plow and pack trails so the animals can move freely and access feed provided by people on snow machines, snowshoes or skis.

But Idaho has IDAPA Rules requiring IDFG to conduct emergency feeding of deer, elk and antelope so one might reasonably ask why F&G Regional Supervisors can ignore the Rules and allow thousands of big game animals to starve to death under similar conditions.

Penalties For Wasting Idaho Game Species

Idaho citizens recognize the billion-dollar value of their renewable wild game resource and have placed a monetary value on any game animal, game bird or game fish that is either taken or wasted in violation of Rules, Regulations or Laws. For a single deer of any size or sex that value is \$400 and it is \$750 for a single elk (see I.C. Sec.36-1404)

In Idaho it is also a misdemeanor offense, punishable by fine or imprisonment, “for any person, through carelessness, neglect or otherwise, to allow or cause the waste of any game animal, game bird or game fish or any portion thereof usually eaten by humans.” (see I.C. Sec. 36-1202)

Yet the IDFG Officials who are responsible for enforcing these Rules, Regulations (Proclamations) and Laws against wasting game species are brazenly ignoring the Rules and Laws they are required to obey. Ditto for their bosses, the Idaho F&G Commissioners who are required by law to administer Idaho Wildlife Policy: “Preserve, protect perpetuate and manage (and) provide continued supplies for hunting, fishing and trapping.”

Biologist Reports Record Snow But No Feeding

During the 2007-08 winter, Panhandle Region biologists apparently made repeated trips on snow machines along the St. Joe and Coeur d’Alene Rivers. Panhandle Wolf Biologist Dave Spicer reported snow depths of up to four feet at the lower elevations, which prevented deer and elk from accessing feed.

He said that the elk had “migrated” down to the Coeur d’Alene River and were huddling close to trees where the snow wasn’t as deep. He reported the deep snow was causing stress and malnutrition – especially in whitetail deer that were remaining in the bottom along the St. Joe River, but he also said he expected a substantial winter kill among the elk – especially the calves.



Elk watching wolves. Photographed in deep snow above Highway 12 along the Lochsa River early in the 2007-08 winter by a road maintenance crew clearing snow slides.

“It’s Like a Kid in a Candy Shop – They Are Out There Doing Their Thing”

In Spicer’s interview with St. Maries *Gazette Record* editor Ralph Bartholdt, published on February 20, 2008 (see Bulletin 26), he reported seeing 10 or 11 dead whitetails along with a dead elk calf and a dead moose calf during the second week in February. He said the live deer he saw were in bad shape and the dead ones had depleted bone marrow.

Spicer then commented, “Predators from cats to wolves have an easier time killing their prey when the snow piles up. It’s like a kid in a candy shop – they are out there doing their thing.”



Wolves photographed near the elk on the preceding page. The road crew reported that wolves killed two elk about two hours after these photos were taken.

The article mentioned that severe snow depths prompted the Idaho Fish and Game to resort to a feeding program for mule deer on the South Fork of the Payette in the SW Region and included Spicer’s comment, “At certain depths elk can’t move regardless, and deer have a heck of a time, period.” But Panhandle Regional Wildlife Manager Jim Hayden did nothing to reduce the death loss, and proposed shorter hunting seasons to compensate for the excessive winter kill.

What actually prompted the token feeding effort in Boise County was a series of phone calls to elected officials followed by the threat to bring a television crew to the area and photograph the private citizens feeding deer and elk in deep snow along the South Fork of the Payette River from Garden Valley to above Lowman. The token feeding effort by IDFG there and at a handful of locations from the SW Region to the Upper Snake could hardly be called a serious effort to reduce winter losses.

Commission Supports Token Feeding

The Commission’s failure to obey the law and force the Department to provide continued supplies of wild game and fish for harvest is evidence that it has become a

rubber stamp for the deep ecology philosophy embraced by most Department biologists. The so-called “Conservation Biology” practiced by these dedicated disciples is simply restoration and preservation of bears, lions, wolves and pre-Columbian habitat – and let everything else in the ecosystem re-evolve without interference.

If you carefully read the propaganda message in the “Special Predator Issue” of *Fishing and Hunting News* and still choose to attribute another motive to their failure to manage wild game such as their quest for money, that is also true but each complements the other. Traditional logic says that if they managed to provide a sustained yield of wild game as the law requires, they would benefit from thousands more hunters providing increased license revenue.

But they have learned that allowing a scarcity of game to exist and managing what is left for a handful of trophy hunters will produce even more revenue with far less effort. Their creation of three tiers of deer hunting in every Region for 2008 – “general hunts, quality hunts and high-quality hunts” – is a giant step in that direction.

IDFG 1997 Game Count Data

During the severe 1996-97 winter and spring, outdoorsmen Cal and Steve Alder monitored the elk along the Lochsa River and reported severe winter losses to Clearwater Region Wildlife Manager Jay Crenshaw. They urged him to cancel 500 cow elk permits in the Lolo Zone for the 2007 1997 season.

Crenshaw responded to their report in a May 29, 1997 *Lewiston Tribune* article with the claim that IDFG biologists had been monitoring the elk since January and losses did not exceed the normal 5-10% winter loss. And when hunters in the Dworshak area reported seeing and harvesting far fewer elk following the 2007 season, a December 4, 2007 *Lewiston Tribune* article published the F&G claim: “Aerial and ground surveys of elk in the northern units of the Clearwater Region last spring showed no signs of unusual winter kill.” (emphasis added)

When I requested and received the original raw data sheets from those counts and reported that they indicated a significant decline in elk numbers, computer modeling biologist George Pauley shrugged them off as “an anomaly” (an unexplained deviation). At the time I was not aware that fictional figures that hid the loss were later substituted for the actual elk counted.

The Truth Was Admitted in 1998

But like the 1993 F&G claims that there were no significant deer and elk winter losses in southern Idaho, the truth will surface sooner or later. In a February 26, 1998 article in the *Lewiston Tribune* Bill Loftus wrote: “During helicopter game surveys this winter, the agency (F&G) found elk numbers had dropped dramatically in unit 10 since 1994. Much of the problem was blamed on the long hard winter of 1996-97.” (emphasis added)

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Loftus continued, "The total number of elk dropped by nearly half, while the number of bull elk dropped by 71 percent." Announcing F&G's intent to reduce the number of Lolo Zone rifle hunters by 50%, the article mentioned predators and declining habitat as "other problems," but failed to mention the unwarranted harvest of hundreds of breeding cows and replacement calves that dramatically reduced bull productivity.

Outdoorsman Documents Elk Losses

Beginning in January of 2008, Steve Alder became concerned about Clearwater biologists again ignoring massive losses of elk caused by the combination of excessive snow depths and excessive killing by wolves taking advantage of the deep snow. He began photographing these losses and posting them on the internet to prevent another cover-up by IDFG.

In one 11-day period before IDFG/FS closed the road along Orogrande Creek to snowmobile traffic, Alder photographed several instances of "spree" killing by wolves with little or nothing eaten. One photograph shows three dead elk in deep snow along the road in less than 50 feet and others show cow elk chased into the Creek by wolves where they eventually died without being eaten.



One of several dozen photographs of dead elk provided by Steve Alder. Most were taken along a short stretch of Orogrande Creek near its confluence with the North Fork of the Clearwater River before the road was closed to snowmobile traffic.

One of the cows had its intestines exposed, a second had a wound in its flank and another, see photo above, had no visible wounds. Alder, who is also President of the Clearwater Chapter of SFW, was reportedly asked by IDFG Director Cal Groen to stop publicizing the elk losses until after F&G took over full management of wolves on March 28, 2008 but he declined.

Feeding in the SE Region During 2008

During the first week in January 2008, Pocatello sportsman/conservationist Harvey Peck called and advised that landowners in the southeast corner of Idaho were expressing concern about abnormally deep snow and cold

temperatures in several areas. Mr. Peck does not have access to the internet and asked me if I would send an email to Legislative Services Budget and Policy Analyst Ray Houston requesting the balance in the Winter Feeding Set-Aside Account.

Mr. Houston responded with a report showing an unencumbered cash balance of **\$721,263.01** in that account at the beginning of FY 2008 and I forwarded that information to Mr. Peck. He provided copies to several landowners who had reportedly requested that IDFG begin feeding mule deer due to the excessive snow depths followed by sub-zero temperatures.

SE Region Also Ignored Feeding Criteria

Like their anti-feeding counterparts in the other four central-southern Idaho regions, SE Region Supervisor Mark Gamblin and the SE Region Winter Feeding Advisory Committee ignored the 18" snow-depth, sub-zero temperatures, and deer presence criteria that had already been met – and the Rules that required Gamblin to begin feeding. In order to save the deer in their area, West Side Sportsmen's Assn. landowners Joe Naylor and Kent Howe began feeding the deer in early January 2008.

Using deer pellets they had previously purchased, and stockpiled on site, as IDFG is required to do – but does not do – they then reportedly purchased an additional 26 tons from Walton Feed in Montpelier and stored it on site. They fed at established sites, carefully selected to prevent unhealthy crowding, and they also provided feed to other landowners where feeding was indicated.

This and a few scattered private feeding operations in areas like the South Fork of the Payette in the Southwest Region, were the only legitimate deer feeding operations designed to save Idaho deer. The West Side group also scheduled a February 9, 2008 meeting with IDFG officials to see if the dedicated feeding fund money was available.

Region Declares Feeding Emergency A Month Late

Of course the money was available since at least \$400,000 must be maintained in the dedicated feeding account and no feeding had been done by F&G (except for the several hundred elk that are fed every year by IDFG in the Magic Valley Region to artificially maintain an elk herd). The Advisory Committee recommended and Gamblin declared a feeding emergency that day and the West Side group was credited with 18 tons of feed at Walton to continue feeding approximately 800 mule deer.

Except for its baiting operations, F&G reported feeding no mule deer in the SE Region. Most of the \$8,976.50 it paid Walton Feed for deer pellets went to supplement private citizens' feeding operations after the feeding emergency was declared. As with every other IDFG feeding operation since the nearly half a million dollar annual appropriation was passed in 1984, every attempt at F&G feeding was "too little too late."

On February 19th the Upper Snake Region began feeding palletized beet pulp to mule deer wintering next to

the sand dunes near St. Anthony. They advertised that they would slowly accustom the (malnourished) deer to digest high energy deer pellets but said they could only feed some of the deer and the rest would die.

As with every other IDFG feeding operation, they selected how many dollars they would spend on feed rather than how much feed was required to free choice feed a specific number of animals. The 32 tons of pellets they purchased would feed the more than 1,200 wintering deer for only 13-18 days.

The F&G policy of halting feeding prematurely when they use up the allotted feed in the area has killed many deer that lacked the energy reserves to survive through the first week or two of green-up. During the 2001-02 IDFG feeding operation in the Garden Valley area one employee fed free choice at his sites and the other stopped feeding free choice on January 15th and cut the amount of feed by 50%, and by another 25% on March 1st.

As the snow melted the Boise County inspection team found and photographed only eight dead deer and elk with depleted bone marrow above the full-fed sites yet found and photographed **262** dead deer and elk with depleted bone marrow above the sites where feed had been cut to two pounds per deer on January 15th and cut to one pound per deer on March 1st.

The claim by IDFG State Big Game Manager Brad Compton that you only save the mature does when you feed is proof of IDFG's failure to feed properly. He continues to ignore the Colorado research on 5,000 fed deer during the worst winter in the past 50 years (see Colorado Deer Mortality chart on page 3).

Where they distributed deer wafers in two-pound piles spaced apart from each other on top of the snow – providing two pounds for each deer in that group – the same number of fawns survived as in the full fed group but three times as many adult bucks and 50% more adult does died. But when you limit the feed pellets to an *average* of two pounds per deer and feed them in a few troughs as IDFG does, the most aggressive animals rush the troughs and hog the feed and the rest starve.

Urban Media Repeats Compton's Misinformation

Yet in an April 24, 2008 Idaho Falls *Post Register* article, Outdoor Editor Rob Thornberry quoted Brad Compton in an attempt to ridicule Harvey Peck for faulting F&G's failure to feed starving fawns. Thornberry wrote that Fish and Game officials spent more than \$200,000 this winter to feed 1,000 elk and 2,500 deer at 44 sites and claims the \$57 per animal average is a great deal of money for a program that doesn't help fawns survive.

I choose to use a different set of statistics provided by Jennifer Jackson on April 17, 2008 in response to a request to Southeast Region Supervisor Mark Gamblin. The information she provided said the SE Region spent a total of only **\$8,976.50** for deer pellets and delivery to feed a total of **1,230** deer in the SE Region.

Because all of those deer were reported fed on private property and most were fed by private citizens who volunteered their own time, equipment, fuel and some of the feed, the total F&G expense appears to average only **\$7.30 per deer** for feed and delivery plus any wages and vehicle expense they may have paid for baiting in spots like Georgetown Canyon. And since fawn survival was reported to be fairly high by the citizens who fed properly, this is a very different picture than Thornberry paints.

"Subcontract Feeding to Local Residents"

In 1993 when Emmett District Conservation Officer Brent Hyde submitted his recommended feeding criteria to Stacy Gebhards, one of his most important suggestions was deleted before the rest were adopted by the Commission and approved by the Legislature. DCO Hyde suggested that emergency big game feeding should be subcontracted to qualified local residents because it is never cost-effective to have conservation officers or other IDFG employees performing that type of work.

In the few rural counties where emergency winter feeding occurs once every few years, there are one or several bona fide experts who don't need a back fat measurement or an eye fluid analysis to know when mule deer and elk are in good, fair or poor condition. Years of observing forage, weather and animal movements have taught them when a real crisis exists and their knowledge and ability to organize and conduct successful emergency feeding programs is recognized and accepted.

Feeding advisory committee members and F&G employees who lack this knowledge – including those who live outside the area and/or are openly opposed to emergency feeding of wild game – cannot possibly perform the function that is expected of them. Twenty-four years of failed feeding attempts and misappropriation or waste of millions of dollars of dedicated feeding funds should be sufficient to convince any prudent legislator that, regardless of excuses, the existing system can never work.

Hunters, Landowners Blast F&G

An April 16, 2008 front page article in *The Preston Citizen* by Necia P. Seamons; "Cub River residents protest Idaho Fish and Game;" explains why many landowners in the area have closed their lands to hunters (see photo of "Restricted Access" sign on page 1). According to the article, (spring) turkey hunters have been calling the phone numbers of F&G officials included on the signs, and asking them where they're supposed to hunt as there is still a foot of snow on public lands.

Salt Lake City hunter Andrew Romney said he and his friends don't want to spend the \$500 apiece for tags, lodging, food and gas that they've spent in Franklin County for the last four years when all the turkeys are still on private lands. According to the article, other hunters expressed concern that areas like the Oneida Narrows would be so crowded that hunting would be miserable

continued on page 10

F&G Defies Feeding Criteria - *continued from page 9*

Gerald Cole, a farmer and rancher between Cub River and Glendale described how, several years ago when similar snow conditions existed, he found all of the turkeys on a section of his land dead in the trees. This year he said that \$1,000 in corn had been fed to the turkeys on his land and by Jim Dougherty along the Cub River Road, and said some of that money had been donated by local citizens and a group from Utah.

F&G Says It Doesn't Feed Animals

He mentioned that Boyd Burbank, Jordan Galloway and Vance Broadhead had fed more than 250 deer in Cub River and said that when he called IDFG for assistance he was told that the Department does not feed the animals. Cole said that a few years ago when he complained to the Department about their not feeding, they sent a lot of hunters to his land and he was bothered by constant phone calls.

Cole pointed out that, in addition to the feed farmers provide turkeys during a severe winter, the birds scratch up seed grain and destroy a lot of grain on the stalk. IDFG gets the fees from turkey hunters yet never offers assistance to the landowners who save the turkeys from mass starvation during severe winters.

Cole said when he moved to his home in the early 1960s he often counted herds of mule deer as large as 70, and often saw large 4-point bucks. He said last year he only saw about seven does along the three miles of road that borders his property.

Closing Land to Hunting Brought Retaliation

In the article, Jim Naylor described how, when landowners in Unit 73 asked IDFG to implement a 4-point minimum antler restriction to address declining buck ratios in 1999, the agency instead "opened it wide up and hunters annihilated the herd." The following year landowners and sportsmen united to form the West Side Sportsmen's Assn. and closed 150 square miles of private land to hunting and fishing (see *Outdoorsman Bulletin* 16).

But the next year, 2001, IDFG retaliated by extending the seasons which nearly doubled the buck harvest in Units 70 and 73 – and increased the doe/fawn harvest by 800 percent! Then they refused to feed during the 2001-2002 winter which resulted in 9,000 fewer does being counted in the Region during the 2003-04 counts.

West Side Sportsmen Prevailed

Although SE Region Commissioner Marc Gibbs had rubber-stamped everything proposed by biologists during his tenure as Commissioner – just as current Commissioner Randall Budge is doing now – the loss of 9,000 does and a buck-to-doe ratio of only 6 per 100 in one unit finally convinced him to start doing his job. His angry confrontation with Big Game Manger Brad Compton in a 2004 public Commission meeting (described in *Bulletin* No. 2) resulted in 5-day, 4-point or larger bucks-only harvest seasons in Units 70 and 73.

Despite IDFG biologists' claim, repeated by Commissioner Budge, that antler point restrictions don't work in other states, Colorado used them to rebuild its elk herd with such success that hunters were eventually encouraged to kill two cow elk per season to reduce elk numbers. Naylor points out that following four years of 4-point minimums in a general season lasting only one week, Unit 73 now has more mature bucks and a buck-to-doe ratio of **35 bucks** per 100 does – while Units 72, 75, 76, 77 and 78 have only eight bucks per 100 does.

That is roughly half of the 15 per 100 minimum objective in the state's Mule Deer Plan yet biologists are doing nothing to correct it. Before he was replaced, the former Mule Deer Initiative biologist recommended using 4-point restrictions and not allowing a successful mule deer hunter to harvest another deer for one year.

Landowners Penalized for Saving Deer

That is what deer hunters and landowners in Unit 77 have reportedly been seeking in order to increase the percentage of bucks and restore healthy productive deer herds. Instead, biologists and Commissioner Budge left the maximum 22-day any-buck season open in Unit 77, and closed the general deer season in adjacent Unit 78 except for 200 special draw buck permits.

In return for saving hundreds of deer from starving to death, Unit 77 hunters and landowners will be overrun with several hundred unsuccessful applicants for the Unit 78 controlled hunt, as well as unsuccessful buck hunters from the other general season units. By leaving the general deer seasons open for the 22-day maximum and permitting bowhunters to also kill does and fawns in a 30-day general season in those units, Gamblin and Budge have violated the most basic principles of scientific deer management.

Naylor supports Unit 77 landowners shutting down hunting to restore sound management as his group did in Unit 73 in 2000. "I hope they hang in there – if I managed my cattle like F&G manage deer I'd be out of business," he said.

Urban Media Misleads Readers

According to Jennifer Jackson, the same F&G News Releases were sent to the Idaho Falls *Post Register* as to *The Preston Citizen*, yet the information provided in one bears little resemblance to that found in the other. IDFG uses major urban media, including the *Post Register*, to spread misinformation about winter feeding to cover up its repeated failure to obey the Idaho Code and IDAPA Rules. This allows it to spend leftover feeding funds on its pet projects.

If urban Idahoans knew that IDFG deliberately let declining mule deer and elk in several critical areas starve to death (that could easily have been saved) they might express the same outrage as those who live among the animals. Some may learn the truth when they encounter a steadily increasing number of posted private farms and ranches that were previously open to hunting and fishing.

Three Generations of Native Idaho Outdoorsmen

By George Dovel

More than a decade ago I married into a family of Idaho natives who share my love of outdoor Idaho and its hunting and fishing heritage. Several generations of my wife's family have lived in harmony with the land and enjoyed harvesting some of the abundant renewable natural resources that were available to every Idaho citizen as shown in these current fishing photos of three generations.



Patti Dovel with two steelhead she caught in Long Tom Hole on the Salmon River upstream from the end of the road above Riggins in March 2008.



Patti's dad (and Charlie's granddad) Dave Hubbard of Pollock, Idaho, with smallmouth bass and a large trout (not a steelhead) he caught in the Salmon River country on April 27, 2008.



Patti's oldest son, Charlie Newell of Sweet, Idaho, shows off a four pound largemouth bass he caught on April 13, 2008 at "No Tellum" Reservoir in Southwest Idaho.

Like Patti's family, all but one of my sons were born and grew up in rural Idaho and, like her family, they cannot understand why F&G officials have abandoned scientific game management and substituted reduced harvests. Forced to live among excessive populations of wolves, those who still live in rural areas see firsthand the wasteful destruction that inevitably results from manipulating people rather than managing wildlife.

One son who now lives in Oregon participated in the average annual harvest of 2,849 deer in the Banks-Lowman area in 1991-1994. He brought his 15-year-old son over just before hunting season last year but the total deer harvest in the 3 units had dropped to only 347 in 2006.

Although IDFG would only charge his son the resident youth rate to hunt on the land his dad hunted for years, his odds of harvesting a buck there were lousy. My grandson killed his first mule deer buck with a bow in Oregon's high desert where he saw several nice bucks.

Voice Your Opinion?

A January 2001 "Assessment of Efforts by IDFG and the F&G Commission to Solicit Public Input" by the Legislative Office of Performance Evaluation found that, although F&G and the Commission comply with statutory requirements to solicit information, only one in five respondents to F&G surveys were satisfied with the methods used to provide public input. Three-fourths of survey respondents rated the Department's efforts to follow-up on information provided as "fair" or "poor."

The Commission's willingness to change the Idaho Wolf Plan from manging for about 150 known wolves to managing to maintain at least 500-700 known wolves indicates little regard for public opinion. The Department has announced its intention to manage wolves like any other big game animal - with open and closed seasons, restricted methods of take and special limited draw tags.

You have until May 16, 2008 to offset comments from anti-hunters with your views on wolf hunting seasons, methods of take and the cost of tags (by email or by sending a letter addressed to "Wolf Hunting Rules," IDFG, P.O. Box 25, Boise, ID 83707). That means you must respond as soon as you receive this issue in the mail.

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In the May Outdoorsman

Nevada Predator Debate - Originally scheduled for this issue, the debate involving the need for more effective predator control in Nevada has spilled over into the Governor's Office and concerns whether or not he will re-appoint two Commissioners who oppose the policy of controlling predators - or replace both of them. The issue is receiving some high powered national attention from players on both sides.

Fish and Game Transparency - How open is your wildlife management agency in its dealings with the public and what doesn't it want you to know? This, too, was scheduled for the April issue but reporting the IDFG failure to obey the IDAPA Winter Feeding Rules was given top priority.

WS Rebuts Wolf Advocates' Claim - As predicted, the 12 wolf preservationist groups waited until the last minute to file their lawsuit and request for injunction to reverse turning Northern Rocky Mountain wolf management over to the three states. In his FY 2007 Wolf Activity Report, Idaho USDA APHIS Wildlife Services Director Mark Collinge effectively rebutted the Plaintiffs' claim that hunters can have a significant impact on wolf numbers.

Accompanied by facts that the public never sees or hears in the news media, this article dispels the myths being circulated by wolf advocates and provides a dose of reality about the rapidly increasing impact of wolves on wild game and livestock in Idaho.

Reader Opinions - The May issue will include letters and opinions from readers regarding current wildlife management issues of concern.

2008 Legislative Report - This will list the final status of bills that affect or would have affected Idaho hunting and fishing.