

The Outdoorsman

Bulletin Number 5

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Tell It Like It is

by George Dovel



Healthy bighorn ewe with abundant mule deer and a healthy ratio of coyotes

The Bionic Wolf

On July 13, 2004 the Discovery Channel aired a one-hour program called "Wolf Battlefields". It contained some interesting and creative wolf filming and a plot that resembled "The Bionic Man".

The leader of the starring wolf pack had the ability to "sense" (along with video graphics and sound effects) which cow elk had bad teeth and thus would be in poorer condition and easier to catch. The wolf allegedly singled her out of a large herd and left the healthy calves alone.

The only other pursuit showed a wolf chasing a cow with an odd gait, possibly from a broken hind leg bone that had healed. Two wolves pulled down a cow (possibly the same one?) reinforcing the message that wolves selectively kill only unhealthy, weak or crippled prey, leaving more feed for healthy animals.

Several wolf experts denounce this type of fiction, which ignores the reality that a pack of wolves is the most efficient killing machine on this continent (even without bionic implants). The message it leaves in the minds of many viewers is that wolves are beneficial to their prey species regardless of density.

During the years I lived among bighorn sheep I observed an old blue ram with the same characteristic gait



malnourished bighorn ewe from area with few deer and many coyotes. Frequent coyote chases depleted winter fat reserves.

as the "crippled" cow elk in the video. He competed with other rams each fall and when a ewe came in estrus it was he who passed on his superior genes to a new generation.

He was the leader of a bachelor band averaging eleven rams from March through October and I watched them for several years as they traveled the high remote country during the summer. When he was finally killed by a hunter, I skinned out the hind leg to reveal the broken bone that had healed while remaining offset.

You don't learn these kinds of lessons from a college professor or a television documentary. Yet many people without the benefit of an outdoor education profess expertise concerning wolf-prey interactions based on what they have read in a newspaper or watched on TV.

Recently Boise's *Idaho Statesman* newspaper has been conducting a wolf acceptance campaign with several lengthy articles, three editorials, three readers' opinions and a collection of pro wolf letters. A typical wolf supporter wrote, "A wolf balances out Mother Nature. He usually kills the weak and old so the strong can survive."

The role of the wolf is no different than any other large predator. Wolves limit the population of prey species by killing mostly juvenile animals which limits recruitment.

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Like other large predators that chase their prey, wolves often pull down one of the slower animals which may, depending upon the time of year, be a pregnant cow elk about to calve or an aged cow that may not survive the winter. In most Idaho deer and elk herds hunted by humans, life expectancy rarely exceeds five years so aging animals are relatively rare.

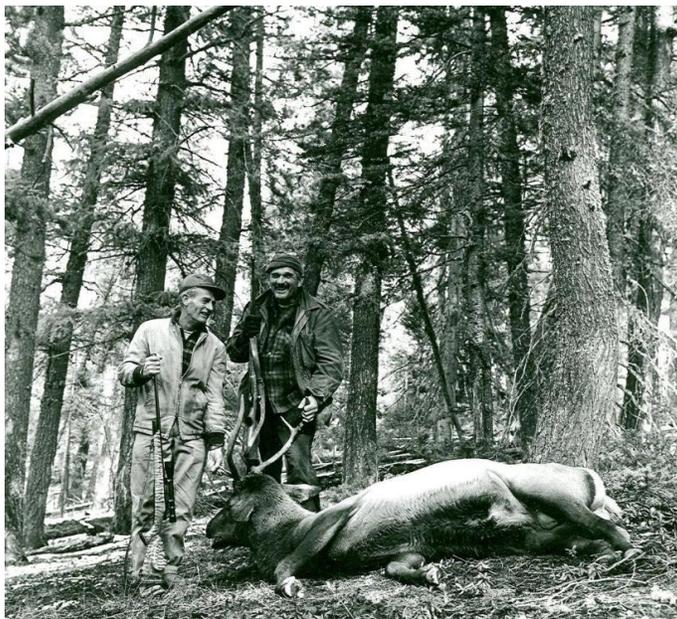
Whether the occasional old deer or elk is killed by wolves, succumbs to winter, or dies of other natural causes, it's carcass normally feeds a host of scavengers/predators and other organisms. When a wolf kills an animal that has managed to survive past its prime it is considered compensatory. But it does nothing to maintain desirable genetics or improve herd survival in a managed population.

Studies Reflect Ignorance of Subject

Over several decades I have reviewed many of the North American biological studies involving wild ungulates and their predators. Unfortunately, many of the early flawed theories on winter feeding and predators resulted from inexperienced recent college graduates who displayed an obvious lack of familiarity with the species they were studying.

Back in 1927 U.S. Biological Survey Biologist Olaus Murie was assigned to do a five-year study of elk in the U.S. and set up his headquarters in Jackson, Wyoming near Yellowstone Park. His famous book, "The Elk of North America", was published by the Wildlife Management Institute in 1951.

When I read it, I discovered that many of his assumptions were based on unsupported opinions or other studies by similarly inexperienced biologists, rather than on actual observation in the field.



Two-year-old bull elk bugle like mature bulls and will breed if the opportunity presents itself.

He wrote that in his many years of observing elk he never saw a two-year-old bull bugle. That raised a red flag as I have bugled many two-year-olds in the Yellowstone/Bridger area and have always used a call in Idaho that was designed to imitate young bulls.

Theories With No Proof

In his discussion of predators and elk Murie stated, "It is very doubtful that bears ever kill adult elk except under very unusual circumstances. In 1947 YNP Biologist Victor Cahalane published similar comments in his book describing the life habits of North American Mammals.

In his chapter on grizzly bears he says that grizzlies coming out of hibernation dine on early vegetation and the flesh of *winter killed animals*. Then he says that the grizzly is more dangerous than the black bear to the "sick or crippled" elk, moose or deer.

In 1959 John and Frank Craighead began a highly publicized seven-year study of grizzly bears in Yellowstone. In 1968, their famous *National Geographic* article included a picture of a grizzly covering a bull elk with dirt and grass along with the following comment:

"The grizzly's keen sense of smell enables it to detect and locate carrion from afar. Rarely does a grizzly kill a healthy adult elk, but it may fell a sick or disabled one."

The Truth

In 1958, I spent several months flying a USGS survey crew around Yellowstone in a helicopter and discussing grizzly predation on the *Central* Yellowstone elk herd with the YNP Biologist and two Rangers who became my friends. In May 1959 I returned and observed several grizzlies and one black bear chase and kill healthy adult elk between Canyon and Old Faithful.

In May 1970, I returned with Rob Donley and Steve Jordan to photograph the grizzlies killing elk in the same area. The YNP maintenance employees carried loaded .375 magnum rifles in their pickups to protect themselves from grizzlies defending their elk kills.

We observed grizzlies easily catch up to cow elk and kill them. Then remove the unborn calf and eat every bit of that delicacy except the lower legs. We also checked the condition of several kills and wondered why Murie, Cahalane and the Craigheads had ignored overwhelming evidence that YNP grizzlies were killing healthy elk and preventing the Central elk herd from increasing.

In June 1970, the YNP Biologist contacted me and said he had recorded 90 elk killed by grizzlies in that limited area since they emerged from hibernation. He said the grizzlies worked on one small elk herd with 11 calves until they killed all of the calves along with several cows.

He also said the Craigheads knew about the grizzly impact on the Central Yellowstone elk herd but refused to publish the information. The YNP biologist blamed their lack of integrity on their zeal to promote the "sick and crippled" theory taught by academic biologists.

Do Coyotes Kill Healthy Elk?

In 1938 federal biologist Adolph Murie, brother of Olaus, conducted an extensive study of the coyote in Yellowstone National Park. The study reflected many interesting conclusions based on fact and one that was not supported by any evidence – that coyotes kill deer, elk calves, and other “weakened animals fated to succumb before spring.”

For many years after his study was published wildlife biologists attempted to prove that coyotes exist primarily on rabbits, mice and grasshoppers. They collected scats (coyote droppings) in areas where rabbits were abundant and deer were scarce as proof of their claim.

At the same time several government coyote trappers kept a record of coyote stomach contents which contained primarily mule deer depending on the season and the area. Neither scat analysis nor stomach content analysis provides conclusive proof of predation so research biologists now use radio-collared deer to quickly locate kills and determine the cause of death.

Few biologists are willing to spend the time and endure the hardships required to witness even one coyote or wolf kill. But fortunately there are some exceptions.

The Answer is “Yes”

Wildlife research biologists Gese and Grothe recently published “Analysis of Coyote Predation on Deer and Elk During Winter in Yellowstone National Park” which dispelled some of the long-standing myths.

From 1991-93 they observed and recorded eight attacks by coyotes on elk in Yellowstone. Five of the eight initial attacks were successful and all involved at least two coyotes.

Of the two elk cows and three calves the coyotes killed, only the killing of an old cow might be classified as



Hungry coyote licking its lips during winter. Photographed by author in Yellowstone National Park while watching elk.

“compensatory”. The average elapsed time from initial attack to presumed death in four of the five incidents was 32.5 minutes, with coyotes spending most of that time feeding on each downed elk while it was still alive.

On two occasions, I have observed coyotes eating mule deer that were still alive. At other times I have seen evidence of typical coyote kills of deer with blood and stomach contents strewn along a trail in the snow.



Mule deer fawn killed by lone coyote biting its flanks for 50 yards until it could no longer get back up.

Wolves Use Similar Techniques

Famous Alaska wolf trappers Oscar Vogel and Frank Glaser both described wolves’ technique of running and slashing at the soft places on a moose until even the healthiest moose finally succumbs. Both also mentioned wolves ripping open a moose’s soft flank or underbelly so the animal steps on its intestines as it tries to escape.

Each mentioned finding injured moose on several occasions where wolves had torn out an eye, bit off a tongue, etc. until the moose went down. Then the wolf would eat 25 or 30 pounds of leg muscle and depart when its hunger was satisfied.

Thirty years ago I published letters from Vogel describing how a single pair of wolves killed 12 dall sheep close to a den site while another pair had three adult moose down and dead or dying to feed a litter of pups. He expressed frustration with Alaska biologists who claimed the wolf predation was beneficial.

He offered a comparison of “the healthy caribou herd on the Alaska Peninsula where there were no wolves until recently (1972),” and the unhealthy caribou in the Brooks Range “where wolves have been feeding on them for centuries.”

Harmful Side Effects

The photos on page 1 compare a healthy bighorn ewe where mule deer were plentiful with a healthy ratio of coyotes, to a malnourished bighorn ewe where mule deer

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Beware of "Natural" Wildlife Management

by Dr. Valerius Geist

Dr. Valerius Geist, Professor Emeritus of Environmental Science at the University of Calgary in Alberta, is a renowned expert in wildlife management and conservation practices. In addition to teaching, writing about, and lecturing on the subjects, Dr. Geist has performed years of in-the-field research on big game species. He has authored 16 books, seven documentary films and contributed 40 entries to various encyclopedias.

The management of reintroduced wolves is not merely a matter of wildlife management but a clash of deeply held values. It could be called a rural versus urban clash in which some ecologically based philosophies, if one can call them such, are fostered on the country at large by urban based nature "protectors."

They proclaim two myths as self evident or as scientific "truths" to the general public: that predators in general and wolves in particular are an "ecological good" no matter how many; and that "wilderness" is the "natural" pre-Columbian state of North America, then presided over by noble natives who selflessly maintained its ecological integrity which ecologically insensitive Europeans subsequently destroyed. In addition, they operate on the assumption that wildlife is a free gift of Nature, a gift of God, and not a resource painfully restored by human hand over the last 80 years in North America.

The wildlife we currently enjoy is not wildlife that was left over from the past, but wildlife restored by a continental system of wildlife conservation that arose after its near destruction a century ago. It is one of the great cultural achievements of North Americans in the 20th Century, the greatest environmental success story of that century, and a highly successful system of sustained development of a natural resource.

Since wildlife was financed on a "user pays" basis, the restoration fell on the fraction of North Americans who hunt. The rest of society got a free ride in their enjoyment of wildlife as an important component of the high quality of life we enjoy.

Few North Americans are aware of the excellence of the wildlife conservation system developed here by the dedicated public spirited efforts of three generations of their ancestors. Unfortunately, this ignorance extends to professional wildlife biologists as well. Americans are, after all, not keen on history, following Henry Ford in considering it more or less bunk.

I cannot go into great detail here concerning why predators in low abundance are a benefit to wildlife populations, but are also capable of severely depleting such with unfortunate and unexpected consequences. It's analogous to sugar: a little in the coffee is great but ingested by the pound it becomes a significant health hazard.

Put another way, if someone proclaimed that deer, as predators of plants, eat only the sick and decrepit plants, sparing the vigorous growing ones in order to insure the health and well being of the range, that individual would not be taken too seriously. Moreover wolves, as Siberian immigrants unlike mountain lions or coyotes, are not expected to be co-adapted with North American species and can be incredibly efficient in removing other species.

For instance, wolves that entered Vancouver Island in the early 1970s are spread across the island now. The deer kill by hunters has plummeted from about 25,000 to less than 4,000 today. Deer are found in reasonable abundance only where they live in suburbs and cities juxtaposed to human beings.

Black-tailed and mule deer are notoriously susceptible to pack hunting wolves. It is ironic that wildlife biologists who reported the severe depletion of deer by wolves on Vancouver Island were not considered quite professional by some academic biologists. Ingrained beliefs can be hard to challenge, no matter what the facts.

Now to the wilderness as an argument for letting nature (and wolves) run its course, unimpeded by interfering human hands. The argument is that wolves must be introduced in a hands off fashion so as to restore aboriginal pre-Columbian wilderness ecosystems.

Current research indicates that pre-Columbian North America was a well settled, quite severely exploited land, with native people practicing highly skilled horticulture. The latter is a development to escape starvation brought on by food shortages in native ecosystems.

Instead of maintaining wilderness, native people manipulated the land to make it yield sustenance, no different from people on other continents. When European diseases devastated native tribes rapidly in the 16th Century, thus lifting the heavy hand of red man off the land, "wilderness" was the result.

Far from being the natural state of the land, wilderness is an artifact of European colonization. The ecology of North America was not "natural" in pre-Columbian days. Not only because of agriculture and skilful landscape manipulation by fire, but also because native people had all but destroyed the mega fauna in colonizing the continent.

The lesson from this is that we need not be slaves to some pre-Columbian fiction but may do just as pre-Columbian natives did – generate our own land use and conservation practices in which the maintenance of biodiversity is the only bottom line requirement. Yes it is quite all right to have areas with minimum predation to raise bountiful wildlife for broad public use.

Not less management as wilderness proponents proclaim, but more management is the more desirable state of affairs.

To let predation go unchecked, “letting it be management,” is bound to diminish much more than the game herds that were built up from next to nothing over the past 80 years. It risks our public system of wildlife conservation and the great Public Good that flows from it.

As game herds drop so do license sales and revenue to game departments. The public guardians of wildlife have less and less wherewithal to do their job, and ultimately have no job.

Despite all the controversies about public wildlife management, it is on the whole infinitely superior to private management of wildlife for the marketplace. Superior in conservation achievements and far superior in economic returns or as a creator of wealth or employment.

There is little doubt that with the loss of significant public participation in the harvest of wildlife, most public land will lose its political clientele and, as sure as the sun will rise, will slide into defacto private ownership. There will be little wolf conservation under private condition, or cougars, grizzly bears, etc.

Letting predators run down game herds will indirectly weaken the framework of wildlife conservation. Together with other opponents of public wildlife such as game farming and the anti-hunting and animal rights movements, this may succeed in destroying the greatest environmental success of the past century – the return of American wildlife.

It would be replaced by a mixture of European, South African and shooting preserve type wildlife management – if one can call it such.

Tell It Like It Is

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were scarce and coyotes were often observed chasing small groups of ewes and lambs.

The malnourished ewe we examined had apparently been chased enough by coyotes that she lacked adequate fat reserves to survive even a moderately severe winter. Alaska wildlife biologists recorded wolves chasing small groups of caribou at high speed up to eight miles before they were able to pull down an animal.

The animals that survive these chases in late fall and winter are severely stressed and their chance of surviving until spring green-up is significantly reduced. Increased winter losses resulting from coyotes chasing bighorn sheep and from wolves chasing elk can be estimated based on the length and frequency of the chases by calculating the extra energy consumed.

Wolves Relocate Elk

Wildlife biologists soundly condemn the use of snowmobiles in Yellowstone Park because they allegedly

chase the elk away from traditional wintering areas and cause the elk to burn extra energy in the form of stored body fat, reducing their chance of surviving the winter. Yet the same biologists are now praising wolves for doing exactly the same thing to the elk because they claim it increased young aspen survival on traditional winter range.

In December 1940, Frank Glaser found that wolves had similarly chased several thousand reindeer away from their traditional winter range north of Golodin on the Seward Peninsula to higher elevations in the mountains. Over several days he counted nearly 300 dead reindeer, of which some had been killed by the wolves and others had simply starved due to lack of available forage.

Since the animals were weakened and easy to catch, the wolves were not hungry and ate very little of the dead animals. Whether the exact cause of death was wolf predation or malnutrition, biologists attributed all the deaths to the wolves chasing the reindeer onto the mountains where there was little food available.

Yet wolf biologists in the “lower 48” are ignoring the fact that many elk cannot survive the winter on the snow covered forage in Yellowstone at the higher elevations. Similar elk relocation by wolves is also occurring in Idaho Units 33, 34 and 35.

Biological Fantasy

In their eagerness to depict wolves as benefactors of elk, the producers of the Discovery Channel program “Wolf Battlefields” displayed their ignorance by showing footage depicting long chases of elk by wolves. The peripheral damage caused by coyotes and wolves to big game herds in winter *if they are out-of-balance with their prey species* cannot be ignored.

While Alaska’s biologists have finally admitted, in writing, that excessive ratios of wolves and bears are keeping moose herds in a predator pit over most of the state, many biologists in the “lower 48” continue to ignore poor juvenile deer and elk survival – the classic symptom of a predator pit.

When IDFG wildlife managers state that lack of habitat or severe winters are the major factors limiting elk and mule deer recovery, they are ignoring their own research which clearly shows that predators are responsible for more big game deaths than all other causes in the long term.

Alaska biologists admit that predators are responsible for 85 percent of all big game deaths while hunters kill only between two and seven percent of those that die. Yet Wolf biologist/activist Gordon Haber produced a computer model purporting to show that an increase from a 4 percent to a 6 percent kill by hunters would destroy Alaska’s big game herds.

Until IDFG officials produce site specific forage/carrying capacity inventories to substantiate their false claims, knowledgeable Idaho citizens must challenge every false claim and force them to “tell it like (sic) it is.”

The Compass - Part 2

by George Dovel

In May 2004 the IDFG Natural Resources Policy Bureau mailed a 24-page Draft entitled, "The Compass" to a select list of sportsmen, environmentalists and public officials. The package also included a letter from Director Huffaker soliciting "your comments" and a cover page including a comment sheet requesting you to get your comments in by May 31, 2004.

Huffaker advised, "Once approved, The Compass will provide the strategic direction of the Department's activities for the next ten to fifteen years."

If you are one of the 99.9 percent of licensed Idaho sportsmen who did not attend a scoping meeting or strategic planning workshop, you had no input into this very important strategic plan. If you did not read the May Outdoorsman Bulletin Number 3 and did not hear about "The Compass" from your local media, you are not alone. Several IDFG employees had not heard of it either.

During the F&G Commission public hearing in St. Maries on the evening of July 7, a few sportsmen who had received The Compass raised objections to the de-emphasizing of the Department's lawful mandate to provide continued supplies of game and fish to harvest. They also objected to the extreme emphasis the draft plan places on non-game/fish activities proposed for IDFG.

These include being "recognized as the most comprehensive source of objective, scientifically based information on fish, wildlife and plants in Idaho" (emphasis added).

Commission Fails To Approve "Compass"

On July 8, Natural Resources Policy Bureau Chief Tracey Trent presented a "Summary of Public Comment on (the) Draft Compass" to the F&G Commission. It stated that 153 total comments were received of which 77 percent (118) came from people who were already involved in the Compass process.

It said that 102 people gave the draft a "Thumbs Up", 35 were neutral and 16 gave it a "Thumbs Down". Many scribbled changes had been made in the draft and when the Commission was asked to approve them, new Commissioner Gary Power replied that he had never seen the original document and the (corrected) copy he was handed was difficult to read.

Spectators report that Trent was visibly angry when the Commission requested that appropriate changes be made and it would be considered during the next Commission meeting.

IDFG's Environmental Agenda

As reported in the May Outdoorsman, "The Compass" is a blueprint to completely change the function of IDFG from a "hook and bullet" agency to an environmental bureau, exerting its authority over every living creature and plant and all habitat that supports them.

The closet environmentalists in IDFG who have pretended to be perpetuating Idaho's wild game harvest have taken this bold step, in defiance of Idaho's Wildlife Policy, to assert their independence. Their "mandate" from the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA), the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) and similar groups is driving their entire agenda as it has since former Director Conley quietly began implementing their non-game/fish programs.

The discussion of the \$72.7 million FY 2004 budget on pages 11-12 shows how far they have already strayed from their mandate of preserving, protecting and perpetuating "the wild species that Idaho hunters, fishermen and trappers harvest." It is not possible to determine how much is charged to game and fish but spent for non-game/fish activities because employees in every Bureau are involved and interact with each other.

For example Rita Dixon, who gave the March Commission presentation on cataloging and classifying reptiles, amphibians and other *non-wildlife*, is one of 19 ecologists, zoologists, botanists, etc. who works in the conservation Data Center of the Natural Resources Policy Bureau.

Yet she coordinates with Chuck Harris, who gave the presentation on classification and protection of wildlife (mostly *non-wildlife*) which afforded protection to snakes, amphibians, etc. and made the crow a game bird. Harris is the State Nongame Wildlife Manager in the Wildlife Bureau, which spent \$2.1 million on non-game/fish activities in FY 2004.

Administration, Communications, Engineering, Fisheries and Law Enforcement also interact and spend several million license dollars on non-game/fish activities, including endangered species and nongame.

Budgets Hide Non-Game/Fish Spending

\$8.4 million of the \$8.5 million Law Enforcement budget is funded with sportsman license dollars yet many C.O. activities have nothing to do with game or fish. The average IDFG Law Enforcement expenditure per citation issued is \$21,691! In fact Law Enforcement receives slightly more than \$100 for each one of the estimated 84,500 sportsmen it contacts per year, including groups.

The Wildlife Bureau spent \$2.3 million in FY 2004 for administration of its statewide wildlife program. This included analyzing harvest reports, answering phones, checking harvested deer and elk in the field, maintaining statewide data files, recommending hunting and trapping seasons and printing 1,000,000 brochures. The \$2.3 million included \$1.4 million in license revenue.

Yet the Administration Bureau spent an additional \$7.9 million in license money (a total of \$13.8 million) for

administering the Bureaus, including the Wildlife Bureau. Hunters, fishermen and a few trappers who buy the licenses and pay the federal excise taxes to support their harvest of wild game and fish are being forced to pay much of the cost of IDFG's environmental programs.

Environmental Brainwashing

To add insult to injury, many of these programs detract from their ability to harvest wild game and fish. Even worse, programs like "Project WILD" send a not too subtle message to our children and their teachers that killing a coyote or a rattlesnake is a crime against the environment.

John Gahl was the IDFG Project WILD Coordinator and the editor of various environmental publications adopted under former Director Conley's tenure. I observed him and other IDFG employees "teaching" the teachers around a campfire at night by having the ladies pretend they were salmon struggling upstream.

Then Gahl and his buddies would pretend they were predators or dams by grabbing the squealing teachers in the dark. Gahl was also the facilitator for the Deer and Elk Teams and volunteered to educate the citizen members of the Teams when they suggested controlling predators as a means of restoring depleted prey populations.

He pulled them aside and used "buzz words" like "compensatory" to claim that predation was beneficial regardless of density. Then he would draw two wavy parallel lines to illustrate his false claim that nature keeps predators and prey species in a healthy balance.

Project WILD is a joint project of the Council for Environmental Education and the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies whose members are western state Fish and Game directors.

Gahl has apparently gone on to bigger and better things and now serves on the Board of Directors of the Council For Environmental Education. The 7-member Project WILD Committee for 2003 included Gahl and IDFG Director Steve Huffaker.

"Wildlife Related Recreation"

Several years ago, the environmentalists that are pushing so hard to de-emphasize hunting and fishing coined the phrase "Wildlife related recreation" to describe hunting, fishing and wildlife watching. Then, in order to increase the proportion of wildlife watchers to hunters and fishermen, the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation included people who enjoy seeing wildlife from the window of their home plus those who maintain backyard bird feeders.

Using these definitions, the number of wildlife watchers in the 2001 survey exceeded the number of hunters or the number of fishermen – but not both. That would be true of the average family that hunts and fishes but that is being conveniently ignored in the media stories claiming that wildlife viewing is "bigger than hunting."

No matter how much The Compass emphasizes "Watchable Wildlife" and other non-game/fish programs those who endorse them will not support them. Hunters, fishermen and trappers are the original wildlife watchers and they are the only wildlife advocates who are willing to pay their own way.



Hunters, fishermen and trappers are true wildlife watchers...



...and the only ones willing to pay for sound management.

When IDFG accepted the federal money to catalog all of the flora and fauna in the state, it accepted huge "strings" that were attached. It says that unless it presents a plan to manage all of the plants and assorted bugs and other life forms by 2005, it will have to pay back all of the CWCS federal money it has received.

It is going to be up to Idaho Legislators to straighten out this boondoggle and assign various functions, including appropriate funding and personnel to the appropriate state agencies. Until that happens the license buying sportsmen who support our billion-dollar wildlife resource will be forced to watch its destruction.

Why Protect Rattlesnakes in Idaho?

By George Dovel

To most IDFG employees in the Boise Headquarters, an excursion into rattlesnake country is an occasional adventure rather than a daily fact of life. When I visited Riggins last month, people who work in the brush used some colorful language to emphasize their opinion of the F&G Commissioners who agreed to the rule making it a misdemeanor offense to kill a rattlesnake.

My wife grew up near Riggins and was forced to wear a pair of adult irrigation boots to and from the school bus stop as protection against a potential rattlesnake bite. That so embarrassed her that she always arrived early and hid the ugly boots in the brush before anyone saw them.



Author windrowing hay with a mule-drawn dump rake in the back country. Rattlesnakes in the windrows made life "interesting".

I have lived and worked around rattlers most of my life and handled a few of them. During an absence, we lost my son's Welsh mare to multiple rattlesnake bites, possibly caused by it stepping on the snake. A dog on the Taylor Ranch died after its second bite experience and I used to react pretty fast when I would hoist a pitchfork full of hay over my head and it would start buzzing.

At home one of my younger sons reached to turn on the outside water faucet without seeing the rattlesnake coiled on the damp ground under it. The snake struck our border collie as she jumped between it and my son.

It was either a dry strike or the ruff hair was too thick, but that dog achieved special status with our family after that incident.

An acquaintance working above Riggins was bitten on the hand some distance from civilization. Within two weeks he experienced muscle damage in his legs and endured six months of severe pain and expense.

I am familiar with the increased incidence of rattlesnake bites at the beginning and end of summer when

they are migrating away from and back to their dens, and the fact that they sometimes become more aggressive when shedding and in hot August weather. It pays to be especially watchful at those times.

My neighbors who live a mile away regularly kill rattlers near their house. But thanks to former owners of my property, the dens were destroyed and I have not seen a rattler on my property in the 22 years I've lived here.

Although I was summoned to evacuate a fire fighter who died from multiple rattlesnake bites in the mid 1950's, I am aware that fewer than one percent of the 5,000 rattlesnake bites in the U.S. each year are fatal.

That is because most snake bite victims are rapidly transported to a proper treatment facility and receive anti-venom when its use is indicated. However, those who receive a large dose of venom from a bite may wish they had died before the ordeal is over.

Western rattlesnakes remain abundant in most parts of Idaho and I am not aware of any profitable market for hatbands or the not-so-tasty meat from these relatively small snakes. Following my announcement in the April *Outdoorsman* that the Commission added rattlesnakes to the list of protected nongame "wildlife", IDFG issued a May 3, 2004 news release entitled, "Snakes can be our friend."

The release advised, "The only snake people need to show caution around is the western rattlesnake, but it also serves as a good neighbor. It feeds on mice, *ground squirrels* and young rabbits, but being venomous it has an aura of danger. If you are working or playing in rattlesnake country, it's good practice to wear tall, leather boots, and long, loose pants. Be smart - don't use hands to lift anything a snake could be under."

Another news item entitled, "Idaho's threatened ground squirrels", listed "threats" as "shooting, poison, *predators like rattlesnakes*, habitat degradation and the replacement of nutrient-rich native plants with less nutritious invasive alien plants."

Then someone apparently decided it wasn't too wise to protect another predator of a federal threatened species so they dropped the "predators like rattlesnakes" from the "threats" and added "*overgrazing by livestock*".

Despite the fact that rattlesnakes are not "wildlife" as defined in I.C. Sec. 36-103, IDFG and the F&G Commission have arbitrarily changed that definition to include 4 salamanders, 10 frogs and toads, 10 lizards, 11 snakes, and 1 turtle - all of which are now protected. But don't worry, if you possess a valid Idaho hunting, fishing or trapping license you are allowed to capture four of any of these species and keep them alive as pets!

News and Comment

Another California Hiker Attacked

Unless you happened to see a brief news item described by some Idaho TV newscasters, you may not be aware of the latest reported mountain lion attack on a hiker in California.

According to the report, 27-year-old Shannon Parker was attacked on June 27, 2004 by a 70-pound female mountain lion while hiking with three male friends about 20 miles north of Kernville. Although her companions stabbed the lion and pelted it with rocks, it tore out one of her eyes, injured the other eye and inflicted deep lacerations to one thigh.

Game and Fish spokesman Steve Martarano said the wounded lion left a bloody trail and was later shot and killed by U.S. Forest Service officers and state game wardens. He said the lion appeared to be emaciated and a 2002 wildfire in the area may have hampered the lion's ability to find enough food.

After receiving emergency room treatment, the victim was transported to UCLA Medical Center for reconstructive surgery according to Martarano. He claimed the incident was the 15th mountain lion attack on a human in California in the past 114 years.

(Calif. Game and Fish failed to admit that there were no reported lion attacks from 1909-1985 but it has investigated and confirmed numerous lion attacks since then. In 1994 alone, 10 lions committing attacks on or threatening humans were destroyed, including two incidents resulting in the victims' deaths.

The attack on Sharon Parker in June was the third lion attack this year resulting in serious injury or death in California. Several attacks where serious injury was avoided were not reported to the media because "officials always fear public reaction."

When an intended victim shoots the attacking lion or manages to escape or receives help thwarting an attack, a media blackout is a disservice to the public. Attempts to hide this latest injury attack from the public indicate that California Game and Fish is more interested in preserving its agenda than correcting the unhealthy lion-to-deer ratio that is the root cause of these attacks. – ED.)

F&G Commission Meets in Sun Valley

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission attended the annual meeting of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies ("WAFWA") in Sun Valley from July 23-30, 2004. The week-long meeting was held at the Sun Valley Resort and was also attended by IDFG Director Steve Huffaker and F&G staff members.

WAFWA membership reportedly consists of the directors of 23 western state and province F&G agencies. Along with the Council for Environmental Education, WAFWA co-sponsors the controversial non-game/fish environmental education program "Project Wild".

The public meeting notice advertising the meeting stated, "No official decisions or final actions would be taken by the Commissioners; however the Commissioners will receive information and discuss fish and wildlife issues with other WAFWA attendees."

(In recent years when Idaho's Governor appoints new F&G Commissioners, the Department provides an appropriate atmosphere and setting to "sell" its programs and agendas to the Commissioners. This practice was temporarily discontinued during the highly publicized budget crunch after former Governor Phil Batt took office, but it was quietly resumed as the heat died down.

The Sun Valley Resort provided an ideal setting for salesmen from the other agencies to sell their concept of wildlife ecosystem management to Idaho's Commission, while discussing their common problems resulting from their common failure to properly manage fish and game.

As usual, Idaho's licensed sportsmen were forced to pay the bill with the hope that at least one or two Commissioners will remember their real constituency and the real issues that must be addressed. – ED)

Attacking the Sacred Cows

We cannot halt the infiltration of environmentalist agendas into management of our renewable wildlife resource without exposing the organizations that perpetuate the deception. The handful of ex F&G employees who control the Idaho Wildlife Federation will continue to fight zealously to preserve the status quo.

Well-intentioned spokesmen like Senator John Andreason lend an aura of legitimacy to this organization whose goals are not the goals of mainstream Idahoans. The IWF Board has the right to promote its extremist agenda, but the F&G Commission must stop pandering to it and restore biologically sound management as required by Idaho law.

Our elected officials can help the Commission by redirecting useful non-game/fish activities and funding to appropriate agencies and eliminating the others. So-called "Watchable Wildlife" programs were designed by non-hunting activists in Washington, D.C. to replace legitimate hunting activity.

At best they are a function of Parks and Recreation and should never be administered by the agency charged with perpetuating wild game and fish harvest. If IDFG will return to managing all wildlife to provide a healthy balance of predators and prey, it will provide an annual surplus of both wild game and non-game for everyone.

Without abundant wildlife populations to view, Idaho's varied landscape becomes just so much sterile scenery to be enjoyed briefly and then ignored. Abundant wildlife populations transform that dead scenery into a land of expectancy where seeing wildlife is a memorable experience that everyone enjoys.

Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

by George Dovel

Idahoans whose names happened to be on a list of potential contributors to various causes, recently received a membership solicitation from the National Wildlife Federation. In return for a \$15 annual membership fee, NWF offered a "stylish fleece blanket" and promised that your contribution will "help expand our wolf recovery success" and "*prevent species like this from disappearing forever.*"

Raising money from a gullible public by implying that wolves were ever in danger of disappearing forever is dishonest. Biologists' estimates that wolf populations in the U.S. and Canada currently exceed 75,000 were noticeably absent in the NWF plea for money.

In its fundraising pamphlet "Wildlife Watch" it brags, "For nearly three decades NWF led the fight to restore this vital and magnificent species (wolf) to suitable habitats across America." It promises to "continue to restore and safeguard America's wild wolf population... dispel old myths... and build understanding of the importance of wolves in our world."

Unfortunately, few NWF contributors look beyond the glowing rhetoric about how its environmental programs make kids and families better stewards of nature.

NWF Dictates Wolf Policy

The role of NWF in federal wolf recovery goes far beyond that of a wolf advocacy group. Along with Defenders of Wildlife and other animal rights groups, NWF is actually dictating changes in the criteria for state management of wolves, and delaying the delisting process far beyond the time frame originally promised by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

In 2003, both Assistant (Interior) Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks Craig Manson and FWS Director Steve Williams endorsed the wording in Wyoming House Bill 229 as the framework for state wolf management. Like Idaho's 2002 Wolf Plan, the Wyoming plan agreed to manage for a minimum of 15 wolf packs instead of the 10 packs needed to remove wolves from endangered listing.

However FWS Wolf Recovery Coordinator Ed Bangs began to voice wolf advocates' objections to Wyoming's dual classification of wolves as predators outside of the wolf recovery area. The conflicting messages from Bangs and his boss prompted Wyoming Governor Dave Freudenthal to ask the Department of Interior (DOI) to appoint one liaison from FWS to communicate wolf policy to Wyoming.

In an August 5, 2003 response, Assistant Secretary Manson wrote that FWS Director Williams "will be DOI's official policy spokesman on wolf issues (and) Ed Bangs, the Service's Wolf Recovery Coordinator, will continue to interact with Wyoming Game and Fish Department personnel *as to technical issues only.*"

Wolf Advocates Prevail

However the influence of NWF and wolf activists in FWS prevailed. Director Williams reversed FWS approval of the Wyoming Wolf Plan on January 13, 2004.

In testimony before the Wyoming Legislature on January 15, 2004, FWS official Paul Hoffman said that from a strictly science perspective Wyoming's Wolf Plan was deemed adequate. However he said, "It all hinges on what we believe is our ability to defend a rule to delist wolves. Our question is how are you going to sell it to an *eastern judge?*"

NWF made sure that would be "the question" by filing litigation on distinct population segments and the wolf reclassification rule in a federal district court in *Vermont*. It also sent a February 23, 2004 letter to FWS Director Williams applauding his last minute rejection of the Wyoming Wolf Plan and suggesting that litigation will continue to tie up every step of the delisting process for years.

A similar lawsuit was filed in federal district court in Oregon by Defenders of Wildlife and FWS attempted to get the Portland judge to consolidate both cases so as to be decided as one by the eastern judge in Vermont. The Oregon judge refused but it is no accident that these lawsuits were not filed in Wyoming where a district judge might be more inclined to rule in favor of science rather than misguided metropolitan sentiment.

NWF remains an environmental organization that embraces causes like global warming and destruction of rain forests. It remains dedicated to increasing populations of large carnivores, while ignoring biologically sound wildlife management.

The Idaho Wildlife Federation

For some time, membership of the Idaho Wildlife Federation has included former IDFG Directors, Regional Supervisors, and Department Heads who openly advocated the reintroduction of wolves into Idaho. Its current list of officers and directors includes a majority of former IDFG staffers and traditional F&G supporters.

In 1999, prior to the 2000 Legislative session when a new IDFG fee increase was being considered by Idaho Legislators, the rumor was circulated that the IWF represented nearly 5,000 licensed sportsmen members. IWF Board members who testified in support of the fee increase allowed a well-known Senate Democrat to repeat the rumor without correction.

However in its "Strategic Plan 2001" found at the IWF website, it admits to having only about 500 members who contribute dues. These include non-hunting and anti-hunting members, and out-of-state individuals and groups who support both the state and national Wildlife Federation environmental agenda.

The IWF Board Structure published in the 2001 Strategic Plan included four non-resident associated directors, a national affiliate representative, and state affiliation representatives. The IWF strategic planning team decided that a handful of affiliates could take over the organization so it reduced the Board to exclude affiliate participation and invited trusted individuals to join IWF.

It also voted to utilize the National Wildlife Federation membership lists to solicit new IWF members and agreed to integrate the National Wildlife Federation programs into its services and programs in order to receive more financial support from the national organization.

IWF Supports Wolf Recovery

Previously, IWF President Jack Fisher denied that IWF sponsored wolf recovery. But in 2001 it “came out of the closet” and endorsed wolf recovery and the broad environmental agenda of its parent national organization.

In 2001 IWF announced, “Social values regarding hunting and fishing have changed” and declared IWF is an advocate “for *all* men, women and children who value *all* wildlife and *their habitat*.” IDFG Director Steve Huffaker used similar language about people’s changing values in “The Compass” in May 2004 in an effort to justify de-emphasizing game harvest in favor of non-game/fish activities.

That is the agenda of both NWF and IWF. They continue to undermine responsible fish and game management required by Idaho law, and to influence the agenda of Idaho’s Fish and Game Department.

IWF Opposes Predator Control

F&G Commission hearings are mandated by law (I.C. Sec. 36-104[b]) “to find facts regarding the state’s wildlife populations...in order to provide continued supplies of wildlife for hunting, fishing and trapping.” Ex F&G IWF spokesmen like Jim Keating have used these hearings as a forum to preach IWF’s false claim that lack of habitat, not excessive predator populations, is the reason depleted game populations fail to recover.

Ex F&G IWF Board members like Carl Nellis provide IDFG staff with arguments and “sound bites” to present to the Commission claiming that controlling predators is too costly and has other detrimental effects. A typical example was Director Huffaker telling the Commission that mice were plugging sprinkler pipes at a Wildlife Management Area because of coyote control.

Outdoorsman Bulletin 3 discussed the attack on F&G Commissioners Burns, Gibbs and Moulton by IWF President Jack Fisher in retaliation for their willingness to use predator control as a wildlife management tool. The article also mentioned the failed initiative attempt by IWF and its affiliates to eliminate Burns’ and Moulton’s Districts and remove the F&G Department from being accountable to the Legislature.

On January 1, 2002, Fisher and former F&G I&E Chief, Bill Goodnight, issued an IWF press release stating,

“There is a conspiracy of legislators, agricultural organizations and F&G Commissioners to achieve the dismissal of Director Rod Sando. Current opposition to Nancy Hadley is simply a mechanism to get the fourth commission vote to fire Sando,” Fisher said.

These irresponsible charges angered Legislators and Commissioners and damaged IWF credibility. Although Fisher, Goodnight and former IDFG Acting Director Jerry Mallet no longer serve as IWF officers Fisher and Nellis remain on its current Board of Directors.

Current IWF Officers

Recently re-elected IWF officers include President Cherie Barton, Vice President Kent Marlor, Secretary Al Logosz and Treasurer Jerry Conley.

Marlor, a former Idaho Wildlife Council Chairman and political science professor whose doctoral thesis defended IDFG mismanagement in 1970, has served on F&G advisory boards, refusing to feed starving big game and criticizing Commission predator control.

Logosz is a retired BLM employee who supervised an April 2004 grazing report by IWF and two affiliates, the Ada County Fish and Game League and the Idaho Bird Hunters. The report charges the BLM with substantial mismanagement of Owyhee County grazing lands.

As explained in Outdoorsman Bulletin 2, Conley is the former IDFG Director who violated I.C. Section 36-715 on September 27, 1994 by issuing a permit to FWS allowing them to introduce Canadian wolves into Idaho, and signing a letter endorsing exaggerated prey estimates and supporting the proposed FWS wolf recovery rules.

Outdoorsman Bulletin 3 described how Conley convinced the Andrus appointed F&G Commission to adopt “Project Wild”, “Watchable Wildlife”, Automated Wildlife Data Systems, “Teaming With Wildlife” and Wildlife Interpretive Centers. Along with the MK Nature Center, these non-game/fish programs cost several hundred thousand dollars or more each year.

During Conley’s 16-year tenure as Director from 1980-1996, the annual IDFG budget increased from \$10.3 million to \$45.2 million - a **339** percent increase averaging 21 percent per year! Yet Idaho Mule Deer and Pheasant harvests declined from record highs to record lows.

IDFG Budget Reflects Agendas

The non-game/fish programs Conley initiated continue to expand the IDFG budget with a disproportionate amount of spending. Since Conley was hired in FY 1980 the percentage of the total budget spent on wildlife management has declined from 31 percent to only 24 percent in FY 2004. But even that significant decline does not tell the whole story.

Most of the \$6 million charged to wildlife habitat was spent on Department owned Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) that are utilized by a relatively small percentage of licensed hunters.

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More than \$2 million of the Wildlife budget was spent for endangered species and another \$2.4 million for research projects. Less than *four percent* of the total FY 2004 IDFG budget was actually spent to monitor wildlife populations and harvests and another *three percent* was spent by Headquarters to analyze that information, recommend seasons and print brochures.

F&G Padded Reported Deer and Elk Harvests

That 3 percent included \$245,038 for a telephone harvest survey that was apparently used to prove my charge last fall that the Wildlife Bureau statistician was padding the deer and elk harvests reported by hunters with a few thousand fictional kills that were not reported.

On March 25, 2004, during discussion of F&G Commission meeting agenda item 8, Big Game manager Brad Compton told the Commission that they used a telephone survey to check every one of the several thousand hunters and none of them had killed a deer or elk. That significant information was not included in the Commission Meeting Notes.

There has been a 50 percent increase in the percentage allocated to Fisheries since FY 1980 because of the millions of dollars in federal and industry mitigation money resulting from the dams. License money comprises only 21 percent of the fisheries budget compared to 44 percent of the wildlife budget.

The financial impact of the non-game/fish programs implemented by Conley and promoted by IWF

goes far beyond the matching federal dollars that supposedly finance them. Although employees' time is roughly allocated on the basis of the jobs they perform the support costs of expanding the agency are not included.

For example, IDFG maintains 1,175 pieces of motorized equipment for half that many employees, including clerical staff. Capital expenditures and the cost of maintaining offices, computer systems and utilities are not fairly apportioned and the cost of administration has skyrocketed.

In FY 2004 F&G Administration spent more than 15 times as much as it did in FY 1980 - representing more than 19 percent of the *total* budget compared to less than 9 percent in 1980! More sportsmen's *license dollars* were spent for administration in FY 2004 than were spent for fisheries or for wildlife.

Project Wild and other environmental education efforts promoted by IWF are robbing sportsmen of money that should be used to restore healthy game populations. Instead of bragging about the \$5,000 hunters spend for each big game animal that is harvested, the Department, the Commission and the Legislature must realize that inflated "value" is based on the *scarcity* of big game rather than on a healthy, harvestable resource.

Expanding Communications Bureau (I&E) funding to nearly \$3 million to "sell" non-game/fish programs to hunters and fishermen will not work. A return to sound management is the appropriate solution.

Each month, Outdoorsman articles reveal little known facts about a variety of fish and game management issues that affect every Idahoan, especially those who cherish Idaho's hunting, fishing and trapping heritage. Please help distribute these facts to help stop the destruction of our billion-dollar wildlife resource and restore sound wildlife management for future generations. A donation in any amount will help defray the cost of printing and mailing these informative bulletins to elected officials. A donation of \$20 or more will pay the cost of printing and mailing all bulletins to you for the next 12 months, and will guarantee they will also be sent to the Senator and Representatives in your District.

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