

The Outdoorsman

Bulletin Number 19

Mule Deer Management Issues

June-July 2006

Emergency Big Game Feeding – Part Two

By George Dovel

This...?



Mule deer being fed "free choice" by private citizens one month before IDFG began token feeding. Note thrifty condition of fawn.

...or this?



Starving mule deer fawn above road. One of thousands IDFG refused to feed in violation of IDAPA 13.01.18.

“There Oughta Be a Law”

Although Outdoorsman Bulletin 18 was published at a time when fishing and camping are uppermost in the minds of most outdoorsmen, several readers took the time to contact us and express their concern about abnormal deer winter losses in their areas. Most asked us why the Legislature has not passed tougher laws requiring F&G to begin feeding timely and supply adequate feed.

My answer is there is a law - in fact a series of laws in both the Idaho Code and the Idaho Administrative Code - defining exactly when, and to some degree how, big game feeding will be accomplished.

For outdoorsmen who are not familiar with the Idaho Administrative Procedure Act (IDAPA) contained in Idaho Code Title 67 Chapter 52, it is the process whereby Idaho state agencies are given the authority to enact temporary rules which are effective until the next regular session of the Legislature. If the rules are then approved by the Legislature, they become permanent rules and are listed in the Administrative Code with full effect of law.

What the Law Says

When long-time Senate Resource Committee Chairman Laird Noh was debating a bill to prohibit winter feeding by private citizens before his retirement, he said, “Fish and Game does not believe in winter feeding and does not want big game fed.” That attitude described by Noh defies the Fish and Game Commission’s own rules which became permanent law on April 3, 1995 as follows:

**IDAPA 13
TITLE 01
CHAPTER 18
13.01.18 - RULES GOVERNING EMERGENCY
FEEDING OF ANTELOPE, ELK, AND DEER OF
THE IDAHO FISH AND GAME COMMISSION
000. LEGAL AUTHORITY.**

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission is authorized to adopt rules concerning the administration of the wildlife policy of the state of Idaho in accordance with the Idaho

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Big Game Feeding *continued from page 1*
fish and game code under Sections 36-103(b), 36-104(b), and 36-105(1), Idaho Code, and specifically concerning emergency feeding of antelope, elk, and deer under Section 36-111(1), Idaho Code. (4-3-95)

001. TITLE AND SCOPE.

The title of this chapter is “Rules Governing Emergency Feeding of Antelope, Elk, and Deer of the Idaho Fish and Game Commission”. These rules govern winter emergency feeding operations and establish the criteria for determining a feeding emergency. (4-3-95)

002. WRITTEN INTERPRETATIONS.

Written interpretations of these rules and documentation of Compliance are available at the Department of Fish and Game’s headquarters office. (4-3-95)

003. ADMINISTRATIVE APPEALS.

There is no right of appeal provided under this chapter. (4-3-95)

004. -- 099. (RESERVED).

100. INTENT.

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission recognizes that the big game population should be maintained under natural conditions and by naturally available forage. Winter forage is the major limiting factor which determines the basic size of the big game populations, and it must be maintained if the animals are to prosper and propagate. In order to maintain these winter ranges, big game numbers must be controlled through adequate harvest. The Commission does not sanction any widespread supplemental winter feeding programs. Additionally, big game animals, especially elk, when concentrated by supplemental feeding are very susceptible to infectious disease which can be transmitted to livestock. However, big game harvests and weather vary from year to year throughout the state. In most years and areas, snow depths, temperatures, and animal body condition do not create adverse conditions for wintering animals.

Unusual weather conditions, limited winter forage, or other circumstances may create critical periods of stress for animals or force them into areas involving public safety. The Commission is unable to manage the big game populations for extreme weather. Therefore, emergency feeding of big game is appropriate under certain criteria. (4-3-95)

101. DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY TO REGIONAL SUPERVISORS.

Because the declaration of and quick response to a feeding emergency will depend on local conditions, the Commission and Director delegate the authority to declare a feeding emergency and to expend funds on feeding to the Regional Supervisors of the Department of Fish and Game. (4-3-95)

102. EMERGENCY FEEDING CRITERIA.

a. Actual or imminent threat of depredation to private property. (4-3-95)

b. Threat to public safety, including traffic hazards. (4-3-95)

c. Excessive mortality which would affect the recovery of the herd. (4-3-95)

d. Limited or unavailable winter forage caused by fire or unusual weather. (4-3-95)

02. Additional Guidelines. The Regional Supervisors may develop additional guidelines on emergency feeding within the listed criteria based on local conditions and local public input. (4-3-95)

103. FEED STOCKPILES.

Over the years, the Department has identified a number of locations where emergency feed should be stockpiled for probable winter use. It is impractical and cost prohibitive to purchase feed and transport it to these locations after snowfall. The Commission and Director declare that the maintenance of this stockpile constitutes a feeding emergency and authorize the expenditure of funds to maintain the stockpiles. (4-3-95)

104. -- 999. (RESERVED).

The foregoing are the entire permanent rules governing emergency feeding of antelope, elk and deer, with underlining added to emphasize important points. Subparagraphs **001.** and **100.** declare that emergency feeding is appropriate and that a feeding emergency will be declared when any of the listed criteria are met; **101.** emphasizes the need for quick response and delegates the authority to declare a feeding emergency in each region to that Regional Supervisor; and **102.** lists four separate criteria, any of which warrants declaring a feeding emergency.

During the recent 2005-06 winter, Regional IDFG news releases verified that not just one but all four of these criteria had been met in several regions. Yet the only sanctioned mule deer feeding (actually “baiting”) in the entire state occurred in Georgetown Canyon in a tiny portion of Unit 76.

The fact that regional supervisors failed to stockpile feed as outlined in Subparagraph **103.** is prima facie evidence of their intention not to conduct proper feeding programs in time to prevent abnormal losses. Their failure to document their reasons for not feeding is evidence that they have no reasons – only excuses.

Two Excuses For Not Feeding

The two excuses used by Director Huffaker and his biologists for not feeding in general are: (1) the false claim that it is too expensive; and (2) the illogical claim that since only a small percentage of Idaho’s deer, elk and antelope are fed, it makes no sense to feed them.

Following the 1980s and early 1990s emergency feeding programs, IDFG claimed it cost an average of \$84.93 to feed each mule deer. Of that amount, only \$12.58 was spent for feed but IDFG claimed its overhead costs averaged \$72.35 for each deer that was fed!

If it cost Idaho livestock owners six times as much to put the feed on the ground in the winter as the feed costs, they would all go broke the first winter. Yet in most cases citizen volunteers unloaded hay and fed the deer and elk.

Studies Prove Feeding Is Cost Effective

By comparison, in a carefully controlled Colorado study conducted on 5,000 of 30,000 mule deer fed a special formula for 100 days during the extreme 1983-84 winter, all of the costs, including feeding labor, averaged only \$34.80 per deer fed two pounds per day, and \$52.80 per deer fed free choice.

These figures translated into a cost of \$174.81 for each extra deer saved by feeding only two pounds each, or \$183.37 for each extra deer saved by providing 110% of the feed they would consume each 24 hours (Baker, Hobbs et al, Journal of Wildlife Management Vol. 49, Oct. 1985).

The estimated value of each extra buck mule deer saved, based on hunting benefits alone, ranged from \$168 to \$1,268 and this does not include the additional production for the period between severe winters. 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 resulted in a long-term annual gain of 2.6% for mule deer bucks harvested in the entire state.

At the carcass value of \$250 per buck deer harvested, the study proved a *minimum* net benefit of \$216,000 for each of the 12 years between extreme winters after feeding costs for all deer were deducted. Spending nearly \$1 million for feeding brought in \$3.6 million just in the value of the extra meat harvested from bucks!

Feeding Properly More Than Doubled Survival

Comparing the carefully documented Colorado studies with the inflated feeding costs and negative gains claimed by Idaho and Utah reflects the latter two states' unwillingness to feed properly. With the exception of the 1996-97 deer feeding program in the Panhandle Region and supplement block program in the Southwest Region, IDFG deer feeding programs since 1984 have consisted of feeding too little too late to be successful.

In December of 1983, snow depths on Colorado mule deer winter range had already reached 30 inches yet feeding did not begin until January 7th. But by providing a constant supply of free choice deer feed until adequate green feed was available *at the end of April*, Colorado cut total deer losses from **53%** to only **24%** where it fed ad libitum (free choice).

Other Benefits of Free Choice Feeding

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 2 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 normal fawn recruitment. But it would take at least 2-3 years for the group fed only two pounds to restore normal recruitment even to reduced deer numbers.

IDFG Cut Feed – Starved Deer

That is exactly what happened in 2002 on the South Fork of the Payette winter range when F&G officials decided not to spend any more money on winter feeding. On February 11, the Landowner-Sportsman Coordinator (LSC) told the SW Feeding Committee and Channel 2 News F&G was going to cut the quantity of deer pellets being fed by 50% and wean the deer off of artificial feed.

As the snow continued to melt on the south slopes, F&G cut the remaining feed in half again before green-up even began. The Boise County Feeding Committee photographed 300 deer and elk that died from malnutrition searching for feed in a small area above those feed sites.

In an apparent effort to hide the massive death losses, IDFG presented a written report to a special legislative hearing claiming that only 46 elk and 19 deer had died in Jan-Feb-Mar in the entire South Fork of the Payette winter range! The erroneous report also claimed that only eight of the elk deaths and none of the deer deaths were attributed to malnutrition.

As IDFG Veterinarian Mark Drew was reading the report, JFAC Co-Chairman Sen. Dean Cameron allowed a videotape of dozens of dead deer and elk above the feed sites to be shown on a screen. The report also said F&G had fed 7.5 pounds of elk pellets per elk per day and **9.9 pounds** of deer pellets per deer per day!

Although a large buck mule deer may consume more than four pounds of pellets per day, claiming that deer ate ten pounds of pellets per day ignores mule deer rumen capacity and digestive processes. IDFG had refused to feed hundreds of starving elk downstream from Lowman and these elk simply charged the deer troughs as soon as the humans left and ate the remaining deer pellets.

During a January 2002 meeting with concerned area residents, the LSC claimed starving elk did not need feed and said F&G was "going to train them to find natural

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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%

Big Game Feeding *continued from page 3*
forage on the windblown ridges above Garden Valley.” He said any elk that refused to paw for food on these ridges would die and those that learned to survive “naturally” would never need feeding again.

The LSC and his Supervisors in the SW Region apparently did not realize that all of the elk that had remained on the ridges pawing for food were already buried under several feet of snow. As the snow settled, antlers sticking out were stark reminders of Regional IDFG officials’ refusal to follow feeding guidelines in the law.



As the snow settled in 2002, Garden Valley residents located bull elk that had attempted to find feed on the “wind-blown ridges” by spotting an antler sticking out of the snow.

When IDFG feeding employees finally noticed the discrepancy between the number of deer counted and the quantity of deer pellets being consumed, they ignored the profusion of elk tracks around the feed troughs and the elk standing in the distance waiting for them to leave. Instead, they insisted local residents were stealing the deer pellets.

What About IDFG Biologists’ Second Excuse?

Idaho biologists’ claim that feeding the relatively few animals that can be reached is not worth the effort is a reflection of the “do nothing – have nothing” result of their hands-off wildlife management. With that attitude, why feed a few thousand hungry children in Idaho if it’s only a drop in the bucket compared to the millions who are going to bed hungry elsewhere?

Each additional male mule deer that is saved by a proper emergency winter feeding program helps insure optimum conception during the first estrus, which increases fawn survival. For each buck mule deer that is harvested in Idaho, merchants receive hundreds of dollars in trip expenses, equipment and vehicle purchases, etc.

Every extra female deer that is saved by feeding has the potential to increase the herd with eight or more surviving offspring. If managed properly, each of its female offspring will produce a similar increase, etc.

Deer, elk and antelope herds that live in traditional “snow belts” generally require emergency feeding more often than others. Those are the critical areas where feed stockpiles are supposed to be maintained every year (see IDAPA 13.01.18.103 on page 2).

The Consequences of Not Feeding

The South and Middle Forks of the Payette River include 75 linear miles of traditional mule deer and elk winter range in one such snow belt. From USFS and IDFG records in our possession, we know that 600-700 elk and thousands of mule deer were fed successfully during extreme winters on portions of that range during the 1920s.

We also know that the S. Fork mule deer population in the 1,648 square miles of Units 33, 34 and 35 was estimated at 30,000 in 1933, and estimates based on reliable annual trend counts averaged >**10,000** for several decades. The opening day of deer season was a school holiday as students joined several thousand visiting hunters who harvested deer and patronized local businesses.

But all that slowly ended as IDFG Director Dick Woodworth and his biologists substituted selling increased “hunting opportunity” for managing Idaho game. They stressed the deer in these three units by increasing the season length from 30 days to **2-1/2 consecutive months**.

F&G Claimed “Deer Are Still There”

Then when many deer died during a deep-snow winter, they wrongly blamed it on too many deer for the available winter forage. When they could no longer count at least 5,000 deer each March at a handful of locations near Garden Valley, they conducted fixed-wing counts and then extensive helicopter counts in an effort to prove their false media release titled “The deer are still there!”

In the late 1960s when I pointed out that we were counting too few deer to justify the continued annual either-sex harvest of >2,500 deer in the three units, IDFG stopped hiring me to conduct the census flights. When Woodworth was forced to resign, his successor, Joe Greenley, set 26-day buck seasons, and 5-12 day antlerless seasons in the few units where doe hunting was justified.

The combination of biologically sound seasons and feeding during a severe winter slowly restored the deer herd until Greenley’s successor, Jerry Conley, also began selling “hunting opportunity.” Knowing that he could not get away with extending the general deer season as Woodworth had done, Conley simply added a 26-day general either-sex archery season in Aug.-Sep. and a 15-day general muzzleloader buck season in late November.

Record Harvests Don’t Last

With antlerless seasons nearly six times as long and buck seasons doubled - plus 15 extra days of hunting in the rut added, mule deer harvests in the three units increased through 1992. But then Conley and his biologists refused to feed properly in the extreme 1992-93 winter across central and southern Idaho and mule deer populations and harvests have never recovered.

The following deer harvest figures were published by IDFG in P-R funded studies, Annual Reports and other F&G publications. The claimed average deer harvests for 1991-1994 were provided to the Deer Team, and to the USFWS Wolf Recovery Team along with a letter from Conley attesting to their accuracy:

Declining Deer Harvests in Units 33, 34, and 35

Unit	1964	1968	1991-94	2002	2003	2004	2005
33	1888	1819	1576	320	313	332	457
34	306	267	681	61	46	86	68
35	622	562	592	92	123	133	109
Ttl	2816	2648	2849	473	482	551	634

What the chart does not show is that SW Region officials averaged the high 1991 & 1992 harvests together with radically declining 1993 & 1994 harvests of only ~ 200 deer each and falsely claimed the deer population in all three units was "increasing since 1991." The deer population took another nose-dive in 2002 so it is again "increasing" (or was until most of the remaining deer starved this past winter because they weren't fed).

Despite 80% Deer Decline F&G Kills Off Females

Of the **535** average deer killed by hunters in these three famous deer units during the past four years, one in four were does or fawns killed by special privilege bowhunters or youth hunters. The **>80% decline** in both deer populations and harvests since the 1992-93 die-off prohibits killing even one antlerless deer until the populations have recovered.

Yet SW Region Commissioners Meiers, Clower and Watts all allowed special privilege hunters to continue to kill off the breeding does and kill too many breeding bucks during the late muzzleloader season. After F&G's 2001-02 winter feeding disaster, SW Region officials published a series of "Big Game Winter Feeding Supplements" in both a local and a regional newspaper.

The series of articles omitted significant facts and used selected phrases to imply that deer populations in the 75 miles of winter range loosely referred to as "the Garden Valley area," had once reached a "high" of 1,500! They claim that annual deer harvests averaging about 400 since 1993 result from inadequate winter forage and adverse climatic conditions and imply that F&G winter feeding programs use sound biological practices.

They profess expertise in feeding and claim that supplying about three pounds of deer pellets per deer in one or several feed troughs allows every deer to consume the recommended percent of its body weight in deer pellets without overeating. That statement reflects their ignorance of mule deer biology and of 20+ years of published research pointing out the flaws in such a feeding policy.

Since only the deer present at the troughs when the feed arrives are counted, F&G has no accurate count of the

number of deer being fed. When deer or elk are still hungry after the feed at one site is exhausted, many simply move to other feed sites searching for food.

But even if the number of deer is accurately counted and no elk are present (a rare circumstance in the "Garden Valley" area) feeding only once per day while limiting the amount of feed always results in some animals overeating and others not getting enough feed to survive. Because of the limited capacity of their rumen, deer alternately eat and chew their cud over a 24-hour period, but there are two periods, normally about 12 hours apart, when they consume most of their feed.

Forcing mule deer to go hungry as F&G does and then rush the feed troughs once a day to wolf down food before the other deer and elk eat it is unnatural and unhealthy. Not only does the "pecking order" prevail, with even a calf elk dominant over all deer, but there are also individual "bullies" of either sex that will leave their feed just to chase deer away from other troughs.

Why Use Troughs?

Extensive feeding studies conducted over a period of years resulted in Colorado distributing feed wafers (similar to pellets) on the snow in carefully spaced small piles so that some feed was always available to any deer. To insure this they fed an estimated 10 percent more each day than the deer would consume.

To prevent that 10% or more daily waste, private citizens in the Garden Valley area began using troughs and adjusting the quantity of feed at each feed site so that one sack or less of pellets remained in the troughs when feed was delivered the following day. If no feed remained the quantity was increased and if more than one sack remained it was reduced by the appropriate number of sacks.

They identified and recorded small groups of deer visiting the troughs at various times during the day or night in a natural feeding pattern. The stress resulting from overcrowding and aggressive behavior was virtually eliminated along with acidosis and acitosis or other potential digestive problems.

Wyoming feeds thousands of elk every winter, but rarely feeds deer or antelope and prefers to distribute alfalfa pellets over a long distance on top of the snow just like ranchers feeding cattle. But in Garden Valley where deer and elk must be fed at the same site, the use of troughs can facilitate the feeding, but only if a pelletized formula that is digestible by both species is provided free choice.

After F&G killed more than a dozen elk at a feed site above Lowman by feeding them high-energy deer pellets they could not digest, ruminant nutrition specialist Chuck Hurst provided a safe formula to be fed free choice to either species. In 2005 the IDFG Veterinarian developed a low-energy rye grass pellet intended to be fed to both deer and elk in poor condition initially – and again later as a transition feed just before green-up.

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Big Game Feeding *continued from page 5*

Another Reason F&G Can't Feed Properly

The simple chore of feeding animals in the winter, accomplished by hundreds of Idaho livestock owners without a second thought, has been described by several IDFG employees put in charge of feeding as their "worst nightmare." Nothing in their education has prepared them for several months of non-stop physical labor or the conflicting pressures from their bosses who want to limit spending, vs. local residents who want the animals saved.

Immediately following the 1992-93 F&G feeding disaster in the Garden Valley area, local area legislators directed the IDFG SW Region to write up a plan for future feeding in the area. On April 14, 1993, IDFG Emmett DCO (District Conservation Officer) Brent Hyde, who supervised the IDFG feeding personnel, prepared the plan for then SW Region Supervisor Stacy Gebhards.

In the plan Hyde emphasized that six C.O.s spent 1,800 hours, including hundreds of hours of "comp" time, with the feeding operation. To those unfamiliar with the term, comp time is accumulated in lieu of overtime by public employees and must then be used as paid vacation time during the officers' busy seasons.

Hyde recommended purchasing and storing feed during the summer and hiring a private contractor to conduct the entire feeding operation if it became necessary to feed. He offered several reasons why this was more logical and cost-effective than disrupting officers' schedules during the occasional extreme winter, but that recommendation was never implemented.

Idaho Biologists Perpetuate Myth

In a January 12, 1994 newspaper interview former SE Region Supervisor Greg Tourtlotte was quoted as saying, "I don't think there's a biologist in this country that would recognize winter feeding as a game management tool, but it's expected by the public. It may not have good effects biologically, but it has a sociological effect."

Yet on Dec. 12, 1994, Colorado Division of Wildlife Research Biologist Dr. Dan Baker sent our Feeding Advisory Committee a letter stating, "It's my opinion based on our studies and experiences, that the long held view of most wildlife managers that you cannot successfully feed big game is largely a myth. There may be other reasons not to feed starving deer in winter (economical, social, philosophical) but from a biological standpoint, it works."

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

Anti-Feeding Clichés

Baker hit the nail on the head – IDFG's refusal to feed starving big game is based on a fanatical philosophy that cannot be supported with facts or science. The cliché that feeding only during the occasional extreme winter

"takes the 'wild' out of wildlife" reflects either ignorance or dishonesty.

Idaho biologists know that deer and elk that have been fed only during an extreme winter do not return to the feed sites the following year looking for a handout. Yet in a May 23, 2002 interview in *The Idaho Statesman*, Wildlife Bureau Chief Jim Unsworth claimed the deer and elk "quickly become accustomed to the steady chow and return there every year."

He said emergency feeding is "economically a bad deal" (for sportsmen). "In the South Fork (of the Payette) where elk were fed, the management cost for each elk taken by hunters was \$150. In the Middle Fork of the Salmon where there is no feeding, management ran \$10 per elk taken by hunters," Unsworth said.

His purported "cost analysis" ignored the reality that IDFG removed the feed prematurely and allowed several hundred elk that were being fed to starve to death before green-up (which tripled the feeding cost of the elk that survived to be harvested). His "analysis" also ignored the increased future harvests resulting from having to feed only one winter out of the preceding nine.

Same Feeding Failure – Different Excuses

During the 23 years that more than \$400,000 per year has been set aside for emergency feeding, IDFG has never fed properly and has always provided a set of excuses for its failure. In 1983 the Wildlife Bureau excuses for Garden Valley were "overgrazing by livestock," "too many deer and elk for the winter range" and "no money for feeding."

Since then, all livestock grazing was eliminated, deer and elk numbers have declined dramatically and the \$400,000+ is paid by deer, elk and antelope hunters every year, so a new set of excuses was needed. In the 2002 *Statesman* article Unsworth blamed it on "all those new cabins that are taking away traditional winter range - then summer fires burn the grasses and shrubs on what is left, and invasive skeleton weed and cheatgrass move in."

Garden Valley has experienced the same fires, skeleton weed and cheatgrass over the past 40 years and 95% of the South Fork winter range remains untouched by human development. Hunters who get skunked this hunting season can anticipate a new set of excuses for F&G's failure to use the dedicated fund to feed the starving animals this past winter.

Alternatives to Emergency Feeding

But until the dedicated feeding money is put in the hands of an agency that will spend it properly for the purpose for which it was intended, mule deer harvests in Idaho will continue at record low levels.

The following article describes a viable alternative to emergency feeding. It will increase mule deer survival significantly during moderately severe winters and will help mitigate the massive losses that occur during extreme deep-snow winters.

An Alternative to Emergency Winter Feeding

By George Dovel

In the April 14, 1993 IDFG Garden Valley Feeding Action Plan described on page 6, DCO Brent Hyde included "Distribute mineral blocks on ridges to try to hold animals away from town." Once our winter feeding advisory committee was formed in 1994, I pursued this recommendation with the intent of using energy block supplementation in lieu of standard mineral blocks.

This would enable small groups of deer and elk to survive on poor quality natural forage rather than invade farms and subdivisions searching for food. The ruminant nutrition experts I discussed this with strongly endorsed the practice, which was already used in some states to correct selenium and other mineral deficiencies in selected areas.

Energy Blocks Corrected Deficiencies

The experts suggested I contact Gary Rohwer of the Bar Diamond, Inc. feed testing facility in Parma because of his background in wild mule deer nutrition studies. Rohwer tested both normal and drought-stressed forage samples from the South Fork winter range in October 1994 and found all of the samples were deficient in phosphorus, zinc and copper.

The drought-stressed samples were also deficient in protein and magnesium and would provide only 63% of the normal carrying capacity per plant. Deer utilizing this forage without proper supplementation would be more likely to succumb to malnutrition during the winter or to grass tetany at spring green-up.

With his background in mule deer and other wild ruminant nutrition, Rohwer designed a generic deer, elk and antelope energy supplement for the Great Basin area. Then he contacted Ruminant Nutritionist Chuck Hurst of Nutritech, Inc. in Carmen to design the blocks.

The blocks provide energy from fermentable carbohydrates, along with a proper mineral, electrolyte and pH balance to maintain a healthy rumen capable of digesting a wide variety of natural and artificial feed. Consumption is carefully controlled by ingredient as well as by texture.

Private Citizens Purchased-Distributed Blocks

The initial orders of wildlife energy blocks were purchased using money donated by private citizens. Garden Valley resident Jack Ogden manufactured metal trays on rebar rods driven into the ground to keep the blocks elevated above the snow and prevent leaching into the soil. This turned out to be an unnecessary precaution as the leaching into the soil that is common with salt blocks or mineral blocks does not occur with these energy blocks.

Local feeding expert Sandy Donley established block sites at locations that would reduce conflicts with civilization, by providing the nutrients deer and elk needed to survive on poor quality natural winter forage. When he

first placed the blocks he tossed a few flakes of weed-free alfalfa hay beside them in the snow to attract deer and elk to them initially.

Once the animals began using the blocks, they would visit a block site in small groups and each animal would consume the few ounces it required. Then the group would leave the area to feed on natural forage.

The heavy browsing that is common in the immediate area where a feed site is located did not occur with the energy blocks. This was later confirmed by BLM and FS range specialists who examined block sites that had been used continuously for several years.

They also confirmed that, unlike salt blocks, there was no leaching or soil erosion in the vicinity of blocks that had been placed directly on the ground for several years in a row. Unlike salt, the animals do not utilize these blocks unless a dietetic deficiency exists.

Animals Consume Blocks Only If Needed

Without exception, as soon as hay, feed pellets, or high quality natural forage becomes available to the deer or elk, their use of the blocks drops dramatically to almost nothing. Recently IDFG Veterinarian Mark Drew attempted to measure the impact of the blocks on two small groups of captive elk.

Both groups were fed what was called "low-quality" hay and one of the groups was also provided blocks free choice. The elk consumed almost none of the blocks, which proved only that the so-called "low-quality" hay provided the nutrients the elk needed for a subsistence diet.

To determine the impact of the blocks, the veterinarian might have withdrawn the hay from both groups of elk for five days to simulate starvation (as was done in the well-known Colorado study with mule deer) and then provided some fresh or frozen grass clippings to both groups to simulate green-up. This would have quickly proved the blocks' ability to preserve the microorganisms in the rumen that are needed to digest high-nutrient forage without acidosis, scouring, etc.

Ten Years of Proven Success

From 1994-2003 the Wildlife Energy Blocks were used in multiple locations, either as a substitute for emergency winter feeding, or to keep deer and elk away from livestock feeding operations. In every instance where a small quantity of hay was used to "bait" the animals to the block initially, the operation was described by all F&G personnel who participated as 100% successful."

Costing just pennies per day per elk, the blocks saved thousands of dollars that were formerly spent to "bait" elk away from livestock feeding and stored hay in

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the Garden Valley area. Yet IDFG Big Game Chief Lonk Kuck began ridiculing their use in a Jan. 5, 1998 memo to regional directors and wildlife managers.

Admitting that he knew little or nothing about what he called “protein” blocks, Kuck said the blocks should not be used because there were no published studies (by wildlife biologists) allowing their use as a management tool to be evaluated. His memo neglected to mention that, as a member of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Board of Directors, he had sabotaged a proposed study of the blocks to be funded by RMEF.

“Lonk, You’ve Destroyed The Mule Deer”

Idaho law says “the buck stops” with the Director and his bosses, the F&G Commissioners. But the person most responsible for the destruction of Idaho’s once famous mule deer population is former Big Game Manager Lonk Kuck.

He opposed feeding the starving deer in 1992-93 and then used his standard cliché, “bullets do not affect deer populations,” to justify continuing the extended seasons and antlerless harvests in 1993 that destroyed any chance for a normal mule deer recovery.

In a December 2, 1993 Special Commission Hearing attended by a crowd of angry deer hunters, Kuck’s former boss, Joe Greenley walked up to him in my presence and said, “Lonk you’ve destroyed the mule deer – what are you going to do about it?” Kuck did not reply.

Biologists Conspire to Halt Block Use

Instead he and his co-conspirators at the regional level accelerated their campaign to halt increasing use of the wildlife energy blocks statewide. With no facts to substantiate their position, they repeated false claims that the blocks could cause protein poisoning, copper poisoning, etc.

When that didn’t work, SW Region Supervisor Al VanVooren and Emmett Senator Brad Little repeated the false claim in 2002 that Sandy Donley was getting a “kickback” on all of the blocks that were sold. When that lie also failed to halt the block use, SW Region officials published the false claim: “Both field and laboratory tests have yielded less than encouraging results so far.”

As “proof” of that claim, they cited the fact that elk in the Wood River area walked past some blocks placed on their route to ranchers’ haystacks by Magic Valley Region F&G employees. They failed to mention that no hay or other attractant was placed near the blocks to cause the elk to stop and investigate them – an oversight that guaranteed that so-called “field test” would fail.

“Even If It Works It Is ‘Philosophically’ Wrong”

Still unable to find any legitimate reason to not use the blocks, they resort to Lonk Kuck’s claim that using “animal husbandry techniques” with wildlife somehow violates their “philosophy” as professional managers of “free-roaming wildlife.” But are they consistent?

The answer is “No.” They show no reluctance to use so-called animal husbandry techniques to increase survival in free roaming wolves, certain bighorn sheep populations, and wild turkeys in areas where they cannot survive a severe winter without feeding.

They apparently feel it is acceptable to stress deer and elk by chasing them with helicopters or allowing hunters to pursue them in deep snow until they cannot survive the winter, because it’s the wildlife managers’ idea. But providing the animals with the necessary nutrients to survive a moderately severe winter on natural forage is apparently considered “unnatural” because it wasn’t their idea.

F&G Defied State Veterinarian

Former Idaho State Veterinarian Dr. Bob Hillman, recognized nationally for his expertise in the transmission of disease between wild ruminants and livestock, strongly advocated use of the energy blocks early enough to allow small scattered groups of elk to winter on their traditional range. Instead, regional F&G officials insist on letting the elk form into large groups of several hundred animals “migrating” downstream in search of adequate nutrition.

F&G’s refusal to use the blocks as Dr. Hillman recommended always results in having to bait elk away from highways, railroads or livestock feeding operations during deep snow winters. This often results in a costly annual feeding operation, which could have been prevented by using blocks and then feeding the smaller groups away from livestock operations if the snow gets too deep.

Twenty-three years of taking money from big game hunters to mitigate winter losses and instead using that dedicated money as a slush fund to make up deficits in other programs proves that F&G is neither capable of nor willing to spend the money properly. Transferring the money to the Idaho Dept. of Agriculture as some have suggested could create more problems than it would solve.

Two Realistic Solutions

One solution would be to replace the F&G feeding advisory committees with county feeding committees, appointed by the board of county commissioners in the few rural counties where feeding historically occurs. They would have authority to use energy block supplementation as required, and switch to full feeding, with county commission approval, in the rare winters with extreme snow depths. The annual feeding money would be apportioned among these counties and could be used for no other purpose.

A second solution is to abolish the entire feeding program, including the dedicated account, and reduce the big game tag fee by the appropriate amount. That would allow big game hunters and other private citizens or businesses to donate the money to support the use of energy supplement blocks and of feed on the rare occasions when it becomes necessary. The article on page 9 explains what IDFG must also do to increase winter survival.

Extra Hunting Opportunity Increases Winter-Kill

By George Dovel

When Jerry Conley replaced retiring Joe Greenley as IDFG Director in FY 1980, the total F&G budget was **\$10.3 million**. There were only three special-privilege bonus* deer controlled hunts and one bonus* elk CH in the entire state (*hunts where there is already a general season for the same species and sex).

When Steve Mealey replaced Conley in FY 1997, the F&G budget had mushroomed to **\$56.1 million** and there were 9,110 limited CH deer permits and 28,360 limited CH elk permits plus several thousand unlimited permits for both species. Most of the ~40,000 permits were bonus CH permits in addition to general hunts.

In the late-1990s when Gov. Phil Batt finally replaced Idaho F&G Commissioners as their terms expired, he told the new Commissioners to restore fiscal responsibility and sound game management. They quickly implemented significant spending cuts in each Bureau but Conley and Administration Chief Steve Barton made sure the cuts came out of programs that benefit game and fish.

Selling "Hunting Opportunity"

After Conley had been replaced by Steve Mealey, Virgil Moore, who was still Chief of the Information and Education Bureau, conducted a F&G Commission "workshop" explaining how the new Commissioners could increase license revenue without the need for a fee increase. He claimed that the only product they could offer to draw customers away from other states was extended "hunting opportunity" and said they should take advantage of longer big game hunting seasons than other states offer, and advertise the extra hunting opportunity to nonresidents.

Providing extended hunting seasons when game populations are depleted is an obvious violation of I.C. Sections 36-103(b) and 36-104(b). But the Batt-appointed Commissioners followed Commissioner Keith Carlson's lead, instructing the Director to promote extra big game hunting opportunity and to spend sportsmen license dollars advertising it in Washington, Oregon and California.

In 1997 IDFG biologists increased "hunting opportunity" by adding another 1,245 bonus deer permits and 1,175 bonus elk permits in extended hunts. In 1998 they extended the general mule deer seasons that had been shortened following the 1992-93 die-off, and extended all general elk seasons using combinations of the A-B Zone Tag System.

Several commissioners objected to the liberalized cow elk seasons but they were assured that the harvests would not increase because rifle hunting was limited. Then as now, F&G officials and their support groups manipulated Commissioners to approve expanded hunting opportunity that cannot be justified biologically.

Increasing Hunt Opportunity Increases Winter-kill

So what does selling expanded hunting opportunity have to do with mule deer survival in the winter? The answer is: "A great deal."

In an effort to lessen the massive mule deer winter losses that we have been experiencing across central and southern Idaho, a concerned IDFG biologist presented published study results to his peers to remind them that hunting season lengths have a major influence on mule deer winter survival.

During a normal Idaho summer, the grasses and plants mule deer consume meet their energy requirements and provide surplus energy that is stored as muscle tissue and body fat. But beginning with the first killing frosts in the fall, much of the plant nutrients are lost and the forage mule deer consume begins to have a low ratio of digestible nutrients to indigestible cell walls. The low quality forage also remains in the rumen longer before it is digested and the deer can no longer process enough food to meet their daily energy requirements.

Thus the deer begin a slow process of starvation which causes them to lose 10-15% of fall body weight during a normal winter. This weight loss consists of stored fat and muscle tissue that is "burned" to compensate for the reduced caloric intake of the forage.

It is almost impossible to save a deer that has lost 25% or more of its optimum fall body weight. Since every exertion burns calories which increases the amount of weight loss needed to compensate, it is extremely important to reduce or eliminate stress from all causes – including hunting.

Losing Back Fat Increases Energy Demands 35-50%

The study results provided by the biologist indicate if "one" energy unit is required to bed on bare ground, then standing would require 1.5, walking 3 and trotting **11.5**. In other words "trotting" away from hunters requires nearly four times as much energy as simply walking, and 8-11 times as much energy as standing or bedding.

Most deer hunters enjoy hunting when there is a tracking snow but it requires **75%** more energy for a mule deer to forage for food in eight inches of snow than in one inch. Mule deer spend most of their time bedded during the winter, with external body fat and hair providing insulation from the cold air.

But if the hair gets wet or there is a wind, external body fat is all the insulation they have. If that is used up prematurely avoiding hunters (including late elk hunters) on almost a daily basis, daily energy demands are increased by 35 to 50% and their odds of surviving even a moderately severe winter are reduced substantially.

continued on page 10

Extra Hunting Opportunity *continued from page 9*

As we have pointed out in several previous issues, with very few exceptions Wyoming does not allow mule deer hunting during the November rut. This increases buck-to-doe ratios, increasing conception during the first estrus, which results in early birth the following May so that both fawns and their dams can take advantage of the high quality forage that is available in late spring.

This produces healthier, heavier fawns with a much better chance of surviving the winter, and healthier bred does with healthy fetuses. When mule deer are not being harassed by hunters during the rut, adult females may continue to gain fat in early November if the weather is mild.

But this is only part of the reason Wyoming has such good mule deer survival without feeding during moderately severe winters. The other reason is that, unlike Idaho, Wyoming does not sell thousands of bonus CH mule deer permits for special privilege hunts from August 15th through December 20th. Wyoming archery deer hunting is limited to 30 days or less in September and most rifle mule deer seasons are the last 17 days in October.

Excess Stress Reduces Fat Reserves

During a period of drought, mule deer will seek out the nutrients they need if they are available – unless they are being pursued by hordes of hunters for up to 127 days as happens in many parts of Idaho. By mid-October mule deer on many public lands in Idaho are so spooked by assorted hunters that they take off running when they hear a vehicle or see a hunter several hundred yards away.

Because of the constant hunter harassment, these deer have little opportunity to build up adequate fat reserves to survive a hard winter. Idaho wildlife managers argue that the extra harvest from the special privilege hunts is so small as to be insignificant, yet slightly more than 25% of the mule deer harvested each year are taken in special privilege bonus hunts where a general season for that species and sex also exists.

And there is substantial evidence indicating that more mule deer die during a hard winter because of inadequate fat reserves resulting from the cumulative effect of bonus hunts than the 6,000-7,000 that are killed by hunters in those hunts. Also, more than half of the mule deer harvested by hunters in those bonus hunts are productive females.

Statewide Mule deer Hunter Survey

A small percentage of mule deer tag purchasers will soon receive an IDFG survey with numerous multiple choice questions asking how much they earn, the most important reason they hunt, and what they are willing to give up in order to continue to hunt mule deer. The survey implies that if they want a chance to harvest a large buck they must go to a system of limited controlled hunts like the existing bonus hunts, or else hunt only one year out of every 2, 3, 5, or 10 years.

The wildlife managers, who provided information to be elicited by the survey questions also want to know if deer hunters are willing to accept deer seasons shorter than 10 days in order to be able to hunt every year. These are the same wildlife managers who have violated the law and ignored the welfare of Idaho's mule deer herds in order to keep selling increased hunting opportunity using bonus controlled hunts.

The Truth about Increasing Buck-Doe Ratios

Another proposed question asks if deer hunters would accept more controlled hunts to provide for more mature bucks and higher buck:doe ratios. The truth is that fewer controlled hunts – not more – will save several thousand mule deer bucks from being killed every year when they are most vulnerable.

Instead of taking the skill out of hunting and selling chances for the right to slaughter a buck that is intent on locating and breeding females, why not let those bucks that survive the general hunting season breed the does efficiently? This will double the buck:doe ratio from 15:100 to 30:100 and provide twice as many older bucks for everyone to hunt in the general season next October.

Any Idaho mule deer hunter who isn't willing to compete with other hunters in the field for an equal chance to harvest a big buck is free to apply for special privilege hunts in states like Utah and Nevada. Or he or she can pay the going rate for a "canned" hunt on private land right here in Idaho.

Instead of surveying mule deer hunters like me who are gullible enough to keep buying an Idaho deer tag, why isn't the survey being sent to the 40,000 hunters who have quit hunting mule deer in the past 10 years? And instead of asking slanted questions with carefully crafted answers provided, why not let these former hunters tell you the truth about why they quit hunting mule deer?

Controlled Hunts Exploit Mule Deer, Hunters

For the past 25 years Idaho hunters have been bombarded with the false claim that controlled hunts are used to protect big game and perpetuate hunter harvests. In 2006, IDFG offers a record high 14,002 limited controlled hunt deer permits - yet deer populations continue to decline because, except for a handful of units, these are bonus permits designed to increase license revenue and exploit Idaho mule deer populations.

In 2004 deer hunter success in Idaho was 60% for bonus CH and 29% for general season hunting – with total deer hunter success of only **32%**. In 2004 Wyoming deer hunter success (with no bonus CH) was **66%** - slightly more than double Idaho's success rate.

Until IDFG admits its bonus controlled hunts are a major contributor to excessive mule deer winter losses, mule deer harvests will remain at record lows. Its failure to mitigate these losses with appropriate biological tools reflects its unwillingness to stop selling hunting opportunity and start managing the resource.

Editorial Comment:

Supertag or Super Con Job?

Recently Garden Valley resident Sandy Donley said he had been notified by IDFG that he had been selected to receive a Supertag in a drawing held for hunters who returned their mandatory harvest reports on time. The notice said he must choose the species by June 1st and would have to pay for both the tag and a permit fee.

He called F&G to see if buying the supertag would allow him to kill a second elk and was told that it wouldn't. He explained that he preferred to hunt elk in Unit 33 where he has hunted all his life with his family and friends, and asked if he could transfer the tag to someone else who needed a place to hunt (like landowners transfer their LAP tags). Again the answer was "No."

Sandy said it reminded him of the con artists who notify you that you've won a luxury cruise – and then tell you the limitations of the "prize" and how much it's going to cost you. It reminded me of how big game management has been prostituted in the past few years.

When I returned from service in Korea and Japan in 1956, I bought a "super" tag for deer and another "super" tag for elk. For a total of \$5.00, including the license, I could hunt elk or deer and most other species in every open hunt in Idaho and I could kill an extra deer in some units by paying an extra dollar for a second tag.

In 1966 and 1976, for slightly higher fees, I still bought deer and elk "super" tags entitling me to hunt anywhere in the state in every open season. But I could no longer kill certain predatory species.

In the 1980s I could no longer buy a "super" tag. If I wanted to hunt deer or elk in some units I was forced to buy an archery permit or blackpowder permit along with the appropriate weapon, or else pay extra money to draw in a CH lottery for the chance to hunt in just one unit.

Now, even if I spend several hundred dollars on licenses and special equipment, my odds of harvesting a mule deer are only 1-in-3.4. The odds of my drawing a bonus permit for a 60% chance to harvest a deer are 1-in-3 so statistically I can only hope to harvest a deer about once every 3-4 years. That is unless I'm willing to pay another \$272.50 for a "Leftover Nonresident Deer Permit" each year to increase my harvest odds.

IDFG now offers the most mule deer hunting opportunity and the least mule deer harvest opportunity since statewide total harvests were first estimated. The apparent intent of the carefully crafted Mule Deer Hunter Survey is to provide an excuse for creating even more special privilege bonus hunts for those who will pay the extra money to shoot a buck mule deer during the rut.

This will automatically "weed out" more hunting families in the lower third of the income scale that some

F&G biologists insultingly refer to as "fast food hunters." With the exception of the Panhandle Region, which manages both deer and elk with general seasons (except for one bonus buck deer CH with 50 permits), IDFG has substituted selling hunting opportunity for managing game.

If a huntable population of deer or elk exists in any unit in Idaho where annual hunting occurs, the harvest is easily regulated by adjusting the general season lengths for males, and separately for females. Simultaneous opening dates guarantee proper resident hunter distribution.

The fact that wild game is a valuable natural resource owned by Idaho citizens and managed for them to harvest is ignored by F&G in its effort to see how much license income it can generate to subsidize its **non-game agenda**. Hunters now pay nearly \$4,000 in lottery fees for each so-called "Superhunt" tag that is issued – a tag that used to be available to every hunter for the price of a meal.

And nearly 105,000 deer and elk hunters now pay F&G about a million dollars in application and permit fees for the chance to draw fewer than 35,000 permits to hunt deer and elk when other hunters can't.

The controlled hunt system administered by IDFG today is simply a scam designed to sell extra harvest opportunity to a few lucky lottery winners by taking reasonable harvest opportunity away from the average hunter. The less chance all hunters have of harvesting an animal – the more some will pay for that extra chance.

Despite wildlife managers' claims since 1997 that they're working to restore healthy mule deer and Clearwater elk herds, it isn't happening. Why restore deer and elk numbers when you can charge fewer hunters a lot more money because the animals are scarce?

F&G brags about the amount of money spent by hunters on license fees and trip expenses for each deer or elk that is harvested. But it never mentions the millions of dollars that are no longer spent in Idaho for equipment, vehicles, insurance, etc., by the thousands of Idahoans who have quit hunting because of the lack of game.

On page 4 of this issue I mentioned the adverse impact on the local economy resulting from destroying the mule deer herd in Units, 33, 34 and 35. I could just as easily have used units in southeast Idaho or elsewhere that also provide only a fraction of their historical harvest.

The F&G Commissioners I have discussed this with over several years know the system is broken but they don't know how to fix it or where to begin. The obvious place to start is eliminating every controlled hunt where there is also a general season for the same species and sex.

Then use the proper tools to mitigate losses from extreme weather and the resulting predator-prey imbalance.

Scott Richards' Story

By Scott Richards

(When we published the last Outdoorsman issue, we had already received this article by Grangeville hound hunter Scott Richardson. We were told that the story was being published in major Idaho newspapers so we did not include it.

Three weeks after the wolf attack described in Scott's story, The Idaho Statesman published an IDFG news release telling hunters with bird dogs or hounds how to avoid attacks in "wolf habitat". Scott had already followed all of the suggestions, including attaching bells to the collars of his hounds, but it didn't prevent the wolves from attacking and killing his dogs or lunging at him.

A week later statesman environmental reporter and wolf advocate Rocky Barker published an article describing three wolf attacks on dogs in late May and early June. He referenced Scott's experience but did not include the full story or any photos.

We believe that readers who haven't read Scott's article, will benefit from reading this firsthand account of a wolf attack by a rural resident who is not allowed to protect his valuable dogs on public land. The experimental wolf rules clearly violate his Constitutional rights. – ED)

Hi, my name is Scott Richards and I have lived in Grangeville Idaho for the last 17 years. I have enjoyed training my hunting dogs for the past 34 years. To do this takes a great deal of love for your dogs and for the great outdoors.

I have always prided myself on the manner in which I train my dogs and take care of them. When I choose a new pup he or she spends the first 6 months of their life in my house. They are loved and a bond is there forever.

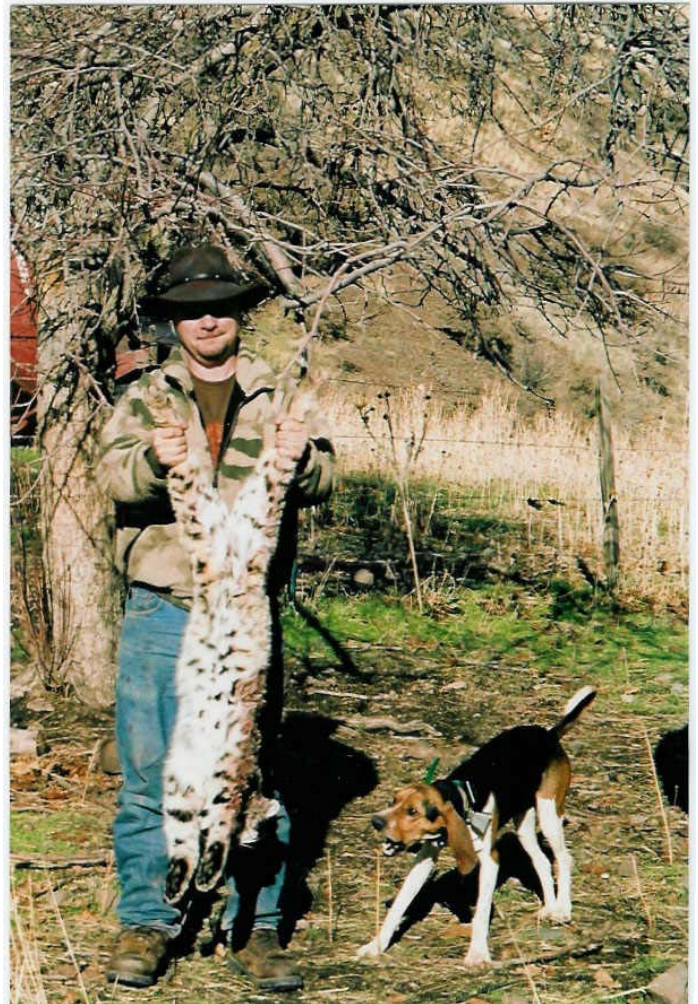
I do not believe there are bad dogs, just inexperienced owners and I have spent the last 4 years trying to introduce this sport to as many young people as I could. My photo albums are full of pictures with children sitting under a tree with the dogs telling them "good job".

That has all changed now! I am not writing this story to debate whether the Canadian gray wolf should be or should not be here. I am not going to debate anyone about how many wolves are really in the state of Idaho but I will say our elk, moose and deer populations are in serious trouble now!

Fear to Disbelief to Anger

I am telling this story because of what happened to my dogs and me last Wednesday, May 24, 2006 at 9:45 in the morning. It's been a few days now and the shock has turned from fear to disbelief to anger.

The life that I have loved, raising and training these special working dogs, is over. Now my major concern is for the safety of anyone who lives in or visits our state.



Scott Richards with bobcat and tri-colored walker hound "Lady", later killed and eaten by wolves while hunting with Scott.

That Wednesday morning started like most days when I am training dogs. I was a few miles from my house and turned up the hill on the Service Flats Road. I let my dogs out of the box; jumped into my truck and followed them up the road for a mile letting them clean out.

I had 8 dogs with me and 7 of them were very experienced 2, 3, and 4-year-olds. I had one 5-month-old pup. I loaded 4 dogs on the top of the box and 4 inside the box. I did not have to drive far and the dogs sounded off letting me know a bear had crossed the road.

Dogs Pursue Different Bears

My friend Brian had driven up from Lewiston to train some of his young dogs. I turned out a 4 year old named Jasper, he left the road and let me know the track was fresh. I told Brian to turn his dogs loose as I did.

They quickly dropped into a canyon where bears hang in the brushy bottoms in daylight hours. When all the dogs reached the bottom, five dogs went up the other side

of the canyon headed toward Fish Creek campground. The other group of dogs came right back up the hill toward us.

They put the bears in a tree 20 minutes later. The other group of dogs treed about the same time about 1-1/2 miles away. Brian and I went to the nearest dogs first. When we were under the tree we found they had a mature sow and a 2-year-old cub.

We took a few pictures and we were back in the trucks ready to go to the other dogs. We drove back up to where we heard the group of 5 dogs top over and shortly thereafter tree the bear.

We checked where the dogs still had the bear treed and drove as close as we could and stopped to listen. They were about four hundred yards away treeing solid. I made the decision to move the truck 200 yards to the low side of the saddle; which would be an easy way back with the dogs.

Dogs Stopped Barking

When Brian and I crested the hill, instead of hearing a roar of barking dogs treeing we heard nothing. We were looking at each other like where did they go; we had just heard them there five minutes earlier.

Then one dog barked in one place and another barked 50 yards away. I said to Brian that neither dog that we heard sounded like any of our dogs. He agreed.

Then I heard a dog bark that I knew was mine, but at the end of his bark there was a sharp yelp. Brian and I headed down the hill in a hurry about 75 yards apart.

Blackie Died Protecting Master

About 300 yards down the hill I was stopped dead in my tracks by a big dark colored wolf. My Blackie dog was getting attacked and I was 20 yards away now and closing fast, screaming and yelling as I ran.

I stopped at about 12 feet from the wolf and even though I was screaming and waving my arms the wolf did not break from the attack. Every time Blackie tried to run the wolf would sink his teeth into Blackie's hindquarters.

All the while I was screaming louder than I ever screamed in my life. Without any thought I picked up a 4-foot stick, stepped toward the wolf and swung and hit a tree. When the branch went "crack" and the tree went "thud" the wolf instantly lunged at me. I remember thinking I was going to die and turned and ran from tree to tree straight uphill towards my truck.

When that wolf lunged at me I believe I would have been seriously hurt or dead if not for Blackie. I did not see what took place, but what I heard was my dog giving his life to save me.

As I reached the truck Brian was digging in his truck for a gun. As I ran up he started yelling "We got wolves!" I was trying to listen to him as I was searching for a gun.

As I took my pistol in my hand and turned toward Brian and looked into his eyes, I realized I was not the only one threatened by wolves. We were heading back down to

see if we could save Blackie or Lady or Hallie, but there was no sound. I wanted to hear a bell dingle or a bark but nothing.

As Brian and I hurried back to the truck to get my tracking box, I finally understood that Brian was able to fight off three wolves and save two dogs, Sniper and Bullet. They were safe in the dog box with no life threatening injuries.

With the tracking box in hand I tuned in on Lady's tracking collar and said to Brian, "Not Lady not Lady." But I knew she was dead.

Then I tuned to Blackie, and told Brian he was dead, and then I tuned in Hallie's collar. One beep every four seconds - that means all three dogs had not moved for at least five minutes. All dead!

I was just standing there in shock. We decided to look for Hallie first. We were getting real close and the receiver was pegging the needle on close and turned way down.

I knew a few more steps and I would be looking at one of my babies. My heart skipped a beat when Halley's tree switch went off, I didn't know if she was alive or if a wolf was dragging her off.

We ran the direction the needle was pointing and in a few yards there she was. She was trying to get up but her stomach was ripped open and her guts were hanging out a foot. She had over 60 bite marks, deep gashes all over her body. Her stomach was torn in multiple places.

Brian went into action. Off came his shirt and we wrapped it tightly around her stomach. I carried her back to Brian's truck, put her in the front seat and Brian headed for the Vet's.

Blackie and Lady Were Both Dead

I remember thinking I wouldn't see Hallie alive again. I started tracking Blackie next; it did not take long to find him. He wasn't far from where the wolf came after me. He was dead and lying in a pool of his own blood.

He was bit and torn so full of holes I just fell to the ground bawling. I could not quit thinking he gave his life to save me.

I was sitting there when it hit me Lady, better get to Lady. When I tuned her in I knew she was within a 100 yards. I lined up with her collar and next thing I knew there she lay in a heap, her eyes wide open looking straight into my eyes. For one second I thought she might be alive but when I knelt down beside her I knew she was dead.

It's very hard to describe the type of death these dogs were handed. It was easy to see that the wolves want to cripple their prey, torture it and then kill it. I have never seen a worse way for any animal or person to die.

I made it back to town and took care of my dogs that made it through this nightmare which happened in the light of day. Then I headed to see if Hallie needed to be buried.

continued on page 14

Scott Richards' Story *continued from page 13*

When I walked into the veterinarian's office I was greeted with, "Did you find the rest of your dogs?" I tried to say they were all dead but could not get the words out; all I could do is cry.

After a few minutes standing alone I heard a voice behind me say Hallie is still alive do you want to see her? I instantly headed for the back room and when I turned the corner I saw this little black ball covered in stitches and swollen twice her normal size.

I stopped and said out loud, "Oh my God Hallie what have they done to you?" When she heard me say her name she lifted her head, whined and wagged her tail.

"A Miracle She Was Still Alive"

I knelt down and held her and comforted her. The whole time wondering if she was the lucky one or were Blackie and Lady the lucky ones.

When I looked into her eyes it was easy to see the only reason she was still alive - the wolves had choked her out. Her eyes were full of blood and they had left her for dead.

The Doc said it was a miracle she was alive at all. Her lungs were badly damaged but what most concerned us all was infection from all the tears and bites.

I knew this little dog had more heart and desire than a 1200-pound grizzly bear and yet was as gentle with my granddaughters as my chocolate lab. If it were just a fight with infection she would win.

IDFG Summoned Federal Trapper

On the way home I called the Idaho Fish and Game to report what had happened. They were very understanding and I could tell they were sincere when they said they were sorry for my loss.

They also made it clear there was nothing they could do for me and that their hands were tied. They said they would write the report, and call the federal agent.

Justin, the government trapper, contacted me by phone and arranged to meet me at first light in the morning. We were at the site of the attack early the next morning and went to the spot where I had laid Lady in the shade.

She was gone without a trace. I took Justin to where Blackie was laying and he had also disappeared.

Located Remains After Searching

We searched around and found nothing. About that time a crow down below me called three times so we walked toward the sound. It did not take long until we were standing over the remains of the dog that saved me from harm.

All that was left of him was his head and backbone. Had we been an hour later there would have been nothing left of him.

We had spooked the wolves off while they were finishing their prey. After five hours all we found of Lady was a pile of fresh wolf scat full of white, brown and black dog hair. Lady was a tri-colored walker, that color.



Remains of Blackie found by Scott and federal trapper the morning after the wolf attack.

Justin and I buried what was left of Blackie. We piled heavy stones on his grave and I walked away thinking that it could have been me. I could have been just a pile of wolf scat lying on the ground and leaving people to wonder where I had disappeared.

I couldn't help but think of the 22-year-old man who was killed and eaten by wolves in Canada this winter. There's been a slaughter on hound dogs and pets in Idaho and it is getting worse daily.

I have been assured that if these wolves kill any cows, sheep or horses they will become a problem and will be dealt with, and the owners will be compensated. That's a relief!! Dogs have no value to anyone in the government it seems. So what I love to do is over, I will not send another dog to slaughter or feed another wolf pack.

My concerns are that the wolves are running out of easy prey and are now eating dogs. In wet muddy areas where elk and moose have always been plentiful, I no longer can find even a track. Perhaps aliens took them off to a safer planet.

I hope you did not find that funny. This is the first documented case in Idaho where the wolves have eaten a dog after killing it.

As I said at the beginning, the real reason I had to write this story is public safety. The people who live in this wonderful state are being left clueless to the dangers that await them in our national forests and elsewhere.

Since I retired I have spent no less than four days a week in the mountains and what has amazed me are how many of these wolves are right around people's homes. When they run out of easy prey, be ready.

For as long as I can remember when you were in the mountains for any reason a dog by your side was a great defense to warn you of predators. I too believed in this. But now a dog is nothing more than bait to lure wolves to you.

Recently while cougar hunting with an associate of mine who is a licensed guide like myself, he described a wolf encounter. He was cougar hunting with a dog on a leash when three wolves charged up to him.

With waving arms and a screaming voice he was able to persuade them to leave, but what if they had been a little hungrier? Your natural instinct will be to defend your companion.

I am not saying to leave your friend at home but be prepared. Put a bell or a beeper on him or her so you know where they are at all times.

The most important thing is to pack a firearm! I personally believe pepper spray will not work in a pack attack. Keep your dogs quiet when you are walking, no barking.

If they are tied up in camp, no barking. And for God's sake don't let your children play with your pets and have them barking while they're playing.

My personal belief is the war has been lost, it's too late to save our big game herds in my lifetime. The perfect plan to end our hunting in Idaho, Montana, Wyoming and soon Washington, Oregon and the entire Rocky Mountain Range.

It's foolproof and would take an order from the President to change it. What I have loved to do for most of my life is over.

So enjoy while you still can, but be prepared, pack a gun! I pray you never encounter a pack of Canadian gray wolves.

(NOTE: Nez Perce Tribe wolf specialist Curt Mack investigated the area three days after the attack and reported no evidence of a resident wolf pack or denning in the area. Three days later Wildlife Services confirmed that a wolf killed a 350-pound calf seven miles from the location and two more were attacked by wolves during the next 30 days. One attack by four wolves that was witnessed could only be listed as a "probable" wolf kill because the wolves ate everything but the head and spine before WS arrived.

On June 23, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation President Frank Priestly published the following editorial in the IFBF publication, *Voice of Idaho Agriculture*, discussing the failure of IDFG's June 12th advice to keep dogs from being attacked by wolves©)

Avoiding Wolf Conflicts

By Frank Priestly, President IFBF

The Idaho Fish and Game Department sent out a news release recently (June 12) advising residents how to keep their dogs from being ripped to shreds by wolves.

F&G warns pet owners that other canines are intruders in "wolf habitat" and if you take your dog into the backcountry wolves may eat him. In addition, because of the Endangered Species Act, there is nothing you can do except scream and yell if wolves attack your pet on public land.

These warnings come on the heels of a wolf attack near Grangeville wherein a bear hunter lost two dogs, paid several hundred dollars in veterinary bills to repair a third dog, and nearly became a victim himself. Hunter Scott Richards wrote about the attack in a first person account printed by the Idaho Press-Tribune.

According to Richards, when he came on the scene of the attack he attempted to scare the wolves by screaming and yelling, resulting in one of the wolves turning on him.

If not for a counter attack from his dog, Richards believes he would have been taken down. When he found his second dog, her stomach was ripped open and she had over 60 bite marks over her body.

"It's very difficult to describe the type of death these dogs were handed," Richards wrote. "It was easy to see that the wolves want to cripple their prey, torture it and then kill it. I have never seen any worse way for an animal to die."

In another recent incident, children watched as two wolves entered a backyard in Troy and carried off their dachshund. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report, an investigation could only confirm "that wolf tracks and scat were within 150 yards of the house."

In a third recent incident, a Sun Valley couple stated in a public meeting that initially they supported wolf reintroduction, but since their dog was killed by wolves they changed their minds. Similar reports have come from Mountain Home, Challis, Leadore, Salmon, Stanley and Council.

An increasing number of incidents coupled with the Idaho Fish and Game department's press release warning us about entering "wolf habitat" with dogs begs the question where is wolf habitat? Is it in the backyard?

The F&G news release further warns us to keep dogs on a leash because "dogs running loose, away from people, may attract wolves." And "if the dog runs loose, bring a leash to restrain the dog if wolves or wolf sign are encountered."

Further F&G advice is to make noise or put a bell on your dog's collar "to alert wolves that humans are associated with the dog."

According to the U.S. FWS report, Scott Richards' dogs were wearing bells and Richards was screaming at the wolves when one of them lunged at him. In our opinion, the Fish and Game's advice is about as much good as a chicken wire canoe.

Along with declining big game herds and livestock losses that are sucking the life out of many small towns, we now need to take extra precautions to protect our families and pets. Along with the millions of dollars our government is spending on wolf management, these are some of the costs associated with living with wolves.

Here's some honest advice that our F&G officials overlooked; if you recreate in the backcountry with your dog, take a gun and leave the leash and bell at home.

Property Tax Exemption Raises Questions About Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Articles in the *Lewiston Morning Tribune* and *The Idaho Statesman* concerning buildings purchased by the Idaho Fish and Wildlife Foundation (IFWF) and leased to the IDFG without paying property taxes resulted in us receiving three letters for publication questioning the relationship between the two entities. Time and space constraints prevent our publishing the informative letters in this issue so this explanation will have to suffice for now.

During the 1980s IDFG was severely criticized for using "go-betweens" like the Mellon Foundation and the Nature Conservancy to quietly acquire expensive ranches and remove them from the property tax rolls. This resulted in legislation prohibiting F&G from buying such parcels without consulting with county commissioners, so in 1990 the IFWF was formed.

This 501c(3) nonprofit corporation purchases property or builds buildings in the name of IFWF, which it then leases to F&G for 20 years without either entity paying property taxes. At the end of that period title to the property is given to IDFG and the value is so depreciated that payment in lieu of taxes is far less than the original tax.

During the mid-1990s a scandal surfaced concerning \$150,000 of sportsmen license dollars paid to IFWF to prepare a videotape and brochure about salmon and dams. The money was paid before the work was accomplished and IFWF was forced to pay part of it back - but then received it again as a "grant" from F&G.

A major complaint is that IFWF uses F&G offices and other facilities paid for by sportsmen license funds free of charge and also uses F&G employees to staff its organization. These employees wear two hats; one

representing the hunters and fishermen who pay their wages and another representing the IFWF agenda which offers questionable benefit to hunters.

There is little doubt that a conflict of interest has existed involving Steve Barton who has been IFWF Treasurer since its inception and also Chief of the F&G Administrative Division for most of that time. He is currently a special advisor to the Director - a vague title that deserves clarification.

Another F&G employee, Gayle Valentine, runs IFWF as Executive Director, and a third F&G employee, Stella Bush, is one of two IFWF Administrative Staff members. The other Staff person, Marcella Hepworth, also occupies a F&G Headquarters office and email address but the number of F&G support persons, like Alyssa Jones in the IFWF newsletter design, has not been determined.

One of the more controversial projects that was assigned to IFWF by F&G was putting the now defunct Idaho Wildlife publication on a self-supporting basis with advertising sales. IFWF sold almost no advertising yet used sportsmen dollars to fund several full-age ads for itself, soliciting memberships and fund raising through the sale of collectibles.

There is almost no accountability of this group and, while it may help fund some worthwhile fish habitat projects, the potential for misuse of money and facilities funded by sportsmen dollars demands that it operate as the separate entity it claims to be.

The August issue will include a revealing article by Jim Beers concerning the impact of groups like IFWF. By the way, if your address label on this issue includes the words "Final Copy" it's time to renew your donation.

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