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Nevada Predator Specialist Challenges Excuses, Cites Need for Predator Control to Restore Deer

by George Dovel

In his October 26, 2007 weekly column in the *Reno Gazette-Journal*, Hunting and Fishing Editor Dave Rice wrote that he was discouraged and frustrated with deer hunting in Nevada. At the top of his list of peeves was “difficulty in obtaining a deer tag for the past 15 years or so” followed by what he described as “the ridiculous \$3 Predator Control Fee.”

He described his first hunt for Nevada deer in 1965 when there was no limit on the number of tags and deer hunting was an annual event. He wrote that the last rifle deer tag he drew was in 2001 and said he failed to draw twice since then and “missed the deadline” four times due to his lack of interest.

In his January 25, 2008 column entitled, “Nevada’s declining deer population affects tag availability each year,” Rice published the following Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) deer population estimates:

NEVADA DEER POPULATION (estimated)

1976	96,000
1988	240,000
2004	105,000
2007	114,000

He wrote that Nevada’s limited controlled hunt (LCH) system was implemented in 1976 to reduce hunter congestion and halt the decline in deer numbers. He claimed that a series of mild winters allowed the deer herd to more than double during the next dozen years but indicated a reduction in LCH tags from 51,011 in 1984 to approximately 18,500 in 2007 has not halted the 20-year deer decline that has occurred since 1988.

Rice said he had discussed the Nevada deer situation at length with NDOW Big Game Specialist Mike Cox who said that of 36,269 *residents* who applied for deer tags in 2007, only 16,659 were successful.

In a subsequent article Rice wrote: “That meant 19,610 hunters were unable to partake in an annual fall tradition dating back, in the history of some families, to well before deer hunting seasons were first established.

Acceptance of the loss of that privilege, which some people view as a right, does not come easy.”

Figures Don’t Show Most Hunter Decline

As a former communications specialist with NDOW, Rice acknowledges the frustration and resentment expressed by long-time Nevada deer hunters who have seen their heritage of hunting and harvesting wild deer destroyed. But that background and his roles as President, Treasurer and Lifetime Member of the Association for Conservation Information, Inc. (ACI)* may have prompted him to downplay the number of resident deer hunters who have lost their heritage of hunting and harvesting deer. (*read more about ACI on page 4)

According to Big Game Specialist Cox’s figures, when about 51,000 LCH deer permits were available to hunters during the mid-1980s, there were more than 96,000 hunters applying for those permits. If at least 90,000 of those applicants were residents, subtracting the 16,659 that were allowed to hunt in 2007 would leave at least 73,000 former resident deer hunters who are no longer legally permitted to hunt deer in their home state.

Rice correctly stated, “In the early 1990s, a number of Western wildlife agency directors lost their jobs over the issue, prompting the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) to form a Mule Deer Working Group with representatives from every Western state and Canadian province.” Cox, who was appointed to that group, said, “The best minds in game management have dug into every nook and cranny of the Western U.S. deer situation.”

Group Ignored Impact of Predators on Deer

He continued, “We looked at everything, including predator management,” yet unhealthy ratios of predators to deer were not even mentioned as a cause of the deer herds’ failure to recover. In March of 2004 an elaborate publication by the Western Mule Deer Working Group was provided to Western State Fish and Game Commissioners claiming that loss and degradation of habitat by invasive

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Habitat Excuse Challenged - *continued from page 1*
species, cattle grazing, wilderness breakup and drought – not predator/prey imbalance – are the reasons for the mule deer decline (see May 2004 Outdoorsman Bulletin No, 3).

This occurred in spite of the fact that Jim DeVos, Research Chief for the Arizona Game and Fish Department and Chairman of the Western Mule Deer Working Group, had just revealed a long-term Arizona study during a 10-year drought, indicating that predators, not habitat, limit mule deer herds. With all other factors being equal, mule deer inside the 30-year-old predator-proof 3-Bar enclosure had **100 surviving fawns** per 100 does while deer in adjacent Unit 22 with predators present had only **18** surviving fawns per 100 does.

The study measured the quantity and quality of habitat in both areas in every quarter of each year and used ultrasound to measure the percentage of fat and the pregnancy rate of live collared deer in both areas. According to DeVos, the 3-Bar deer study findings challenge many accepted biological theories.

“For instance biologists have long believed that deer are ‘density’ dependent, which means that once deer density ratios get high, deer experience a reduction in fecundity - the physical ability to reproduce. That’s not happening on the 3-Bar. That tells us that density dependency may not be a valid theory or that the threshold for it is much higher than anyone thought.

“The generally accepted biological theory is that habitat conditions, not predation, control deer numbers. That theory may be true when weather and habitat conditions are good, such as our study during the 1970s in the 3-Bar. However, we have had a decade-long drought with an exclamation point in 2002 - the driest year in recorded history - yet deer numbers, densities and fawn reproduction have remained as high as during the wet years. The absence of predation is the only variable that has changed,” DeVos said.

“The original 3-Bar mule deer study in the late 1970s found that fawn survival was 30-percent greater inside the enclosure than outside during a six-year wet period,” DeVos reported. Even under good weather and habitat conditions during the 1970s, predators significantly reduced mule deer fawn survival outside of the enclosure.

Most Predation on Fawns No Longer Recorded

Instead of publishing the well-documented fact that the overwhelming majority of mule deer that die are killed by predators, biologists in the Mule Deer Working Group continue to claim, without offering any proof, that the quality or quantity of habitat that is available is preventing deer recovery. The highly advertised mule deer mortality monitoring program adopted by Idaho and copied by other states was designed to ignore the impact of all predation that occurs during the first eight months of a deer’s life.

In his February 1, 2008 column entitled, “Improving habitat is a vital factor to increase Nevada’s

deer population,” Rice claimed that, unlike expert Mike Cox, few hunters understand why Nevada’s 110,000 square miles can’t produce larger deer herds. He continued, “Habitat is the one-word answer to why Nevada wildlands cannot sustain more deer.”

His use of the term “wildlands”, like his earlier criticism of “the ridiculous” \$3 Predator Control Fee, is typical of the carefully orchestrated attempt by **ACI** and its members/supporters to sell the wildlands/biodiversity/State Wildlife Grant (**SWG**) agenda to the public as a substitute for conservation and proper management of Nevada’s wildlife resource. Read the rest of this issue for proof.

Rice’s article included a series of generalizations by Mike Cox alleging that wildfires in sagebrush, lack of wildfires in pinyon-juniper stands, natural plant succession from shrub and brush to trees and grass, too little grass, forbs and flowers, and drought are the reasons the deer aren’t increasing. But another person, with a degree in wildlife biology and three decades of field experience, emailed Rice a guest opinion for publication in his next article, disagreeing with Cox’s assessment.

Instead of publishing the guest opinion in his Feb. 15, 2008 article titled, “Reader, NDOW expert spar over reasons for declining deer numbers,” Rice simply wrote “The e-mailer thinks predators are totally responsible for the condition of state deer herds. During my lengthy interview with Cox last month, we discussed predator control.

“NDOW continues to look at a few isolated spots in the eastern part of the state. Studies in these areas are aimed at trying to determine if there is a particular time of year or a control technique that might be successful if a herd is typically low in numbers.” Then Rice quoted Cox:

“We are trying to find a (predator control) prescription that works, and if we can find that, we will use it in other parts of the state,” Cox said. “So far we have not found anything that is going to work or that we won’t need to spend a half-million dollars for a small increase in the number of tags for that expenditure. In my book that is not an economically viable management tool.”

The argument that controlling predators is too costly is a common excuse used by predator advocates when confronted with proof that uncontrolled predators are keeping game populations in an unhealthy predator pit. Yet they don’t bat an eye when they recommend habitat alteration projects that can cost **2,000 times** as much and still require reduction in predators to achieve results.

Editor Rice chose not to tell his readers that the unnamed e-mailer’s credentials include a degree in wildlife biology and a distinguished 31-year career as a professional with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service observing predator-prey interactions. Every State Senator and Assemblyman in Nevada receives *The Outdoorsman*, and the Guest Opinion by retired ADC specialist Mike Laughlin is included on page 3 for their evaluation.

The Impact of Predators on Nevada Deer Herds

By Mike Laughlin

(Guest Opinion submitted to the Reno Gazette-Journal)

I read with interest your article in the *Reno Gazette-Journal*, January 25, 2008, concerning Nevada's declining deer population.

I do not know who the NDOW expert, Biologist Mike Cox, is but he is a long way from knowing or telling the "real story" of what went on during the big deer years in Nevada. If he thinks the main reason for the decline of Nevada deer herds is the overall condition of habitat, he either does not know what he is talking about or he is creating "smoke and mirrors" for NDOW.

I ran the Predatory Animal Control Program throughout the State of Nevada for the U. S Fish & Wildlife Service during the 1970s and 80s as the Assistant State Supervisor. I believe I have on-the-ground and in-the-air understanding of what went on during the big deer years in Nevada.

There were three full-time Government Mountain Lion Hunters employed year-around hunting lions, and coyote and mountain lion numbers were kept under control. Deer tags for Nevada hunters were unlimited in number and were available for over-the-counter purchase at hunting license dealers statewide.

In 1972, a big change occurred in the Animal Damage Control business throughout the West. President Richard Nixon banned the use of toxicants in the government control program by executive order (he was soliciting the environmental vote that was just starting to emerge). With the loss of toxicants and nothing to replace them with but a few trappers, coyote numbers began to rise dramatically.

Throughout the state of Nevada, deer numbers fell to 96,000 by 1976. Predation upon livestock by predators was a serious problem. In the late 70s, political pressure by the livestock industry and their representatives in Washington, D.C. brought about a dramatic increase in the Federal budget for Animal Damage Control.

The federal government began to appropriate large sums of money in order to prove that coyote numbers could be controlled by what they liked to call "non-toxic methods." This program increased use of aircraft, both fixed-wing and rotor-wing, to shoot coyotes from the air – and additional trappers on the ground to replace the controversial use of toxicants (this was meant to look good to the environmentalists).

At that time, there was a large domestic range-sheep industry operating throughout the state of Nevada. Domestic sheep acted as a "buffer species" to deer for predatory animals.

Predators largely lived on domestic sheep, which were much easier to kill than mule deer. The Ruby

Mountains, in Elko County, for example, had over 50,000 domestic sheep that summered on this mountain range in the 1970s.

In the early 1980s, wild animal longhair fur prices went sky high and private trappers were out in force. There were large numbers of coyotes and bobcats harvested by private trappers since fur prices were at an all time high.

Gas was around \$1.25 a gallon, coyote varmint callers were abundant, and all of the private trapping and shooting plus the concentrated government effort to control predator numbers began to pay off. By the year 1988, the mule deer population responded to these concentrated predator control efforts and mule deer numbers statewide were quoted by NDOW at 240,000.

NDOW was busy patting themselves on the back for what a masterful deer management program they had in place throughout the state of Nevada. They credited the deer tag quota system, which was put in place in 1976, and favorable weather conditions – relatively mild winters during that period – for the large increase in deer numbers.

But never once did they mention the dramatic decrease in predator numbers brought about by private hunters and trappers and the federal government program.

Now then we move forward in time. The range sheep industry began to disappear due to labor problems, government regulations, land use changes by public land administrators, imports, etc. Therefore, predator control efforts in and around range sheep herds decreased and cattle numbers began to decline.

Longhair fur prices fell, gas prices went up, vehicle prices went up, predator hunting declined, and soon predator population numbers began to come back. Today the Nevada landscape is filled up with coyotes, bobcats, and mountain lions with some prowling the alleys of towns and cities. Predators have a "free-roll" statewide.

So what do you think has happened to our deer population? It has steadily gone downhill with the decrease in predator control efforts, and will continue to do so unless there is a dramatic decrease in predatory animal population numbers.

NDOW has blamed the mule deer decline on overgrazing by livestock, poor habitat, too many fires, too cold, too wet, too dry, not enough snow, too much snow, etc. They are in denial when it comes to the overall effect predators have on our mule deer and upland game bird population numbers in the State of Nevada.

In 2007, NDOW reported, there were 114,000 mule deer in the State of Nevada. Looks to me like we are almost out of deer. I wonder what the coyote, bobcat, and mountain lion numbers are statewide in 2008?

Hunters' Dollars Misused to Promote Nongame Outdoor Recreation Agenda

By George Dovel

The article on Page 1 of this issue briefly mentioned that Hunting & Fishing Editor Dave Rice was President, Treasurer and Lifetime Member of the Association for Conservation Information, Inc. (ACI). That organization's website describes itself as a non-profit association of information and education professionals representing state, federal and Canadian agencies and private conservation organizations.

ACI does not communicate direct to sportsmen or the general public. Instead, it trains its members, who are communications specialists, in sophisticated techniques to sell nongame agendas such as "Teaming With Wildlife" and the State Wildlife Grants (SWG) Program to state, federal and provincial officials, and to others who are in a position to assure the success of these programs.

When the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) was organized back in 1902, and when ACI was formed in 1938, their common agenda was restoring North America's wild game to provide a sustained annual harvest for hunters. Although the influence of predator protectionists Allen, Mech, the Craigheads, Hornocker, Nelson, etc.) was very strong by the early 1970s, sustained wild game harvest remained a priority of IAFWA until game populations throughout the West peaked a second time around 1988-1989.

Meanwhile bird watchers and other non-hunting wildlife advocates lobbied these two organizations, and others like the Wildlife Management Institute and the USFWS, to have non-game non-consumptive wildlife recreation given a special priority. They pointed out the increased game populations and said it was time to put forth a similar effort "to preserve the many non-game species for enjoyment by everyone."

IAFWA hired "birder" Naomi Edelson as its Wildlife Diversity Director (nee "Teaming With Wildlife" [TWW] leader) and in 1990 made nongame wildlife "the biggest priority" of state wildlife management agencies (Edelson 2002 – emphasis added). This resulted in the creation of – and funding for – Partners in Flight (PIF) and, a decade later, PARC (Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation) and a similar group to promote bats.

IAFWA and the non-government organizations (NGOs) and government agencies it is associated with, lobbied Congress for non-game funding and Congress obliged by giving IAFWA the SWG funding program to administer. It appointed Sara Vickerman, West Coast Office Director of Defenders of Wildlife (DOW), to the three-member "SWG Working Group" that established the criteria for state wildlife agencies to receive the money.

Two reasons given by some Congressmen who voted for the SWG program were: 1) it would prevent species from being listed, and 2) no sportsman dollars could be used to fund it. Emboldened by its success IAFWA quickly asked for, and received additional funding from a Multistate Conservation Grant Program (MSCGP).

But unlike the SWG funding, IAFWA could award up to \$6 million of P-R AND D-J federal excise tax dollars paid by hunters and fishermen to private entities whose avowed purpose was to end all sport hunting, trapping or fishing. To receive the grant anti-hunting groups were only required to submit a statement agreeing not to spend those specific dollars to oppose sport hunting, fishing, etc. (see http://www.fishwildlife.org/multistate_grants/04.06/MSGP_Fact%20Sheet_3.1.07.pdf)

Without the knowledge or approval of most Fish and Game Commissioners who are lawfully charged with managing the wildlife in each state, Information and Education (Communication) Bureau employees were given a mandate by IAFWA and ACI to use sophisticated high-pressure sales techniques to sell the nongame agenda to the public and their elected officials.

"Involve-Collaborate-Empower" Strategy

For example, in a Sept. 15, 2003 memo to Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) officials from the TWW/SWG Working Group, it was suggested they have their TWW contact attend "The Institute For Participatory Management and Planning" training sessions to learn their "Systematic Development of Informed Consent Methodology." The memo explained that the Institute would teach its "inform-consult-involve-collaborate-empower" strategy.

During his presentation to the Idaho Fish & Game Commission in March 2004, IDFG Communications Bureau Chief Roger Fuhrman casually told the Commission he had taken courses in how to obtain public approval of Department programs, and had assigned his staff to re-design the IDFG website to accomplish that end. The "Department programs" he was referring to were the nongame agendas of non-hunters and anti-hunters who were calling the shots at IAFWA.

In December 2004, IAFWA hosted a summit on "Conservation Education" at the National Conservation Training Center operated by USFWS in West Virginia. Six months later, after each state had developed a conservation education strategy, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) teamed up to give a "Train the Messenger" workshop to sell the SWG program throughout the U.S.

Funded by the Doris Duke Foundation, the workshop included a presentation by experts in polling and public opinion strategies concerning results of nationwide focus groups and a nationwide poll of 1,000 voters. The object was to see which terms and strategies reflect a positive image in the campaign to make the public accept SWGs. For example, the public did not like the sound of “Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy” but had a favorable opinion of “State Wildlife Action Plan.”

According to ACI’s quarterly newsletter, “The Balance Wheel,” during the following months over 400 communications people in 47 states were given polling and messaging information and the state wildlife agencies were provided with “State Wildlife Action Plan Message Kits.” This allowed them to present the following “consistent and tested statements” about the wildlife action plans:

- **Clean air and water**
- **Healthy wildlife and people**
- **The conservation of wildlife and vital natural areas for future generations**

In addition to repeating these pleasant sounding but misleading claims about State Action Plans, the state agencies were told to emphasize to Congressmen, state Governors and others in a position to influence funding, that the plans would prevent wildlife species from being listed under the ESA and save the states millions of dollars in expense associated with listing.

Congress Believed Lies, Appropriated More Money

With the exception of Senator Larry Craig, Idaho’s Congressional delegation bought the lie and signed letters in 2004 supporting an increase in SWG funding to the states. They did this despite the fact that such funding would require a 100% match rather than the original 33% match, so sportsmen license dollars are now being used unlawfully to make up the nongame funding deficit.

Even if it were possible, attempting to restore ecosystems that existed more than 500 years ago ignores the reality that ecosystems are dynamic – constantly changing as a result of weather and climate over which man has virtually no control. Yet nongame advocates admit that is their sole plan to “protect” native animal and plant species from extinction (see “A New Solution To Non-Game Program Funding” in Jul-Sep 2007 *Outdoorsman*).

Additional \$Millions for Birds, Global Warming

In 2002, IAFWA Wildlife Diversity Director Naomi Edelson authored a paper entitled, *Finding Our Wings: The Payoff of a Decade of Determination*, explaining how, since 1990, IAFWA and bird advocacy groups have worked together “getting our agenda to be a state agenda, a Federal agenda, a non-governmental agenda and even a Congressional agenda.” President Bush’s FY 2009 budget request included additional appropriations of

\$35.9 million to enhance migratory bird habitat on federal refuges, plus an extra \$9 million for bird monitoring and assessing the impact of global warming, deforestation and urban development.

After several *Outdoorsman* articles published the fact that the IAFWA represents not only state F&G agencies but also represents and lobbies for the governments of Canada and Mexico, the Washington, D.C based NGO dropped the word “International” from its name and is now called AFWA. At the same time, Interior Secretary Gale Norton signed a new initiative with her counterparts in Canada and Mexico, which meant spending even more money on migratory birds outside the U.S.

Congressional passage of the “Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act” (NMBCA) in 2000 and Norton signing the “North American Bird Conservation Initiative” in 2005 resulted in FWS providing an additional \$25.5 million in NMBCA grants (plus \$116.5 million in matching funds) to 36 countries from FY 2002-FY 2008. By law, 75% of that funding must be spent outside the U.S.

Like a snowball rolling downhill, bird watchers and other non-hunting interests have virtually engulfed the North American Conservation Movement. In a Feb. 8, 2008 news release titled “Working With America To Prevent a Silent Spring,” Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne stated, “Last year, annual surveys conducted by the Audubon Society documented the alarming decline in populations of common birds, which have plummeted 70 percent on average since 1967.”

Kempthorne continued, “The Birds Forever Initiative,” a joint effort of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Geological Survey, would expand and improve the health of wild bird habitat, strengthen educational outreach programs and work in partnership with states, local communities, conservation organizations and other bird-loving partners to reverse this precipitous decline in wild bird populations.”

The survey claiming a 70% loss of our common bird species during the past 40 years might well have included pheasants, mule deer and most other game species throughout the West. Yet Congress did not authorize FWS to send an extra \$50 million to the western states to protect these valuable species from further decline – or even acknowledge that decline.

Because the \$6 million in annual funding for the MSCGP grants “comes from the Sport Fish Restoration Account and the Wildlife Restoration Fund, “projects must benefit sport fish, wild birds, or wild mammals” (see FWS MSCGP Fact Sheet). Acquisition or improvement of habitat for waterfowl has always been a legitimate use of P-R money but FWS and AFWA now include “Climate Change” as a legitimate use of MSCGP funds.

The change in emphasis from hunting, fishing and trapping to environmental activism is evident in the subject

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Hunters' Dollars Misused - *continued from page 5*
 matter being taught to state fish and game communications specialists (now called "Wildlife Communicators"). The following quotes from summaries of ACI presentations to these wildlife communicators published in recent issues of its newsletter, "*The Balance Wheel*," provide three examples of this change in emphasis:

1. Our Professional Shift, From the Sports Page to the Front Page - Instead of being the decision maker on trivial decisions like deer seasons, our primary responsibility must be to be the trusted source to the people, media and political decision-makers on incredibly important decisions like land use, water quality, biodiversity and global climate change. The great challenge for the future will be the collision of rapid development and climate change...and wildlife will be caught in the squeeze.

The good news is that people care about nature and wildlife. The bad news is that they don't understand the choices. Our job is to explain and recommend sensible conservation strategies.

2. Teaming with Wildlife: A Natural Investment - Did you know the average person needs to hear the same message seven times before they will remember it? As communicators, we work to get our messages out in a clear and memorable manner. One simple and powerful way to achieve this is through repetition. People lead busy lives, and remembering what is on the grocery list, much less what we just heard on the radio or read in the news, can be a struggle. Communicating a message takes persistence and dedication.

With your help, Teaming is now in the midst of a national outreach initiative to educate key decision-makers and the public about the state wildlife action plans. A persistent, unified message is one of the key ingredients to making this a success. It's like wack(sic)-a-mole. When the mole sticks its nose out of the hole, you've got to hit it with your hammer. When people stick their nose into a newspaper or turn on the TV, you've got to hit them with your message.

A national press event with Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton in early November provided an opportunity for many states to get out their "hammers" and set to work spreading the message. Secretary Norton was joined by Fish and Wildlife Service Director, Dale Hall and IAFWA President, John Cooper in announcing the submission of wildlife action plans by all 56 states and territories. "These plans represent a future for conservation in America that is rooted in cooperation and partnership between the federal government and states, tribes, local governments, conservation groups, private landowners and others with a commitment to the health of our land and water, fish and wildlife," said Norton.

Outreach to new partners in 2006 will help support the implementation of the state wildlife action plan and strengthen advocacy efforts. "Each state has a goal of 100 members by Labor Day, which would result in a national coalition of 5,000 organizations," says Bill Geer, of the

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. "Such an impressive array of diverse interests coming together to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered will be a true accomplishment."

3. Public Tolerance Toward Predators – The Coyote Story - Coyotes have captured people's attention and emotion for years. Depending on your viewpoint, coyotes are considered a value or a conflict. Some of the perceived values of coyotes are ecological and as a furbearer resource. Conflict with coyotes arises when property damage occurs, such as taking unsupervised pets and livestock.

In recent years, a new ecological paradigm (standard) has emerged...the view that the balance of nature is more important than humanity over nature. Ninety-three percent of people think that predators are an essential part of nature.

In dealing with coyotes, Massachusetts has adopted the following goals: 1) public education about the values and conflicts; 2) preventing conflicts; 3) regulating harvest as a furbearer resource and 4) targeted removal of problem animals.

In the first example, the lecturer went on to say, "Agencies are like a person with one foot on the dock and one foot in the boat...we are stretched between our sportsmen's responsibilities and our general public responsibilities." His claim that establishing deer seasons is a "trivial" decision illustrates what ultimately happens when non-sportsmen with special agendas infiltrate and then take over game management agencies.

The second example – teaching state game management agencies to "hard sell" the SWG wildlands-biodiversity agenda by falsely claiming it will preserve healthy wildlife populations and prevent ESA listing – illustrates the dishonest tactics that are necessary to sell the non-game program. The lecturer could have added that repeating a lie at least seven times allows it to become embedded in the average person's brain as if it were a fact.

The alleged "commitment to the health of our land and water, fish and wildlife" is in reality a commitment to lock up millions of acres of public and private land to restrict or eliminate harvest of renewable natural resources such as forage, timber, water and wild game.

Implying that only *unsupervised* livestock or pets are killed by coyotes and perpetuating the "balance-of-nature" myth further reflect the dishonesty of those who claim to be promoting "healthy" wildlife populations. Allowing protected carnivores to roam the continent in a network of "wildlife corridors" will continue to decimate the species that humans value for food or aesthetic reasons.

But like lemmings racing into the sea to drown, the public and their elected officials are buying the propaganda – *which is supported primarily by hunters' license dollars*. If sportsmen, farmers, ranchers, loggers and other natural resource users don't expose the radical plan, who else will?

What Has Happened to F&G Transparency?

By George Dovel

A classic Webster definition of “transparent” is: “free from pretense or deceit – easily detected or seen through.” To insure that government agencies practice openness in Government in the United States, legislatures pass open meeting and freedom of information legislation – and laws defining the responsibilities of each agency.

Stop Appearance that F&G is “Hiding Something”

Periodically, representatives of the legislature and the governor’s office attend F&G Commission meetings emphasizing the need for transparency in information provided to legislators and the public. Yet we have published numerous examples of “wildlifers” in the agencies, including their directors, continuing to brazenly ignore state law when it doesn’t agree with their agenda.

On April 4, 2005, following direction from Idaho Legislature’s Joint Finance and Appropriations Committee (JFAC) and the House and Senate Resource Committees, Legislative Services Budget Analyst Ray Houston and Division of Financial Management Analyst Larry Schlict conducted a F&G Commission workshop. Both analysts emphasized that F&G must make major changes in record keeping and reporting to make its budget understandable to the average person and overcome the “appearance that the agency is ‘hiding’ something.”

Budget Analyst Houston suggested that the best place to start in building transparency and credibility is by showing clearly what the Department spent in the previous year. He said the goal is to make the budget tell a story understandable to the average person.

F&G Told To Stop Overestimating Revenue

He commented that JFAC has only 1-1/2 hours to understand the Department’s budget and get the answers they are looking for. The Department needs to show revenues and actual expenditures so JFAC will know how federal and state dollars are being used.

He identified an ongoing problem caused by IDFG overestimating its projected revenue, which results in a large gap between its authorized budget and the actual amount of money it receives and spends. Lacking accurate records, this gives the Department blanket authority to spend more money for some projects than it takes in, without having to seek new spending authority.

Both analysts emphasized that revenue should not be included in IDFG’s requested budget unless F&G is reasonably sure of getting the money. This would prevent the practice of using money from a “rainy day” fund established by the Commission to pay for programs where revenue was less than projected.

That “rainy day fund,” called the “Budget Stabilization Account,” was established for emergencies such as a severe winter when the cost of feeding big game

might exceed the required \$400,000 minimum balance in that account. Yet the rainy day account allowed F&G to set aside 10% of *all* license income, *including* the dedicated set-aside funds, and spend it for *any* program it chose to in order to make up a funding deficit.

As the 2005 Budget Workshop ended, the Commission agreed on “the need to prioritize projects and programs that support the objectives in its ‘Strategic Plan’ (described in ‘The Compass’) and which will generate goodwill with customers, legislators, and the public in general.” Director Huffaker laid out a Department goal to be able to track every license dollar from the time it comes in, showing exactly what it was spent on.

F&G Ignores Promises to Legislature, Public

Instead, the IDFG FY 2007 Budget submitted by F&G and appropriated by the Legislature again exceeded its annual income and expenditures by nearly **\$8 million!** Spending for programs that benefit sportsmen was cut while expenditures for nongame programs, including those in the Natural Resource Policy and Communications Bureaus, were expanded to reflect the inflated amounts submitted by F&G.

The failure of the Commission and the Director to honor their commitments to the Legislature, the Governor and the public has become common practice. When an Office of Performance Evaluations (OPE) investigation in 1999-2000 found IDFG had misappropriated \$1.3 million in dedicated fish hatchery repair funds during FY 1996-99, the Commission and Director made a similar written commitment that was also never honored (see June 2005 Outdoorsman).

Contrary to Huffaker’s announced goal of being able to track every license dollar from the time it comes in and showing when and how it was spent, there is still no system to accomplish that. With the exception of maintaining a minimum of \$400,000 in the winter feeding set-aside account, other dedicated funds are still commingled in a single “bucket” account and spent without knowing what each fund was spent for.

Because most dedicated funds wind up as part of the F&G general fund (Account 50) at the end of the fiscal year, Huffaker admitted, “The public senses there is a strong incentive not to spend them for the purpose for which they were intended.” Even the \$400,000 in the winter feeding set-aside is subject to that temptation.

Misusing Feeding Set-aside Kills Deer and Elk

Instead of supplying adequate feed for the number of animals in a specific location IDFG cuts the feed short in order to limit the amount of money removed from the set-aside fund. This frees up more money to be spent on its

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F&G Transparency - *continued from page 7*
nongame/wildlands/biodiversity agenda but it also causes all but the most aggressive animals to die from malnutrition.

Outdoorsman Bulletins No. 1, 2, 18 and 19 provide the scientific facts and the research dispelling the myths about emergency big game feeding, and No. 19 includes the entire IDAPA Rules requiring IDFG to feed – rules with full force of law it often ignores as if they did not exist. All four bulletins document repeated instances of IDFG killing mule deer and elk by not providing sufficient feed and/or refusing to utilize wildlife energy blocks.

A Practical Solution to Winter Feeding

After 24 years of IDFG misappropriating the dedicated emergency big game feeding fund and failing to conduct even a single *emergency* feeding operation without excessive losses, it should be obvious that the program needs a major overhaul to restore public trust. Short of abolishing the fund or turning it over to the appropriate rural county governments, with disease prevention oversight by the State Ag Department, the ability to use the fund for *any* purpose other than emergency feeding should be eliminated.

Unlike the other dedicated IDFG set-asides, the winter feeding set-aside is essentially an insurance policy intended to provide sufficient money during an extreme winter to prevent major big game die-offs in specific problem areas. I.C. Sec. 36-111(c) already provides that “Not less than seventy-five cents (75¢) of each one dollar and fifty cents (\$1.50) collected shall be placed in a separate account to be designated as a feeding account.”

It continues, “Moneys in the feeding account may not be expended except upon the declaration of a feeding emergency by the director of the department of fish and game. Such emergency need not exist on a statewide basis but can be declared with respect to one (1) or more regions of the state. The department shall by rule* establish the criteria for a feeding emergency.” (*These rules in IDAPA 13.01.18 establish the criteria and delegate the authority to declare a feeding emergency and spend the money for feeding – including stockpiling feed in advance – to Regional Supervisors).

Eliminate the Loophole

The loophole in I.C. Sec. 36-111(c) that allows IDFG to misuse the feeding money is a vaguely-worded reference to rehabilitation of winter range and the provision that feeding money in excess of \$400,000 may be removed (from the State Treasurer’s interest-bearing account) and spent. Removing that language would provide additional feeding funding needed during an extreme winter and would prevent the set-aside money from ever being spent except for a bona fide winter feeding emergency.

Amending I.C. Sec. 36-111(c) as suggested to prevent misuse of the winter feeding set-aside fund would undoubtedly generate protests from both IDFG and

its traditional support groups. But it would restore accountability and pay large dividends in the long run.

Tell the Truth Up Front

Restoring legitimate use of the feeding set-aside fund should also eliminate the need to issue misleading press releases designed to cover up IDFG allowing thousands of mule deer to starve needlessly. An important first step in restoring transparency and credibility is to tell the truth up front instead of having to manufacture excuses and alibis in the inevitable damage control meetings that occur following a severe winter when the death losses can no longer be hidden from the public and legislators.

For example, the highly advertised practice of capturing and radio-collaring about 800 adult female and juvenile mule deer in early winter each year and monitoring them for losses until mid-May costs several hundred thousand dollars. Yet the results in specific units, which are important to thousands of mule deer hunters and many landowners, have been hidden from most of them for the past two years.

“Add New Info To Website Constantly”

Following their instructions from the Association for Conservation Information (ACI), AFWA and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the IDFG Communications staff re-designed the Fish and Game website to provide something new to attract new visitors every time they visit the site. But the most recent mule deer fawn survival data on that site covers the winter of 2005-2006.

Mule Deer hunters are the largest segment of hunters in Idaho yet they are kept in the dark about what is happening with mule deer populations and the so-called “Mule Deer Initiative” (MDI). The MDI website states: “*This website section will provide you with information regarding what's being done for mule deer in Idaho and how it's working. So stay tuned and stay in touch!*”

Yet the most recent information that can be found at that site is a Feb. 2007 SE Region MDI Newsletter advocating eliminating roads and restoring “native” (pre-Columbian era) vegetation as necessary ingredients for restoring mule deer. The much amended version of the controversial Mule Deer Plan that was finally approved by the F&G Commission in March 2008 was never shown and only an abbreviated 2005 “Draft Action Plan” with no specifics is available on the website.

Admit the Truth but Put an Optimistic Spin On It

A May 23, 2008 F&G Headquarters News Release stated: “*At 30 percent, statewide fawn survival tied 2005-06 as the poorest survival rate since Idaho began monitoring fawns in 1998-99. Fawn survival in most of Idaho was in the 20-30 percent range, but varied from a low of 8 percent in the Palisades area to a high of 70 percent in the Boise River population management unit.*

“*That's not surprising, given the weather we've had,*” big game manager Brad Compton told F&G commissioners during their meeting May 22. “*But with the*

good female survival, and expected good forage this summer, biologists expect mule deer numbers to rebound quickly," he said.

Two months earlier, on March 10, 2008, these same biologists had published a cliché-filled press release in SE Idaho newspapers stating: "*deer and elk carry their 'kitchen pantries' on their backs...(and) need very little feed to get them through this winter. That doesn't mean that if someone offers them some 'ice cream' they won't eat it...Most of these animals have been taught the bad habit of bypassing the winter range for an easy meal provided by well-intentioned folk. Fish and Game stresses that decisions not to feed wintering wildlife are done with the best interests of the animals in mind.*"

Despite F&G Rhetoric Fawns Were Already Dying

When they issued that press release, many of the 263 eight-month-old fawns they had collared two months earlier and refused to feed had already died and they needed every surviving fawn and breeding-age female mule deer to rebuild the herd. Instead, for the 2008 hunting season they recommended, and the Commission approved, unlimited numbers of bowhunters continuing to kill mule deer of either sex for 32 days in all 13 of the SE Region units – and for an additional 70 days in one unit.

In 2007 archery deer hunters reported killing 132 antlerless mule deer in those units which translates into more than **1,000** surviving progeny if they and their future surviving female fawns had been left alive to reproduce. But despite the unlimited either-sex archery hunting Region-wide, F&G restricted rifle buck hunters to 175 permits in Unit 70 and 200 permits in Unit 78.

F&G Displaced 1,252 Rifle Deer Hunters in 2 Units

A total of 1,627 general season any-weapon deer hunters reported hunting deer in those two units in 2007 but only 375 (23%), including 28 nonresidents, are allowed to hunt there in 2008. That means that 1,252 rifle deer hunters will either be forced to invade and overcrowd the surrounding general season units – or pay \$18.25 for an archery permit plus several hundred dollars for archery gear and learn to hunt with a bow – or give up deer hunting.

Any way you look at it IDFG made more money by disenfranchising three-fourths of the deer hunters in those two units than it would have allowing them to hunt with antler point restrictions or in a shorter general season. Regardless of its rhetoric about recruiting hunters, its actions show that it wants fewer hunters who will pay more to hunt in a longer season when game is more vulnerable.

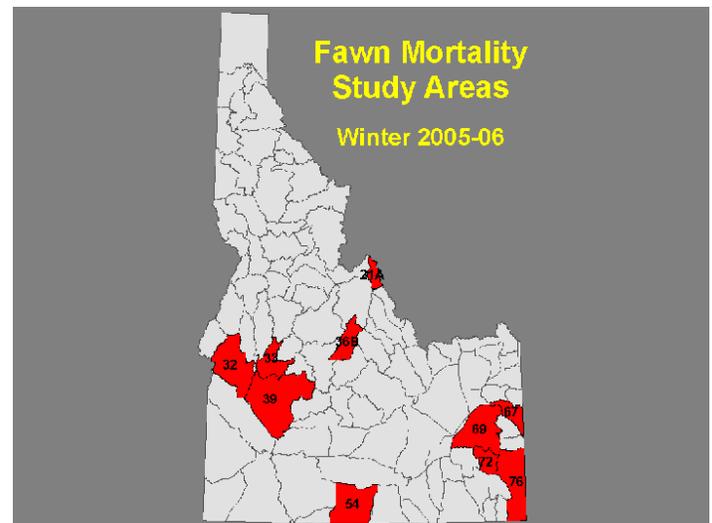
Claimed 30% Survival is Misleading

By May 15, 2008 only 78 of the 263 radio-collared fawns were still alive yet no changes were recommended in the hunting seasons. It is important to remember that the <30% of radio-collared fawns that survived to May 15th only represent a small sample of the hardest (or luckiest) fawns that had already survived for eight months.

If all of the fawns that died from predation, hunting and all other causes during the first eight months of life were added in, it would reflect a much lower average fawn survival rate than 30 percent. Yet the public was misled into believing the loss won't affect anything but the 2008 yearling buck segment of the mule deer harvest.

When the radio-collar survival research was initiated 10 years ago December counts conducted on numerous winter ranges before bucks shed their antlers and while fawns were still small, provided an accurate sampling of the post-season ratio of both bucks and fawns per 100 does. Then spring green-up counts provided a ratio of surviving fawns to surviving adults of both sexes.

That information from these large sampling groups is far more reliable than spending 10 years and several million dollars checking an inadequate* sample. Because that limited sample does not tell what caused mule deer fawn or elk calf deaths during the initial months when they are normally most vulnerable, it would appear to have limited practical application. (*only 263 fawns and 528 adult females out of ~150,000 mule deer were radio-collared and monitored during the 2007-08 winter.)



IDFG map showing 10 scattered units selected to represent statewide mule deer fawn winter losses.

By including data in the so-called "statewide" average fawn survival" from several "banana belt" winter ranges with healthy mule deer populations and little or no snow, it makes the "statewide" winter survival average appear much higher than it actually is. On May 15, 2006, fawns in six of the 10 sample units averaged only **16%** survival rather than the 32% claimed as average statewide.

On May 15, 2008 the mule deer fawns wintering on bare ground in the southern tip of Unit 39 next to Boise reportedly had 70% survival. This, and the fact that some deer were fed, indicates that the statewide fawn survival in the deep snow units was probably only 15% or less rather than the claimed 30% average.

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If you visit the IDFG website at “Big Game Species” and click on “Big Game Winter Feeding” you will find a lengthy “policy statement” which, it says, was adopted by the Fish and Game Commission. It describes “a ‘hands off’ rule” and claims: “Deer research shows that animals that enter the winter in good condition don’t need much feed – supplemental feeding is virtually irrelevant to survival.”

Those statements ignore wild ruminant biology and illustrate the hands-off management agenda preached by AFWA and its nongame/wildlands co-conspirators. The claim that mule deer don’t require supplemental nutrition to survive when their feed is covered by 18 or more inches of snow and ice reflects a combination of ignorance, dishonesty and absence of logic.



Hundreds of starving mule deer fawns died on top of adequate winter forage covered with deep, crusted snow in some parts of Idaho. (April 6, 2008 photo by Harvey Peck)

Anyone with a basic knowledge of Idaho mule deer biology knows that abnormally high winter fawn losses always signal higher than normal mature buck losses. They also know that before malnourished adult females reach the stage of dying, a significant number abort or absorb fetuses, and the fetuses that do survive in the womb are born as undernourished stunted offspring.

Not only are the stunted fawns more susceptible to predation and disease, the females often pass this on to their offspring. But whether or not that occurs, this still represents a gap of at least two years – not one – in the deer herd age structure, plus a gap in the mature buck age class that is normally available for breeding and harvest.

State Game Manager Compton’s assertion that biologists expect mule deer numbers to rebound quickly has no basis in fact or science. Mule deer numbers have not “rebounded” from the 2006 winter losses and

populations and harvests remain **less than half** of their lowest number during the 7 years prior to the 1993 winter.

The Real Idaho Feeding Policy

On the same website page as the so-called feeding policy statement – but in much smaller print – is the official Idaho winter feeding policy adopted by the Commission in 1993, declaring IDFG will feed the animals when they are stressed by extreme weather situations.

That policy states in part: “We are aware that big game harvests and weather will vary from year to year throughout the state. In most years, snow depths and temperatures do not create adverse conditions for wintering animals. However, there are times when unusual weather patterns may create critical periods of stress when winter forage becomes limited, unavailable, or animals are forced into areas involving public safety. We recognize that we cannot manage game populations for these extreme weather situations – nor should we. When the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, through investigation by field personnel, determines that a critical situation exists, the department will provide artificial feed to wintering game animals only during those periods of critical stress.

“The intention of this policy is periods of critical stress and not as a sustaining program which would carry larger game populations than the range can normally support.”

Two Highest Causes of Mule Deer Deaths

Most of the reasons given for not feeding in the long anti-feeding policy statement are excuses that do not apply if the animals are fed timely and properly in specific locations only when and where the need exists. Where some substandard natural winter forage is accessible, the use of Wildlife Energy Blocks eliminates *all* of the problems associated with feeding at a fraction of the cost.

IDFG’s failure to mitigate losses resulting from abnormally severe winters is the overall second highest cause of mule deer deaths in Idaho. But the highest death losses overall result from uncontrolled predation.

In his article entitled, “Beware of ‘Natural’ Wildlife Management,” (July 2004 Outdoorsman) North America’s foremost authority on wild ungulates, Dr. Valerius Geist, wrote: “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.”

F&G Agencies Undermine Intent of Lawmakers

Although game managers in Idaho and several neighboring states pay lip service to predator management, the *limited* predator “control” they attempt is always treated as “research” and is never adequate to restore healthy recruitment of game populations. This results from the “learning to live with predators” philosophy that AFWA, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and similar

preservationist groups have substituted for scientific wildlife management.

When state lawmakers in Idaho, Montana and Nevada introduced legislation enabling and/or requiring their game management agencies to control predators impacting big game populations, the agencies and their supporters spent thousands of dollars unsuccessfully attempting to defeat the bills. Although the legislation became law in all three states, agency officials continue to undermine the intent of the legislation.

Idaho Declines to Admit Predator Impact

Idaho laws enacted in 2005 and 2006 now provide an average of more than \$200,000 annually for the F&G Commission to control predators impacting game. But instead of reducing predators sufficiently to restore healthy recruitment in selected problem areas when the laws passed, the Commission approved the biologists' recommendation to fund yet another predator "study" and split the rest of the money evenly between predator districts with no recommendations to improve recruitment.

In a presentation to the Idaho F&G Commission several years ago, Wildlife Bureau Chief Jim Unsworth remarked "We have not found a situation where the animals are in a predator pit." In reality, declining populations, coupled with continuing low fawn-to-doe ratios in many Idaho mule deer herds and continuing low calf-to-cow ratios in elk herds in the Clearwater and several other locations, are reliable indicators that those herds exist in a predator pit from which they cannot recover without a significant reduction in predators.

Nevada Biologists' Comments Confusing

In his Feb. 15, 2008 article in the *Reno Gazette-Journal* Dave Rice quoted NDOW Big Game Specialist Mike Cox: *"We are trying to find a (predator control) prescription that works, and if we can find that, we will use it in other parts of the state. So far we have not found anything that is going to work or that we won't need to spend a half-million dollars for a small increase in the number of tags for that expenditure. In my book that is not an economically viable management tool."*

"Poor habitat means poor over-winter survival which means fewer fawns. Poor habitat means more exposure to the elements which means more diseases, which means predators can have an easier time of killing the weak animals. It all works together but the foundation is habitat and that is the problem."

Yet in a response to Cox's comments published on that same day entitled, *"NDOW Endorses Predation Management as a Practical Tool,"* NDOW Game Division Chief Russ Mason wrote: *"There is no argument that predation management is an important tool, and no difference of opinion at NDOW on this point. Predators vs. Habitat is a false dichotomy, and Mike Cox, myself, and other management biologists here in Nevada and elsewhere around the country are in agreement."*

"Raven suppression around sage grouse leks, mountain lion, bobcat, and coyote removals to protect bighorn, coyote removals to protect pronghorn, and coyote and lion management to protect deer are all useful when the right circumstances are present."

Predator control projects in Nevada, as in Idaho, are essentially research programs involving information-gathering concerning predators and prey. Since 2001 they have been funded by a \$3 dedicated predator control fee added to every big game tag application by hunters.

With this income reportedly averaging about \$357,000 annually, the dedicated money is used for a few selected programs approved each year by the Commission which may benefit waterfowl, sage grouse, turkey or other upland birds, deer, elk, antelope or desert bighorns.



Bighorn ram being killed by mountain lion. (Part of a rare photo sequence reportedly taken on July 2, 2008)

One mule deer predation control project included capturing, purchasing and installing radio-transmitter ear tags and monitoring 24-30 deer at a cost exceeding \$1,200 each. It also included analysis of coyote and lion age and condition, repeated forage analysis, collecting information on deer movement including home range size, determining the age condition, etc. of mule deer killed and attempting to guess the impact of fires, drought, etc., to determine whether the predation was additive or compensatory.

Undisputed Predator-Prey Research Ignored

As was the case in the SE Idaho mule deer research, the extent of predator control needed to increase mule deer recruitment was speculated rather than known. Instead of accepting the valuable knowledge gained from several decades of predator-prey research in Alaska and western Canada, biologists in each western state attempt to duplicate that research with woefully inadequate funding.

Dr. Charles Kay recently pointed out that states lack the extreme funding necessary to even accurately estimate predator populations and densities – much less document the impact of predation on game species once annual recruitment no longer equals annual adult mortality for that species. With no proof to substantiate their claims,

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biologists like Cox continue to insist that poor habitat – not excessive ratios of predators to prey species – is the real reason for most losses to predators.

More than two dozen long-term scientific study reports published in the *Journal of Wildlife Management* or similar scientific publications from 1983-2008 conclude that once wild ungulate recruitment falls below annual mortality, predator populations must be reduced radically (e.g. by 70%) to allow the prey species to recover.

Biologists Ignore History

Unlike Alaska, most western states refuse to admit that controlling predators, mitigating the impact of severe winters and regulating season lengths and bag limits were the three primary tools used to produce the bountiful wildlife populations we enjoyed from the late 1920s through the 1960s. Before that a relative handful of people using short range weapons with open sights and primitive transportation had decimated wild game numbers.

Yet during the period when human populations in the West increased tenfold and there were far more hunters with long-range telescope-sighted rifles and easy access, wild game populations also increased tenfold or more. Any state game management agency that is unwilling to admit these facts up front, is pretending to manage predators at the same time it is pandering to the nongame agenda that opposes killing predators except in the guise of conducting so-called “research.”

Biologists Oppose Killing Predators

Biologists in many states openly express their philosophy that killing one species to increase other species that humans harvest is “selfish.” In Idaho, IDFG Large Carnivore Coordinator Steve Nadeau even told the media, “It would be nice if the livestock owners and the wolf advocates could come up with a long-term solution that didn't mean killing wolves.”

In an ACI lecture to the co-called “conservation educators” from the various state F&G agencies, Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Leader Ed Bangs stated, “over 85% of wolf mortality is human-caused,” and emphasized the need to educate the public to accept wolves that were not killing livestock. So Nadeau promptly told Idahoans “There is absolutely no reason to fear taking pets into the woods” – despite increasing reports of dogs being killed by wolves (e.g. six more hounds were reported killed by wolves in a July 28, 2008 *Lewiston Tribune* article).

Wolf Kills Understated

Nadeau recently told the media that Idaho research indicates each wolf kills only 12 big game animals per year, *including deer*. Yet all wolf research conducted in the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA) indicates the average wolf pack, including juveniles, kills between 16.4 and 32.8 elk per wolf per year.

This is based on recorded kills by wolf packs during the 243 days in October-May* and a FWS estimate

that wolves kill only 70% as many elk per wolf during the 122 days in June-September.

(*White and Garrott; Wildlife Society Bulletin Vol. 33 no. 3 [Fall 2005]: 948)

Therefore, the following chart represents a more realistic impact of 1,000 wolves on elk in Idaho:

Age/Sex Class	~% Each Class	@ .05 elk/ wolf/day	@ .075 elk/ wolf/day	@ 0.1 elk/ wolf/day
Calves	41%	4,982	7,472	9,963
Cows	39%	4,739	7,108	9,477
Bulls	20%	2,430	3,645	4,860
Total kill Oct-May		12,151	18,225	24,300
Estimated kill Jun-Sep		4,270	6,405	8,540
Ttl. estimated annual kill		16,421	24,630	32,840

Some critics of the research believe the numbers are low based on the fact that packs consume more of the kill than singles, pairs or smaller groups – all of which kill more elk per wolf. Others believe that reducing the estimated summer elk kill by 30% defies the logic that it requires a lot more neonatal calves to produce the same amount of nutrients provided by larger calves and adults.

Wolves Destroy Elk Calf Recruitment

On April 6, 2006 former* Wyoming G&F Director Terry Cleveland used the Oct-May portion of this chart to show FWS how many calf elk the estimated 325 wolves in the GYA were killing after the month of September. Then he showed WYGF studies indicating that, without wolves, 80%-90% of elk calves that survive until September will survive the winter to become replacement yearlings.

(*Cleveland retired on June 30, 2008).

Although there was a period in late winter when wolves killed more mature bull elk that had lost their antlers, they killed elk calves at 3-4 times their availability in the winter population. While hunters kill primarily bulls, 80% of the elk killed by wolves were cows or replacement calves.

The Unmentionable “Predator Pit”

A glance at the elk calf-to-cow ratio in the Northern Yellowstone herd confirms what the researchers “discovered” in 10 years of research. There are too many wolves for the declining elk population to feed.

That is a situation described by Alaska Researchers as “Low Density Dynamic Equilibrium” (LDDE) but more often referred to as a “predator pit” from which the herds cannot recover without help. Refusing to acknowledge that game populations are in a predator pit is just as dishonest as hiding where sportsman license dollars are being spent.

Unhealthy Ratios of Predators to Prey

Roughly seventy-five years ago, Leopold recorded a ratio of one mountain lion per 360 mule deer in what he perceived to be healthy populations of both species. Logic tells us that if Idaho has only 100 deer per mountain lion and each lion kills about 50 deer per year the reproductive potential of the deer cannot continue to produce enough meat to feed the lions – much less coyotes, wolves, etc.

In a multiple prey environment, this forces the lions to turn to alternate prey such as elk, bighorn sheep, beavers, raccoons and other smaller wild prey, and ultimately livestock, and domestic animals and pets. Meanwhile the mule deer remain in a predator pit and, as other prey sources decline, conflicts with humans increase.

That is when most state wildlife managers blame the problem on “humans who invaded the predators’ habitat.” In reality it is the wildlife managers’ fault for not reducing the number of predators sufficiently to restore healthy, productive mule deer populations.

The Habitat Myth

A wildlife management textbook published by the Game Conservancy trust in Great Britain entitled, “A Question of Balance” includes the following analysis: “Habitat management goes hand in hand with predator control (but) habitat management on its own would simply be regarded as *a waste of money*.” Research in Alaska and Yukon Territory concluded that it is impossible to achieve minimum moose and caribou population goals through manipulation of habitat without also reducing the ratio of predators of those species to a healthy level.

According to the BLM and other federal agencies involved in “habitat restoration for wildlife” programs, restoring shrub-steppe habitat costs a *minimum* of \$1,000 per acre and the cost for other types is higher (e.g. \$8,000 per acre to restore stream, riparian and wetland habitat). At the minimum cost for sagebrush acres it would cost about \$5 billion to restore 10% of Idaho’s deer habitat if the initial effort was successful, which is highly unlikely.

At the restoration rate proposed in Idaho’s Mule Deer Plan, it could take two centuries to accomplish that goal and cost additional \$billions to protect the restored habitat from fire, noxious weeds, drought, insects, etc. once it is finally established. Promoting long-term habitat restoration appears to be another excuse not to manage wildlife until the radical wildlands/wildlife corridor plan approved by the Western Governors’ Association in Jackson, Wyoming on June 29, 2008 is implemented.

Stop Hiding the Truth about Declining Harvests

If IDFG wants to dispel the notion that it is trying to hide something from hunters and Legislators, it could begin by publishing the total annual big game harvests at its website as most other western states do. In less than a minute after I type “Wyoming Game and Fish big game harvests” in a search engine I have the total annual harvest for any of nine species of Wyoming big game for the last seven years – with breakdown by resident and nonresident, weapon type, sex and juvenile or adult, whitetail or mule deer if for deer, and a comparison of annual harvests for each species over the past 10 years.

Most of that information is not available at the Idaho F&G website and the info that is provided requires several hours of calculations to arrive at totals that never quite add up. As originally implemented, the mandatory

big game hunter harvest report relied entirely on bona fide reports by hunters. Now it has been modified to consist of only 80% reports by hunters and 20% manipulation by the State Game Manager.

Tell the Truth about Where License \$\$ are Spent

With IDFG currently seeking a 20% increase in funding, the time has come for it to tell the truth about the hunters’ license dollars that are presently spent funding and promoting non-game activities. Unlike the previous “Stockholder Reports” provided at its website, the current FY 2009 Budget Request does not include a breakdown of expenditures in each bureau.

But even if it included “nongame” expenditures in the Wildlife Bureau, that is only the tip of the iceberg. A majority of the \$13.2 million budgeted for Administration and the \$3.3 million budgeted for Communications is funded with sportsman license dollars. Yet a substantial amount of both budgets support nongame activities and non-hunting agendas, including capital expenditures and infrastructure expenses plus a never-ending barrage of propaganda from F&G employees in every department.

The statement on the following page implying that a neighbor’s donkey was killed because its owners invaded “wildlands” (where predators rule) is one of countless examples of that propaganda. The claimed “wildlands” is actually farmland lived on by three generations of family.

A comparison of actual IDFG budget expenditures in FY 1980 (before the word “nongame” was invented) with the approved FY 2009 budget may surprise you. It shows significant declines in the *percentage* of total income spent to support wild game and hunting compared to unprecedented increases in budgeting for F&G bureaus that also support and promote the nongame agenda.

	<u>FY 1980</u>	<u>% of Ttl</u>	<u>FY 2009</u>	<u>% of Ttl</u>
Wildlife	3,212,600	31.1%	16,069,123	20.7%
Enforcement	2,239,900	21.7%	10,122,400	13.1%
Administration	904,200	8.7%	13,192,600	17.0%
Communication	397,900	3.8%	3,312,300	4.3%
Nat Resource Pol	84,500	0.8%	3,421,700	4.4%
Total Budget	10,335,300		77,520,000	

Although the FY 2009 budget is 7.5 times the FY 1980 budget, the 2009 Wildlife Bureau budget, including nongame wildlife expenditures, is only 5X the 1980 expenditures and Enforcement is only 4.5 times as much. The three Bureau budgets that also fund and promote non-game activities increased by 14.6X, 8.3X and **40.5X!**

As the “protect wildlands/predators” propaganda continues and game populations continue to decline throughout the West, more and more sportsmen realize the professional wildlife managers they have depended on to preserve wild game harvests have become professional spin doctors whose job security depends on their ability to deceive the sportsmen who pay their wages.

Mountain Lion Kills Donkey, Goat, Raids Garbage

By George Dovel



Left - Miniature Donkey owned by Lynn Gramkow and her husband, Roger, on Porter Creek Road northeast of Horseshoe Bend, Idaho. Right - Photo of the donkey taken by veterinarian at his treatment facility three days before the animal died from spinal trauma.

Several weeks ago as I was preparing this issue I received a phone call from a neighbor who lives about three-fourths of a mile up the gravel road east of our house. She said a cougar had attacked her miniature donkey and she and her husband had driven it to a vet who would treat it for another day and then let an animal rehab facility take over because it was severely injured.

She said her husband had called both IDFG and Wildlife Services and the WS Specialist had confirmed the attack was committed by a mountain lion and was trying to locate a local lion hunter to pursue it with his dogs. One of the couple's pygmy goats was missing and it was assumed the lion had killed it and carried it off.

It was late afternoon and very hot by the time the WS Specialist was able to get the hunter and his hounds to the neighbors' property. The lion scent left in the dew had long since evaporated and the dogs were not able to follow the lion.

The WS Specialist set up a battery-operated call box and set two traps there hoping to catch the lion. The animal owners, Roger and Lynn Gramkow, set up a well-lit portable corral under their bedroom window and put their miniature mules, goats and horse in it before dark.

TV News Team Interviews F&G

On the third day the donkey died at the rehab facility of complications from a bite on top of its neck and

a Boise TV station interviewed IDFG Communications Specialist Ed Mitchell about the attack. Mitchell said he had heard of the incident and wasn't surprised.

"Idaho has a very healthy population of lions throughout the state," Mitchell said. "The only thing that's changed over the decades is that you have more people moving into the wildland areas when the big carnivores have always lived there. They're appalled when something like this happens."

Lions Were Scarce Before Protection in 1972

Although Mitchell repeated biologists' stock response to reports of human-lion confrontations, it doesn't happen to be entirely accurate. There was a lone wolf residing in this area during the early 1940s according to an old timer's report, but cougar were scarce in most rural Idaho areas until after the bounty was removed in 1960 and lions were given protected status as a game animal in 1972.

It wasn't considered "wildlands" by the people who lived here and whose children attended the Jerusalem school a short distance from where the donkey was attacked. "Wildlands" is a name generated by former "Earth First!" radicals and promoted by the UN and The Nature Conservancy, but Fish and Game spokesmen are determined to re-classify many rural Idaho farms and ranches as "wildlands" and label the people who settled and farmed those lands 120 years ago as "intruders."

Predator Removes Chickens

A couple of nights later the Gramkows were awakened by a loud commotion outside and Mrs. Gramkow went outside and fired shots to scare the animal off. At daylight they found feathers scattered on the ground in the chicken house and something had carried off the five chickens inside.

Although Mrs. Gramkow said a track indicated it was a lion, it might have been a fox or coyote. By the time the WS Specialist and the lion hunter arrived late that day, wind and heat had erased the track and the scent.

There were two reports of one or several lions being sighted by other residents in the vicinity of their homes further up the creek but neither was confirmed by identification of tracks. The call box traps produced one coyote, and two dogs that were released unharmed, and Mr. Gramkow suggested the set-up be removed as the lion had apparently avoided the call box after a trap was sprung.

Lion Raids Our Garbage

Meanwhile, a week or so after the donkey died, my wife opened our front door one morning and commented that something had knocked our large trash pickup container over in the driveway. After I examined the sack of garbage that had been removed, carried a short distance and shredded by teeth and claws, I examined the plastic container and saw it had been clawed and bitten.

Then I observed three faint but distinct cougar front paw prints near the top of the container where the animal had stood on its hind legs and pushed the container over. It obviously had wet feet coming out of the creek or across wet grass and apparently picked up some of the sticky solution used to treat the gravel surface of the road on its pads as it crossed the road in front of our house.

I called the WS Specialist in Emmett and reported that the incident probably involved a female or yearling male lion based on the size of the prints. He arrived after investigating a killing several miles northwest of our house, verified the lion prints and we both agreed to try to contact a lion hunter quickly before the scent disappeared.

Shortly before the donkey attack took place, Sandy Donley, the son of my late cougar hunting buddy, Rob Donley, was asked by the local F&G Conservation Officer to trail and tree a cougar that had killed and carried off a domestic sheep near Sandy's home east of Garden Valley. Sandy's dog "treed" that lion in some hawthorn bushes and the C.O. shot it with a well-placed bullet from his rifle.

Can't Trail Lion Without WS Agent

Sandy could not be located but his wife contacted their son-in-law who was the same hunter who responded to the Gramkow's problem, and he showed up with his dogs in time to have a fresh trail. Unfortunately the WS Agent had to investigate two other killings in the Crouch and Lowman areas and, because there is no open lion season in July, he could not authorize the hunter to pursue the cat without him being present.

One of those killings involved a valuable sheep killed by a wolf pack but an unofficial source later told me IDFG would not allow WS to trap or kill any wolves in that pack because it is "one of F&G's pet packs." This may involve the wolf advocates in the Stanley-Hailey area who insist that no wolves be trapped or lethally controlled.

A woolgrower grazing 2,500 ewes and lambs in that area made news recently when Defenders of Wildlife allocated \$25,000 to hire three people, including a retired IDFG C.O., to set up 3 to 5-acre portable corrals, using "turbo-fladry,"* to put the sheep in at night. The DOW team is provided with radio-tracking equipment to keep track of the wolves and keep the sheep away from them in the Boulder and Smoky Mountains northwest of Ketchum.

(*turbo fladry is one low strand of electrified fence wire with red streamers dangling from it.)

While the lion hunter was waiting at my house for the WS Specialist, he traveled up and down the creek through heavy brush without his dogs, attempting to find lion tracks or other sign indicating which direction the animal was traveling. Meanwhile I obtained the necessary written permission from two other neighbors for WS to hunt the lion on their property.

One of them, a semi-retired ranch foreman/owner, expressed concern that a lion hungry enough to raid a garbage can in an open area covered by a motion sensor light system might represent a threat to small children in the area. When the WS Agent finally arrived in late afternoon he and the lion hunter exerted a lot of effort in near 100-degree temperatures trying to strike a trail.

The lion might have been hiding in heavy brush along the creek or a brushy draw or could have been miles away by then. There are numerous reasons why it might be living among humans in mid-summer including being displaced by wolves or other lions, or surviving on raccoons, feral cats and other small prey where its primary prey, mule deer, have become increasingly scarce.

A few years ago, this predator that represented a possible threat to young children would likely have been treed and shot, or trapped at its kill shortly after the goat remains were located. But now, unless you are armed and catch a wolf, bear or lion in the act of attacking your animals, it is a crime to pursue and kill one of these predators without an open season and the appropriate tag.

Animal rights advocates and some F&G employees have convinced city dwellers, including hunters, to resent the federal trapper. But despite burdensome rules that hinder his ability to help, he is one of the few remaining outdoorsmen with the skills and equipment to respond quickly when people need help involving wildlife.

No report of the lion being killed has been received and the Gramkows are erecting a barn to protect their animals at night. With record populations of all three major predators and a declining prey base, similar incidents will no doubt continue to occur with increasing frequency.

Western Governors Approve Wildlife Corridors

By George Dovel

On June 29, 2008, during their annual conference held at Jackson, Wyoming this year, the Western Governors' Association (WGA) voted to proceed with a plan to implement their February 2007 Policy Resolution 07-01 "Protecting Wildlife Mitigation Corridors and Crucial Wildlife Habitat in the West." The 142-page plan titled, "The Western Governors' Association Wildlife Corridors Initiative," directed the Governors of all 19 states in the WGA to involve their state wildlife agencies in virtually every phase of the plan.

The F&G nongame staffs in several of those states had already submitted maps of proposed wildlife corridors as part of their State Wildlife Action Plans. The Plan suggests these are the appropriate people to determine which lands will be selected as "Crucial Habitat Areas" and as "Connecting Corridors" in their respective states.

The wildlife agencies will be given authority to determine when development of energy (e.g. wind, solar, drilling for oil and gas, geothermal, etc.) and other activities will adversely affect wildlife in these areas. Preserving corridors for wildlife *during climate change* will be a part of "broad planning and zoning affecting all future development in order to preserve open spaces."

The Nature Conservancy provided a photo map depicting important biodiversity sites in 35 ecoregions and the map at right included the comment, "The Wildlands Network Designs identify "core areas" as a proxy for habitat of wide-ranging carnivores based primarily in roadless areas."

If you can handle the truth, read what Western governors agreed to in the next issue. To get this to your elected officials, subscribe now with a donation in any amount. Our cost for mailing to you for one year is \$20.



The "Yellowstone to Yukon" Wildlands/large carnivore program has been expanded to reach from northern Mexico to Alaska.

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