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The Whole Truth about the Radical Declines in Idaho Big Game Harvests

By George Dovel

In his January 2007 Inaugural Address, Idaho's newly elected Governor Butch Otter said his administration would be based on responsibility and accountability. He said efficiency, customer service and cost savings would become everyday language and cited the need for state agencies to engage private citizens and put aside personal and political agendas to achieve common goals. He added, "For me that means committing every day to ensuring that your government becomes what it was meant to be – the people's servant."

In his 2007 State of The State address three days later, the new Governor pointed out that unemployment in Idaho was only 3.8% – a record low, with 23,000 new jobs created the year before he took office. He reminded us Idaho had a substantial general fund surplus and recommended using some of it to build a new animal disease research facility "to manage the health of all Idaho livestock and wildlife that hasn't already been killed by our exploding wolf population."

How things have changed in the past three years!

"New Director Should Pledge to Improve Hunting"

When Gov. Otter took office in 2007, Idaho Elk harvests had been reduced by an average of 2% per year during the dozen years since wolves were introduced. A Dec. 31, 2006 editorial in Pocatello's *Idaho State Journal* had asked for "a pledge by the next director of the Idaho Fish and Game Department to improve hunting and fishing – really improve them."

Cal Groen was also promoted to F&G Director in January 2007 and was promptly made a member of Gov. Otter's Staff. In a half-hour interview on Idaho Public TV, he disagreed that Idaho was going to harvest all but about 200 wolves as both Idaho's Wolf Plan and Gov. Otter indicated

Elk Harvests Have Nose-Dived to 26-Year Low

During the three hunting seasons since then, instead of "really improving" hunting as the *Idaho State Journal* suggested, Idaho's published annual elk harvests have nose-dived to the lowest level in 26 years – a three year harvest drop of 23 percent! But unlike 26 years ago

when the Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game was rebuilding the elk and mule deer herds by harvesting almost no females, that agency is now destroying the female breeding stock of both species.

Increasing Revenue Instead of Managing Wildlife

The final hunter harvest estimates for Idaho's 2009 hunting season recently provided by F&G's Bruce Ackerman reveal that almost one-third of the mule deer and 41 percent of the elk calculated harvested by hunters last fall were females! But in order to legally hunt those female elk and mule deer and male calves and fawns, hunters had to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars extra in controlled hunt drawing and permit fees and/or archery and muzzleloader permit fees.

Only a relatively small percentage of the breeding females killed by hunters are to prevent crop depredation. The fact that F&G continues to offer more antlerless mule deer or elk "any weapon" permits than there are applicants in 30 units indicates it has no intention of reducing its short-term revenue by limiting the killing of the scarce females that produce Idaho's future mule deer and elk.

In 1996, Colorado Wildlife Researcher David Freddy warned Idaho Elk Team biologists that allowing three hunting seasons per species in Colorado's new A-B-C Tag system was done solely to increase income from an extra 200,000 nonresident elk hunters. Hunters were required to choose one of three different seasons to prevent overcrowding complaints from residents where only a single, much shorter, hunting season had existed before.

Colorado used antler point restrictions and halting cow elk hunting as the tools to increase its elk populations. Heeding Freddy's warning, IDFG did not offer stratified hunts with A-B Tags to hunters as one of their four elk management choices in its November 1996 Open Houses.

At its Dec. 1996 meeting, the F&G Commission told the Deer and Elk Teams to reduce the four choices to two and provide them to hunters to get their preference before it met in March 1997. The Elk Team could not agree on the two choices and when the Team Leader lost

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his temper and left the meeting, a Clearwater Region biologist who was not even an Elk Team member suggested choosing the A-B Tag system and it was promptly adopted.

There were no limits on either-sex harvest by archery hunters but rifle hunters in many Zones were restricted to hunting male elk only during the hot, dry period in October. The other choice offered by the Elk Team to hunters was Limited Controlled Hunts in which every elk hunter had to enter a drawing with most hunters not getting the chance to hunt that year

The A-B Zone Tag system was a bonanza for archery hunters and, not surprisingly, they constituted a large percentage of the total hunters responding – and overwhelmingly chose it over limiting the total number of hunters. Concerns were expressed by Director Mealey, but his biologists assured him the Commission could always change back to the old system after this new system was implemented in 1998, if it was not working.

Elk Team Ignores Calf Survival, Historical Populations

Unlike the Deer Team which I was able to influence slightly as a non-member, the Elk Team chose early on to ignore calf survival as a biological indicator. And instead of using historical carrying capacity, the minimum cow elk objectives for most zones were set using the number of cows that survived the two most severe winter kills in >40 years (92-93 and 96-97 winters).

The Department's own figures for the Lolo Zone show the folly of relying on just the unreasonably low cow elk minimums it has used to "manage" elk statewide.

IDFG Lolo Zone Elk Population Surveys

Survey Yr.	Cows	Bulls	BA* Bulls	Calves
1989	10113	2265	1384	2890
1997 & 98	6529	743	597	433
2010	1358	593	571	182

* "Branch-antlered"

Lolo Zone Elk Population Objectives (1998 to Present)

Cows	Bulls	BA Bulls	Calves
6100 -9100	1300 -1900	725 -1200	NONE

Too Few Bulls and/or Surviving Calves Ignored

Although the 6,529 estimated cow elk in 1997/98 was slightly above the unrealistically low 1998 minimum of 6100, there were too few branch-antlered breeding-age bulls to get even that many cows bred timely, and too few younger bulls to provide future replacements.

The decline from 2,890 surviving calves in 1989 to only 433 surviving calves in 1997-98 raised an alarm that should not have been possible to ignore. Pretending that the 433 post hunting season calves could replace all of the calves, yearlings, and adults of both sexes that would die that winter, plus provide the 557 additional bulls needed to

breed the cows, plus produce a surplus for hunters to harvest defies logic.

Yet the criteria in the 1998 Elk Plan also allow biologists to wait three successive years before they take action when either the number of cows or the number of total bulls or branch-antlered bulls is less than the minimum Objective. When the new Elk Plan was implemented in 1998, the biologists waited five years for another aerial count and by then, total cow numbers, which had continued to decline, were 50% below the *minimum* Objective!

Any so-called "elk management plan" that allows over half of the cow elk to die before it is even recognized is designed to destroy – not perpetuate – the resource.

In 1994 several Legislators insisted I be appointed to the newly created Winter Feeding Advisory Committees and in 1997 new IDFG Director Mealey appointed me to the Implementation Steering Team. Along with the other eight Team members, which included six IDFG officials, I was given a copy of the 1991-1995 Elk Management Plan and told our job was to establish Rules to implement the Deer and Elk Team's plans using that Plan as our guide.

When I read the Introduction to the 1991-95 Plan, prepared by Jim Unsworth and dated July 1990, I was shocked that IDFG had boldly published its intention to ignore Idaho Wildlife Policy adopted as law in 1938. When you read the following unedited excerpts from that Introduction you will recognize the hidden agenda (e.g. to reduce consumptive use of deer and elk) that has slowly destroyed Idaho's mule deer and elk for the past 20 years:

Elk Management Plan 1991-1995

Introduction

Although this document is called an Elk Management Plan, it is really the plan of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (hereafter called the Department) for managing the many and varied impacts of people upon wildlife and wildlife habitat.

The basic reason for most management efforts is to ensure long-term annual returns from the wildlife resource to the human population. Most such management efforts benefit the wildlife populations. A gamut of "products", including direct consumption (harvest), recreational opportunity, nonconsumptive use, scientific value, social and cultural value, genetic value, etc. can accrue from any wildlife population...The Department believes the greatest return to society from the wildlife resource occurs when the maximum variety of products is provided and that maximizing a single product (e.g., harvest) is not necessarily desirable. We will encourage and promote nonconsumptive use of elk.

I reviewed my 1996 notes of the Team meetings where biologists had agreed to increase deer and elk to provide food for bears – yet unanimously rejected Bill Chetwood's suggestion to provide deer and elk for hunters to harvest. The biologists' ongoing agenda was obvious.

In Outdoorsman Bulletin No, 38, I described how Attorney Sam Routson and I met with Lonk Kuck in Boise IDFG Headquarters on Nov. 29, 1993. Kuck admitted massive deer losses from the 1992-93 winter, and then admitted the elk losses after we showed him ample proof.



Partial photo of elk racks from 100 bulls that died from starvation in Garden Valley during 1992-93 winter.

Kuck looked at 160 elk “ivories” I dumped on his desk that had been removed from 80 elk by one Garden Valley resident who confirmed the elk had died from advanced malnutrition, and he admitted that was evidence that the elk were not fed emergency rations properly. But then he indicated we were fighting a losing battle and predicted that public hunting as we had known it would be gone in another decade.

Instead of reducing seasons in 1993 and ending the harvest of female mule deer and elk until the herds recovered, biologists added several thousand more antlerless permits. In the Dec, 1993 Commission meeting, former IDFG Director Joe Greenley told Kuck he had destroyed Idaho’s mule deer, and angry hunters testified about tens of thousands of mule deer and thousands of elk that had died needlessly.

But instead of at least listening to the angry hunters, Commissioner Dick Meiers jumped up and arrogantly told the hunters they should be thanking the Commission for providing them the extra hunting opportunity! A little more than a year later when the Legislature expressed its anger upon learning that Director Conley and his biologists were responsible for allowing wolves to be introduced into Idaho, Commissioner Meiers wrote a letter to the *Statesman* claiming he did not support the wolf introduction.

Fifteen years later on Jan. 28, 2010, Commissioner Cameron Wheeler said he knew two Commissioners back then who did not support wolf recovery. Although I applaud Wheeler for his occasional efforts to tell the truth about the sorry state of Idaho hunting, he was misled.

Regardless of what they may have claimed after the fact, none of the Commissioners in 1994 objected to publication of their endorsement of wolf recovery by IDFG and they supported wolf introduction unanimously at their December 1994 Commission meeting.

IDFG Policy – Sell Extra Hunting Opportunity

Following the 1992-93 and 1996-97 severe winter losses, hunters demanded immediate reductions in 1997 mule deer and elk harvests plus halting female hunting. But IDFG biologists had very different ideas.

Virgil Moore gave a presentation to new Director Steve Mealey and the Gov. Batt-appointed Commissioners who hired Mealey, telling them it was their responsibility to increase revenue by selling extra hunting opportunity. Idaho already had the longest general big game hunting seasons in the lower 48 states but Moore, with help from Jim Unsworth and Clearwater Commissioner Keith Carlson, convinced the new Commissioners to advertise Idaho’s extended seasons and thousands of extra controlled hunt permits to attract hunters from other states.

Instead of trying to restore healthy deer and elk herds beginning in 1997, the Commission approved extended either-sex general deer and elk seasons plus unlimited controlled hunts, plus 10,355 deer permits and 29,535 elk permits! And most of these were bonus permits for antlerless animals.

Salmon Commissioner John Burns warned that the focus needs to be on improving the game herds rather than prove that all you want to do is sell tags by launching another marketing program. If you have internet access go to: <http://www.idahoforwildlife.com/Outdoorsman.html> then scroll down and click on “No. 19” and read the article on Page 9 to learn why this destroys winter survival – then click on “No. 23” and read: “Does Idaho Manage Game or Sell Hunting Opportunity,” beginning on Page 7.

The 1998 A-B Tag System – Costly and Complicated

The Deer, Elk and Outfitter Allocation Teams had two primary duties – reduce the harvest of females to increase big game populations, and simplify hunting Rules so a hunter didn’t need a lawyer to interpret the regs. In 1997 Commissioner Fred Wood realized the system was going to be a nightmare for both hunters and administrators and urged the Department and Commission to simply adopt Unlimited Controlled Zone hunts which also required the hunter to choose his or her elk hunting Zone.

But as happens more than 99% of the time, the biologists got their way and devoted nearly a year to adding 228 new elk hunting seasons to the already complicated elk hunting rules! The automated license sale system was never able to keep up with the demand for tags at peak periods and IDFG lost up to a hundred thousand dollars in license sales each time this happened.

In 1998 a citizen committee forced the Clearwater Region to drop the antlerless rifle hunts in the Lolo Zone

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and cap the number of rifle hunters at one-third of the 1997 total while letting archers kill either sex. But it continued to sell antlerless elk permits in several Clearwater Zones and allowed general season rifle hunters in the Selway to kill either sex in October – despite knowing that cows, bulls and branch-antlered bulls were all below minimums.

The Fewer Animals Left – the More Some Hunters Will Pay For a Chance to Hunt Them

Although elk hunters had rejected the limited control hunt option, in 1998 they were offered 24,885 limited controlled hunt elk permits – most of which were antlerless – in addition to the A-B Tag Zone general season hunts! The 1990 plan to reduce consumptive use (harvest) of big game combined with selling excessive hunting opportunity was and still is funding the non-hunting look-but-don't-touch agenda promoted by the NGOs (non-governmental organizations) in Washington, D.C. who are still calling the shots (see Bulletin No. 29).

Any chance of changing the system went out the window in the March 1999 Commission meeting when Mealey was fired by a 4-3 vote and Commissioner Jeff Siddoway resigned. In 1999 Idaho's elk harvest was the lowest in 12 years and the average elk harvest since the Commission approved selling extra hunting opportunity in 1997 has declined 25% from even the 1990-1996 average.

The August 5, 2010 Molloy Court Ruling

The Department's love affair with wolves began to cause real problems in Idaho big game herds once Idaho's wolf population exceeded both the agreed upon minimum of 150 and the 219-wolf maximum that could have been supported in Idaho in 1985 according to the Kaminski-Hansen study (see Bulletin No. 34). Five and one-half years have passed since FWS re-wrote the 10J Rule and Congress authorized it, allowing Idaho to lethally control wolves that were one of the primary causes of big game declines.

According to IDFG Director Groen, wolves were running out of elk and deer and killing each other two years ago yet IDFG recently authorized four outfitters to control wolves which resulted in only two being killed. Why has the Commission failed to do its job?

When Judge Molloy placed wolves in the Northern Rockies back on the ESA list on August 5, 2010, Idaho's Governor, F&G Commissioners and assorted IDFG officials denounced his decision. The following are some email comments from Comm. Tony McDermott's August 6, 2010 email to Bonnie Butler in Governor Otter's Office:

"Bonnie--Greetings from the far North. The attached is provided for your information. As you might suspect there are a bunch of sportsman who believe the process has failed them and will now take matters into their own hands. Everyone associated with the wolf debacle will get tarred before its over. I have received a dozen e-mails from sportsman along with a call from Rep Estridge (sic) that are

similar to Ed's (a critical email from Ed Lindahl that was enclosed-ED) over the past 24 hours. Malloy's decision to put them back on the list was an act of cowardness (sic) and is a result of the mess that he helped create

Wyoming would rather fight than win and as it has turned out we probably should have taken their position from the start?

Wouldn't it be nice to have a do-over on the Idaho re-introduction? They never should have been introduced to central Idaho in the 1st place given that de-listing a population that is 10 times the federal recovery goal is not possible. As you know its a hell of a problem that's going to get a lot worse before it gets better and will probably involve the political process. Cheers.—Tony"

F&G Commissioners' Actions Caused Elk Decline

While Judge Molloy's obvious bias replaced reality concerning the number of Idaho wolves that should exist in 2008, he is not responsible for the fact there are no longer enough wild ungulates in Idaho to continue to feed even the 219 wolves they could in 1985. That is entirely the fault of McDermott and his fellow Commissioners who are trying to make the Judge a scapegoat now that their naïve pandering to the wolf activists was not successful.

On March 6, 2008 McDermott made the motion to accept Wolf Biologist Nadeau's Wolf Plan which changed the minimum Idaho wolf population from 100-150 to 518-732. On August 17, 2009, McDermott refused to agree to Comm. Wheeler's motion to set the wolf harvest quota at 430 and the Commissioners adopted a quota of 220 after admitting neither goal would be reached by hunters.

Increasing the minimum wolf population to a number Idaho's declining wild ungulates can no longer feed, and then setting a "death from all causes" goal that allows wolves to continue to increase – while refusing to control them – has decimated Idaho mule deer and elk herds where wolves exist. The Commissioners have brazenly ignored the Legislative mandates in half a dozen laws passed to prevent this situation from happening.

Lack of Game Contributes to Unemployment

And the situation is far more serious than the "up to \$24 million in lost revenue formerly spent annually by ex elk hunters" reported by IDFG (see Bulletin No. 34).

While the number of unemployed Idahoans increased by 18% statewide from May 2009 to April 2010, unemployment in the one-third of counties that depend on hunters as a significant seasonal source of income increased by a whopping 31-72% during that year!

These are people who lost the ability to earn the money to survive the winter and, thanks to the Commission rubber-stamping F&G biologists' destructive agenda, many also lost the ability to fill their freezers with what used to be a renewable food source. But these are only a few of the obvious costs to the public of IDFG agendas.

The ~\$24 million loss to Idaho admitted by IDFG included only the money former *elk* hunters spent for food, lodging, fuel, outfitter services, licenses etc. (trip related). It did not include the much larger amount spent for vehicles, maintenance, insurance, hunting equipment and gear, ATVs and/or livestock and tack, clothing, etc. spent in their home state by thousands of former hunters in Idaho, both residents and nonresidents, who have quit hunting Idaho in disgust.

But the economic multiplier impact from both large and small game hunters who no longer hunt in Idaho, is not the only loss the governor and many urban legislators have chosen to ignore. The farce of so-called “ecosystem management” has all but destroyed the viability of rural industries that were based on the development and wise use of historical renewable natural resources, including timber, forage, water and wildlife.

The hardworking rural people who quietly provide the products that are necessary for everyone to survive are a vital part of our economy. The folly of efforts to convince them that they must all rethink their traditional productivity and rely upon providing outdoor recreation for those who live in the population centers was exposed during the stark reality of the current recession.

From the spring of 2009 to the same period in 2010, the unemployment rate in the rural county we live in increased by an unprecedented 72 percent! Twenty years of federal managers forcing our sawmill to close and removing the livestock and big game animals that cropped the undergrowth have given a new meaning to the Forest Service “Let it burn!” policy in our county.

The increase in the number of kayakers who add expense rather than income, and the added commercial float trips in the summer did not compensate for either the loss of productivity or the loss of traditional revenue from big game hunters. In our county and other counties that formerly supplied most of the elk and mule deer harvest in Idaho, wolves now kill far more big game than hunters.

Biologists, Commissioners Refuse to Control Wolves

Notwithstanding Director Groen’s promises, no biologist, Commissioner or other appointed or elected official that was representing IDFG has made any effort to reduce wolf numbers enough to actually halt their increase. Instead, when the FWS hearing on the amended 10J Rule occurred, the Governor’s Office of Species Conservation, House Resources Committee Chair Bert Stevenson and then IDFG Wolf Manager Steve Nadeau all indicated Idaho had no intention of using 10J to control wolves that were decimating elk herds.

Their only concern was to get wolves de-listed so F&G could “manage” sport hunting – not control wolves. Then when Molloy re-listed wolves on August 5, 2010, instead of F&G utilizing its 10J Plan to kill 105 wolves it prepared two years ago and put on hold, it joined Montana FWP trying to get FWS approval for a “research hunt.”

Plan Changed From Killing 105 Wolves to Only 40-50

And when IDFG was finally forced to admit that Molloy’s decision allowed it to revert to the 10J Rule that is already in place, it changed the unused 2009 Lolo Zone kill quota from 105 wolves (80% of the minimum estimated number at the end of 2008) to only 40 to 50 wolves the first year, with fewer to be taken in subsequent years. It also committed to leave a *minimum* of 20-30 wolves in 3 to 5 packs in the Lolo Zone.

Instead of directing Wildlife Services to kill at least 80% of all wolves found in the Lolo Zone, the new IDFG Proposal would kill far too few wolves to halt the elk decline. It would have no impact on wolves elsewhere and may ultimately increase the Lolo Zone wolf population by temporarily creating fewer wolves where prey is scarce.

Regardless of what some spin doctors are saying, we know there are presently at least 1,250-1,500 wolves in Idaho and the number may be substantially higher. Killing only 3% of those wolves will not reduce the number of elk and mule deer that are being killed by wolves statewide.

Time to Ignore F&G Propaganda and Admit the Truth

Replacing scientific wildlife management with the pretense of “managing” nongame wildlife by implementing the “Wildlands Project” is a scam designed to cripple our productivity and destroy our way of life. That scheme, formally adopted by the UN in 1992, and the lies used by our state fish and game agency to sell it to Idaho elected officials are documented in *Outdoorsman* Bulletin No. 29.

Many elected officials appear to ignore the reality that mismanagement of the natural resources in each western state cripples not only its productivity but also the State’s net worth. Idaho’s billion dollar wildlife resource and its multi-million dollar annual game harvests have fallen victim to a bizarre agenda that ignores science.

The harvest of virtually every edible game species in Idaho except non-native turkeys has declined to a fraction of historical numbers. Except for conducting game counts that are largely ignored until hunters complain to their elected officials, Idaho wildlife managers do virtually nothing to actually help restore healthy populations of wild game for hunters to harvest.

In 2009 big game hunters paid IDFG nearly \$500 in assorted fees, including their share of Pittman-Robertson federal excise taxes, for each big game animal reported harvested! The 375,853* resident sport hunting and fishing license buyers in 2009, excluding youngsters, are Idaho’s largest special interest voting block (*IDFG Wiedmeier).

Armed with the facts in this *Outdoorsman*, they have the power to convince their elected officials to take a careful look at the history of disobedience of legislative mandates and misuse of license fees by the Commission. Instead of waiting another two years for the next chapter in the wolf debacle to play out in court, legislative oversight should result in the Commissioners being publicly censured for their repeated failure to obey Idaho Law.

IDFG - No Evidence Links Lolo Elk Loss to Habitat!

By George Dovel

Shortly after World War II ended, the Washington, D.C. based Wildlife Management Institute recommended the Idaho F&G Commission invite thousands of out-of-state hunters to harvest “trophy” Idaho big game animals in remote backcountry areas allegedly to prevent damage to habitat. The result of similar recommendations to other western states is evident in the sudden big game harvest increases during the 1950s followed by eventual severe harvest declines during the mid-1960s and early 70s.

Elk Study Proves Habitat Did Not Cause Decline

By 1964, elk harvests in the Clearwater had declined dramatically so the “Clearwater Elk Ecology Study” was launched – with the first five years devoted to evaluating habitat quantity, quality and elk use. The next four years found high conception and calf birth rates but very poor survival during the first two weeks after birth.

The result of the first nine years of careful study was that 13 years of extended either-sex hunting seasons and too few surviving calves – not habitat – were responsible for the mid-1960s elk decline.

The next 10-years of study proved that reduced cow elk numbers could no longer provide enough newborn calves to feed the black bears during the brief calving period, plus feed other predators later and still provide replacements for the elk that die each year. Trapping and relocating 75 bears in 1976 tripled the number of surviving elk calves, and doubling the bear bag limit in year-around seasons restored the elk in a few years.

The 19-year study and a dozen similarly extensive peer-reviewed studies in Canada, Alaska and the Great Lakes all arrived at the same conclusion. Where multiple predators, including wolves, existed with alternate prey species, it was necessary to reduce the number of predators dramatically once prey populations were reduced – regardless of whether the prey reduction was natural or man-caused (as in excessive hunter harvests).

By 1985 even wolf expert David Mech admitted he was responsible for resurrecting the “balance of nature” myth as a graduate student and wrote “Far from being ‘balanced,’ ratios of wolves and prey animals can fluctuate wildly – and sometimes catastrophically.” He illustrated the necessity to dramatically reduce wolf numbers whenever their prey declined and F&G agencies in the Northern Rockies promised wolf numbers would be carefully monitored and controlled if they were introduced.

F&G Fails to Monitor Elk Populations

The Idaho Legislature did not allow IDFG to manage wolves for eight years after it violated Idaho law by secretly approving the FWS plan and issuing FWS a permit allowing them to transplant wolves into Idaho. But even after the Legislature rewrote and then approved the

17th IDFG draft of its wolf plan in 2002, F&G failed to follow even the provisions it had written into that plan,

For example Page 23 of the 2002 State Wolf Plan requires IDFG to conduct a census every year of selected prey populations, including at least population size and sex and age ratio, with additional information required when concerns are raised about wolf predation (emphasis added). Instead, biologists conducted these mandatory counts only once every 3-5 years and did nothing to assess the impact of wolf predation for several years.

F&G Denied Winter Losses, Increased Cow Permits

Despite peer reviewers’ concurrence with counting total deer and elk and then comparing the numbers with pre-wolf counts to determine the impact of wolves, biologists also ignored that input. They also ignored the 19 years of research in the Clearwater and all of the research elsewhere implicating predators, and denied any adverse impact from the 1992-93 winter and the 1996-97 winter.

For a year after the severe 1996-97 winter they continued to claim cow elk losses were less than normal in *Lewiston Tribune* articles and increased the number of antlerless permits in the 1997 elk season! They continued to insist that declining calf survival since 1992 resulted from aging brush fields that were being replaced by forest.

Zager Spent 20 years Trying to Prove the Habitat Myth

That is the same excuse other biologists used 40 years earlier with the same results. The famous Clearwater elk herds have continued to decline for the second time, but instead of seeking the truth as happened in 1964, research biologist Pete Zager and his helpers have wasted nearly two decades and countless dollars unsuccessfully trying to find some evidence to support their habitat excuse as they allowed the elk herd to be decimated.

The UN – Nature Conservancy – IDFG philosophy of reintroducing wolves into ecosystems to create a “natural balance” prohibited biologists from killing wolves and from admitting the truth – that uncontrolled wolves ultimately destroy healthy elk herds and leave them in a predator pit from which they cannot recover without help.

IDFG 2005 Wolf Control Proposal Violated 10J

When former Idaho Gov. Kempthorne signed the Agreement with the Secretary of Interior on January 5, 2006 to manage wolves, Idaho biologists’ proposal to kill 43-50 wolves in the Lolo Zone was written so it could not be approved by FWS (see “**10J Wolf Control Plan Sabotaged**” on Page 10 of *Outdoorsman Bulletin No.38* at: <http://www.idahoforwildlife.com/Outdoorsman.html>). The Proposal falsely claimed (without offering any proof) that “Forest Maturation” was the sole primary cause of elk declines, with bear and lion predation causing calf declines and wolf predation *likely* contributing to low cow survival.

Rather than rewrite their Proposal to include facts instead of the habitat myth, Idaho biologists insisted that habitat is always the primary cause of wild ungulate declines. FWS Wolf Leader Ed Bangs suggested IDFG hold the proposal and took two years to re-write and get final approval of another 10J version which allowed control if wolves were just a contributor to elk declines.

But that same 10J version by Bangs included the lie that predation is never the primary cause of prey declines despite the results of uncontested long-term scientific studies that prove just the opposite is true.

Meanwhile in 2007, Idaho biologists wrote their own version of an Idaho wolf plan, upping the minimum requirement for each state to leave at least 20 breeding pairs intact before any control of wolves impacting big game can be approved. Bangs included that in the final 10J Oproposal published on Jan. 28, 2008 even before it was finally approved by the Idaho F&G Commission in March,

Habitat Had Little or No Impact on Elk Decline

When Judge Molloy canceled Idaho's proposed 2008 wolf hunt on July 18, 2008, Clearwater Region Biologist George Pauley gathered factual information from numerous long term peer-reviewed studies proving that habitat was not a cause of prey declines. These included research in the Clearwater by Pauley back in 1995, which was included in a 2008 10J proposal to lethally remove an average of 105 wolves for five years.

The Outdoorsman has published much of this data for several years and it was a pleasant surprise to see a written admission by IDFG officials that declining habitat was not a significant cause of elk declines in either the Lolo Zone or elsewhere in Idaho. As this issue is printed the 2010 Proposal is still available on the F&G website at: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/apps/surveys/10tenj/10j.pdf> . But for readers without internet access, I am publishing the following comments from that 26-page proposal.

The comments include F&G conclusions from scientific studies in the Lolo Zone, throughout Idaho and in other states and provinces, that habitat has had little or no impact on the decline of big game populations (where alternate prey species and multiple predators exist). They are published here with the reminder that "density dependence" refers to elk numbers being controlled by the quantity or quality of available habitat.

Comments in Idaho Rule 10(j) Proposal, Lolo Zone

At its peak in 1989, the Lolo Zone elk population was estimated to number 16,054 elk. Elk calf recruitment rates at that time ranged from 25 to 31 calves per 100 cows, while (annual) cow elk survival was estimated at 88.6%. Those vital rates were sufficient to support moderate population growth, despite sustained annual cow elk harvest. Informal assessment of forage utilization suggested that the elk population had not exceeded or even reached habitat potential at that time.

Beginning in 1992, recruitment rates dropped to levels at or below 20 calves (per) 100 cows, and low recruitment has been chronic since then. Biologists speculated that the recruitment decline might be a density dependent response caused by the elk population growing near habitat potential in the late 1980s. Consequently, the population objective range was established below the peak of 16,054 elk to address that possibility. The minimum objective population with 30 calves per 100 cows would be 9,230 which is 57% of the peak population estimated in 1989.

Despite the substantial abundance decline in the Lolo Zone, calf recruitment failed to respond in a density dependent fashion, but rather responded in an inverse density dependent manner to declining abundance in the Lolo Zone, a pattern common to other Idaho elk populations. (Pauley 2007). Pauley (2007) examined recruitment trends in Idaho elk populations following harvest-caused population declines and population declines caused by low recruitment.

Following harvest-caused population declines, recruitment rates declined from a mean of 37 calves:100 cows to 29:100. Furthermore, recruitment rates remained low and failed to return to pre-decline levels for 6 years.

Following recruitment-caused abundance declines, recruitment rates declined further from a mean of 26 calves:100 cows to 18:100.

While the Lolo Zone elk population declined sharply from the peak in the 1989 to the 1997-1998 estimate of 7,746 elk, the estimated calf recruitment rate also declined sharply from 28.6 to 6.6 calves:100 cows. Thus, estimated density declined by 53% while estimated recruitment declined by 77%. Such strong *inverse* density dependence casts serious doubt on the prospect that the Lolo Zone elk population is limited by density dependent mechanisms. Pauley (2007) revealed a similar pattern of inverse density dependence in other Idaho elk populations.

White and Garrott (2005) failed to detect a density effect on recruitment in the Northern Yellowstone elk herd. They suggested that the Northern Yellowstone herd did not reach carrying capacity and questioned the conclusions of others in that regard.

Data on elk body condition in the Lolo Zone suggests that nutrition is not limiting elk population performance. Some evidence of significant malnutrition would be expected if elk populations were limited by food quantity.

IDFG measured body condition score via palpation and ultrasonography on adult cow elk in GMU 10 during December 2005, January 2009, and January 2010. We found mean body fat composition levels of 12.8% in 2005, 11.7% in 2009, and 12.6% in 2010. Research with captive elk suggests that the observed body fat composition levels would not likely be associated with deaths or reduced productivity from malnutrition (Cook et al. 2004).

Additionally, there was little evidence of malnutrition among wolf-killed elk. Of the 37 adult cow elk killed by wolves, malnutrition was identified as a potential predisposing factor in only four deaths. Of the 21 calf elk

continued on page 8

Elk Loss Not Caused by Habitat – *cont. from Page 7*
killed by wolves malnutrition was identified as a potential predisposing factor in only one death.

Pregnancy was determined for 112 adult (> 2 years age) cow elk captured during 2002-10. The mean pregnancy rate across all years and areas was 0.84.

Research in Yellowstone National Park revealed that wolves tend to prey on older cows (Smith et al. 2004) that have lower survival rates (Raithel et al. 2005), lower fecundity (Raithel et al. 2005), and consequently, lower reproductive value (Wright et al. 2006) than prime-aged cow elk, suggesting an element of compensation.

Of the 28 cow elk killed by wolves in the Lolo zone during 2005-2007, year-specific ages were available for 13 cows. The mean age at death of those cow elk was 8.1 years. Eight were prime-aged (<9 years) and 5 were older cow elk (> 10 years). It is apparent that wolves were not exclusively preying on older elk.

After wolf reintroduction, annual cow elk survival declined to much lower levels without the occurrence of human-caused mortality among radio-collared elk. Across GMU's 10 and 12, the mean survival during 2002-2009 was 80%, and survival appears to decline with increasing wolf-caused mortality. Reduced survival with the addition of wolf-caused mortality would demonstrate an additive effect.

Given the demographic circumstances, the reproductive portion of the population (cow elk) will continue to decline, and, consequently, will not reach the Lolo Zone cow elk abundance objectives. Wolf-caused mortality is the major factor limiting growth of cow elk abundance, and achievement of State objectives.

Over-Harvesting Healthy Herds Destroyed Productivity

In other words, Elk Researcher Pauley and others who prepared the current 10-J Wolf Reduction Proposal have admitted in writing that over-harvesting healthy elk herds that were restored in the 1970s and 80s *caused* declining recruitment – rather than preventing it. Killing off even more cows to “increase production” – despite no evidence the elk were anywhere near carrying capacity – merely hastened the inevitable destruction by wolves.

Killing more breeding females in the misguided belief that it will somehow magically increase fecundity and juvenile survival might be compared to accidentally hitting your thumb while hammering – and then deliberately hitting your other thumb with the hammer to treat the original wound.

Since the late 1950s, I have watched each new generation of Idaho biologists destroy healthy deer and elk herds by killing too many – and then kill even more in a futile effort to correct what they caused. Doing this, instead of vigorously protecting the remaining breeding stock and reducing the number of predators to a level that will quickly restore optimum production of their prey, reveals blind ignorance of both recent history and science.

Over-Harvesting Caused Calf Declines in Other Elk

The “harvest-caused population declines” found in other Idaho elk herds by Pauley are the result of wildlife

managers selling extra hunting opportunity instead of managing wildlife. According to recent counts, in nearly all of the elk zones that formerly produced most of Idaho's elk harvests, bull and/or cow numbers are either barely meeting the minimum or are below it.

Pauley's 2007 report that over-harvesting caused calf-to-cow ratios in other Idaho elk herds to decline from 37:100 to 29:100, and then to 18:100 from predation, etc., shows what is really happening since IDFG began pretending to manage habitat and ecosystems. Yet Pauley sent similar widely circulated information to Clearwater Wildlife Manager Jay Crenshaw 14 years ago, in a memo dated April 30, 1996, but it was essentially ignored.

The 2010 Proposal also states, “Mid-winter surveys of at least 20 to 25 calves:100 cows is typically necessary to maintain population stability in the absence of hunting,” yet neither the Commission nor IDFG biologists, including Director Groen, have taken steps to halt these calf declines which ultimately eliminate human harvest.

F&G Director Continued to Repeat the Habitat Lie

In Groen's January 2009 meeting with JFAC (the Idaho legislature's Joint Finance and Appropriations Committee) he repeated Pauley's finding that wolves were causing a 15% annual decline in elk populations. Yet in a meeting in his office with me and Deputy Director Unsworth two weeks later, Groen discussed the same decline but angrily shouted, “It's the habitat!”

Instead of listening to Groen, McDermott, and other biologists and commissioners who use “declining habitat” and “federal wolves” as excuses for their failure to perpetuate our wildlife resource, a reality check is in order. Even if wolves were magically removed from Idaho, the practice of selling excessive harvest opportunity while ignoring the signs of excessive harvests would continue to destroy healthy game populations and the abundant healthy forage that proper use formerly created.

In the real world virtually everything that is not run by government bureaucrats or manipulated by powerful special interests is performance-based. Instead of paying our state game managers more money for producing 40% less game to harvest, why not cut their budget by 40% until sustained increased harvests justify added revenue?

Biologists Continue to Repeat the Habitat Lie

At the same time the Aug. 2010 Lolo Wolf Control Proposal on the IDFG website told the world there was no evidence habitat reduced the number of wolves in the Lolo Zone, page 3 of their August 2010 *Idaho Fish and Game News* on the same website said “In the Lolo Zone deteriorating habitat and other factors contributed to a long population decline, dropping from about 16,000 in 1988 to fewer than 8,000 elk in 1998.” (emphasis added).

Until citizens convince their elected officials to force these bureaucrats to stop using habitat as an excuse and obey the laws we already have, new legislation won't solve the real problem. Do it now – before it's too late.

Misuse of Sportsmen Funds by Idaho Fish & Game

By George Dovel

Long-time *Outdoorsman* readers may remember that transplanting Canadian wolves into Idaho and Yellowstone Park was never funded by Congress. They may also remember how Jim Beers, the former FWS Biologist who oversaw distribution of P-R (Pittman-Robertson) excise taxes to state F&G agencies, blew the whistle when FWS stole \$45-\$60 million of those taxes from the states over a two year period.

P-R Funds May Not Be Used To Introduce Wolves

Federal law requires those dedicated taxes, paid entirely by hunters and other shooters, only be spent for very specific wildlife restoration projects (which do not include administration, licensing, law enforcement and recovery of endangered or other non-game species). Yet a significant amount of those stolen funds were used to capture and transplant Canadian wolves into central Idaho and Yellowstone National Park in 1995 and 1996, because Congress failed to fund transplanting wolves.

According to Beers, the first wolves were brought into the U.S. illegally without filing the required Wildlife Importation Form 3-177. Yellowstone National Park was never part of any state-owned property, but in central Idaho even the National Forests include countless parcels of state and privately owned land accessed by public roads, and containing assorted livestock and many permanent human residents.

When IDFG officially approved the unreasonably severe draft FWS plan to introduce nonessential wolves into Idaho, FWS was relieved of meeting Congressional requirements to satisfy the concerns of Idaho's rural residents (i.e. customs, culture, private property, personal safety, livelihood, etc.). These concerns were never addressed and no final FWS plan was written until after IDFG officially approved the draft plan and issued the permit authorizing FWS to transplant 15 Canadian wolves per year into central Idaho for up to five years.

Regardless of recent claims to the contrary by Idaho F&G Commissioner McDermott and others, Ed Bangs' wolf transplant was stymied until either some State official approved his draft plan – or it was modified to address concerns from livestock owners and rural county officials. Once he had the approval and the permit in hand, Bangs did not even respond to those concerns expressed by four dissenting Idaho Wolf Oversight Committee members.

No State Even Reported the Loss of ~\$1 Million

Despite the theft averaging more than \$1 million for each state, none of the state agencies complained about losing the money. Harvesting wildlife had already been de-emphasized for five years and FWS bribed the states by approving their use of the dedicated P-R money for practices that were never allowed by the federal law.

For example IDFG Administrative Chief Steve Barton was immediately allowed to use P-R funds to help pay for a new automated licensing system with the flimsy claim that it would help restore wildlife by counting the number of hunters of big game. Beers pointed out that everyone in the system, except citizens who owned the game, knew that harvest was being deemphasized and state agencies were depending on FWS to secure Congressional funding for the various non-consumptive wildlife uses.

Five years later, Barton admitted misusing several hundred thousand dollars in Dedicated License Funds, which he said he “borrowed” but was never required to pay back. But at that time he apparently did not dare to use the dedicated federal tax funds unless the use was specially authorized by FWS.

F&G Hid \$\$ Spent on Nongame to Justify Fee Increase

In order to justify the massive hunting and fishing license fee increases they were seeking in the 2009 Legislative session, various employees and Commissioners claimed that a total of \$50,000 or less of sportsman dollars was used to fund IDFG non-game (non-consumptive use) activities. My January 2009 info request to IDFG Director Groen for itemized expenditures involving nongame was denied except for an 11-page “FY 2008 Actual Expenditures Report” printout dated 1/12/2009.

In the Report section, “Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Expenditures,” the amount paid in the Wildlife Bureau alone totaled \$1,406,945 – of which \$167,508 (12%) was paid using federal P-R and D-J excise taxes paid by sportsmen (see **Photocopy #1A**). In a 1-02-09 *Idaho Press Tribune* response to my claim that too much sportsman money was already being spent for non-hunting and non-fishing activities, F&G Communications Chief Mike Keckler admitted the \$167,508 came from the Federal Aid (to Wildlife) program but neglected to mention its use for nongame violated federal law.

A 1-23-09 *ISJ* article by Debbie Bryce reported the \$167,508 was “a 12% subsidy of nongame wages in the Wildlife Bureau,” but claimed her investigation revealed the nongame employees “help out at game check points and other sport programs in exchange for that subsidy.”

Records “Disappeared” While I Was On the Phone

On Friday, 1-30-09 when I emailed Director Groen asking for a breakdown of who paid the \$10,000 benefit package, administrative expenses, transportation costs, etc. for each of those nongame employees, it resulted in several phone calls and emails from both him and Deputy Director Unsworth. I waited 30 minutes while Unsworth crossed the hall to get the records from DAG Burkhalter, but when he returned he claimed the records had been changed.

continued on pages 10 & 11

Comparison of the totals originally reported with the altered totals after I asked about unlawful use of P-R/D-J Funds

Photocopy #1A

Nongame and Endangered Wildlife FY 2008 Wildlife Bureau Expenditures dated Jan, 12, 2009, mailed Jan.14th

IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

FY 2008 ACTUAL EXPENDITURES REPORT (Includes Encumbrances)

LINE TITLE	LICENSE FUND	LICENSE SET-ASIDE	FEDERAL PR/DJ	FEDERAL GRANTS	PRIVATE & LOCAL	NON-LICENSE SET-ASIDE	DEPREDEATION FUND	TRUST FUNDS	TOTAL
NONGAME AND ENDANGERED WILDLIFE									
Clearwater Interpretive Center						5,464			5,464
Interagency Nongame Projects			40,729	117,427					158,156
Nongame Conservation			47,677	111,246		147,049		17,932	323,904
Nongame Survey Research			3,976	9,278		79,214			92,468
Nongame-Endangered Species						166,136			166,136
Rare Animal Surveys			14,226	184,069					198,295
Regional Nongame			3,578	8,349	15,060	222,658		51	249,695
Statewide Grant Coordination			14,935	34,848		1,227			51,011
Statewide Grant Program			8	19					28
T & E Species Recovery			42,379	119,410					161,789
NONGAME AND ENDANGERED WILDLIFE Total			167,508	584,646	15,060	621,748		17,983	1,406,945

Temporary Internet Files\Content.Outlook\ZU2T6GE0\FY2008 Expenditures by Function with Encumbrance (Fund Detail).xls Pivot Report

Prepared By: S. Martin

Printed: 1/12/2009 10:07 AM

#1A – Original entries totaling \$167,508 in the “Federal P-R/D-J” column **above** and \$684,646 in “Federal Grants” column.

#1B – No entries in the “Federal P-R/D-J” column **below** and increases in every entry in the “Federal Grants” column with its total increased by the \$167,508 removed from the P-R/D-J column. Entries in all other columns remain unchanged.

Photocopy #1B

Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Expenditures Claimed for the Wildlife Bureau altered by February 3, 2009

LINE TITLE	LICENSE FUND	LICENSE SET-ASIDE	FEDERAL PR/DJ	FEDERAL GRANTS	PRIVATE & LOCAL	NON-LICENSE SET-ASIDE	DEPREDEATION FUND	TRUST FUNDS	TOTAL
NONGAME AND ENDANGERED WILDLIFE									
Clearwater Interpretive Center						5,464			5,464
Interagency Nongame Projects				158,156					158,156
Nongame Conservation				158,923		147,049		17,932	323,904
Nongame Survey Research				13,254		79,214			92,468
Nongame-Endangered Species						166,136			166,136
Rare Animal Surveys				198,295					198,295
Regional Nongame				11,927	15,060	222,658		51	249,695
Statewide Grant Coordination				49,783		1,227			51,011
Statewide Grant Program				28					28
T & E Species Recovery				161,789					161,789
NONGAME AND ENDANGERED WILDLIFE Total				762,154	15,060	621,748		17,983	1,406,945

Photocopy #2A

Total Expenditures by Source of Funds in FY 2008 dated Jan. 12, 2009 and mailed Jan, 14th

IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

FY 2008 ACTUAL EXPENDITURES REPORT (Includes Encumbrances)

TITLE	LICENSE FUND	LICENSE SET-ASIDE	FEDERAL PR/DJ	FEDERAL GRANTS	PRIVATE & LOCAL	NON-LICENSE SET-ASIDE	DEPREDEATION FUND	TRUST FUNDS	TOTAL
	33,470,651	1,559,480	10,885,752	23,313,457	4,226,085	1,351,130	407,624	559,188	75,773,368

Temporary Internet Files\Content.Outlook\ZU2T6GE0\FY2008 Expenditures by Function with Encumbrance (Fund Detail) (2).xls Pivot Report

Prepared By: S. Martin

Printed: 2/3/2009 7:50 AM

#2A – Before alteration (**above**) “Federal P-R/D-J” total was \$10,885,752 and “Federal Grants” total was \$23,313,457.

#2B – After alteration (**below**) “Federal P-R/D-J” total was decreased by \$427,534 to \$10,456,218 and the “Federal Grants” total was increased by the \$427,534 to 23,740,991. Entries in all other columns remained unchanged.

Photocopy #2B

Total Expenditures by Source of Funds in FY 2008 altered by February 3, 2009

	33,470,651	1,559,480	10,458,218	23,740,991	4,226,085	1,351,130	407,624	559,188	75,773,368
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Expenditures by Function with Encumbrance (Fund Detail) (2).xls Pivot Report

Prepared By: S. Martin

Printed: 2/3/2009 7:50 AM

Before I discuss the Department's efforts to stop me from going public with this information, it is important to understand several things:

1. The January 2009 *Outdoorsman* No. 32 had already published the unlawful use of \$231,338 in P-R/D-J funds by just the Wildlife and the Natural Resource Policy Bureaus. F&G's hasty deletion of the \$427,534 in excise tax dollars illegally used in various Bureaus indicates it knew it was as much a theft as FWS stealing the \$45-\$60 million from sportsmen in all 50 states and spending it for transplanting wolves, paying themselves bonuses, etc.

2. Pretending the nearly half million sportsman tax dollars suddenly became newly discovered Federal Grants that could not be traced provided a typical alibi – if not justification – for the dishonest practice. Similar misuse of several hundred thousand dollars of dedicated license funds several years ago was excused by the Legislative Budget Analyst by blaming it on the legislature for having too many dedicated special use F&G funds – although most were actually requested by IDFG.

3. Although I did not request and receive the FY 2008 Actual Expenditures Report until early-January of 2009, the expenditures covered the Idaho fiscal year that ended more than six months earlier. The figures in the original report (from which 1A and 2A were photocopied) had been provided to FWS and various officials months earlier.

4. When I discussed this with Administrative Chief Jim Lau and three other IDFG officials on Feb. 3, 2009, Lau told me they had spent all but about half a million of the P-R/D-J funding they received from FWS. They normally leave a much smaller amount unspent but info I received from FWS showed IDFG received \$2,280,825 more in P-R/D-J funds in federal FY 2008 (which ended on Sept. 30, 2008) than Lau showed was spent.

During my final phone conversation with Deputy Director Unsworth on Friday, Jan. 30th, I asked him to read a couple of figures from the new Report he had obtained from DAG Burkhalter, which he claimed had been altered that same day. We had already scheduled a meeting for the following Monday morning and when Unsworth was unable to read figures I requested, I said I'd pick them up on Monday yet he insisted I must wait until Tuesday.

Groen's Attempt to Get Me to Support Fee Increase

On Tuesday, Feb. 3, 2009 I met with Director Groen in his office along with Unsworth. Groen recited several things he was going to do to benefit wildlife and reduce the number of nongame employees, and told Unsworth to give me anything I asked for.

I had received several emails from Commissioner McDermott threatening to expose my "intention to destroy the Department" which I did not mention, but Groen said, "I'll call Tony off and provide you with information to use in your newsletter." He asked Unsworth to confirm that 40 wolves had been killed by other wolves and said he would regularly provide that type of information to me.

Finally he asked me if I still believed they were not telling the truth about the fee increase proposal and I politely said they were not telling the truth about how much the various fee increases would add to the current cost to hunt. I added they were also not telling the truth about the several million sportsmen dollars they were spending to provide non-hunting/fishing recreation.

In response, Groen jumped up and angrily shouted, "It's the habitat!" and left the room.

Unsworth then took me to a conference room where he and three Bureau Chiefs listened to my comments but declined to give me copies of any of the information I requested. For example Lau brought in a thick printout of a breakdown of expenditures but after I spent less than a minute viewing the first page, he removed it and said I couldn't have it until it was thoroughly checked for errors.

DAG Burkhalter had told me in his Jan. 14, 2010 letter that the information I had requested concerning the amount and source of grants and matching funds was contained in a grant application file at Boise Headquarters, which would be provided to me during business hours.

Yet the grant applications I was given by Lau contained no amounts of grants or amounts and sources of matching funds. When I showed this to Lau he claimed that no record existed which included that information.

Except for the hastily altered FY 2008 Actual Expenditures Report dated that same day, and several fee increase handouts that did not provide accurate information, I left the meetings after several hours with no more answers to my questions than I had before I arrived. When I got home there was an email from Unsworth thanking me for my visit and acknowledging that I did not receive answers to my questions.

More Threats Followed Failure to Gain My Support

On Feb. 10, 2010 F&G Commissioner McDermott sent me another lengthy hostile email including the comment, "Heck George you might even come up with the conclusion that IDFG's books have been cooked by Mr. Lau and the Director to prevent your readers from knowing the real truth." He repeated a threat to send a letter to legislators containing exhibits to destroy my credibility.

I contacted a legislator, explaining the alteration of the FY 2008 Actual Expenditures Report and describing the expenditure of several million dollars of sportsman fees that are used to provide non-hunting/fishing recreation. I was told that the misuse of sportsman fees was being investigated and that the fee increase proposal would probably not pass, at least for residents.

Transferring the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem project from nongame to mule deer management and charging nongame salaries and expenses to everything from big game range rehabilitation to Administration in the Director's office is dishonest. The switch to zero-based budgeting has resulted in less – not more – transparency and warrants independent expert investigation.

Predator-Mediated Competition: What happens when there is a second, alternative prey in a system?

By Dr. Charles E. Kay

(NOTE: One of America's truly knowledgeable wildlife experts, Dr. Kay is well known for his highly accurate predictions, foretelling back in 1993 exactly what would happen after wolf introduction by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The following article was published in the July/Aug 2010 issue of "Muley Crazy" and is reprinted here with permission from Dr. Kay. – ED)

In systems with a single predator and single prey, the predator cannot generally take the prey to extinction due to declining return rates — that is, the predators usually starve to death before they can find the last few prey. So while mountain lions, for example, can have a negative impact on mule deer, the cats can only take the deer population so low before the lions begin to run out of food and increasingly turn to killing each other. But what happens when there is a second, alternative prey in a system? Counter intuitively, the additional prey species does not buffer, or reduce, the predation pressure on the first prey animal. Instead, fueled by alternative prey, the predator takes the more vulnerable species to even lower levels. This is called predator-mediated or apparent competition and where this occurs, habitat and habitat improvements are largely irrelevant, contrary to what most biologists would have you believe.

A classic example of predator-mediated competition is now playing itself out in Yellowstone National Park. For over 60 years, 600 to 700 food-limited elk wintered in the thermal areas along the Firehole, Gibbon, and Madison Rivers in the west-central portion of the park. With the arrival of introduced wolves, however, the elk population began a precipitous decline with researchers predicting extinction — see [The Ecology of Large Mammals in Central Yellowstone](#). The wolves have been able to do this because they have bison as an alternative prey. In fact, if the elk did not have a partial refugia by fleeing into the depths of the Madison River when confronted by wolves, the elk would already be extinct. The habitat is still there, after all this is a national park, but the elk are all but gone.

Similarly, moose-fueled wolves are in the process of eliminating mountain and woodland caribou across the length and breadth of Canada. While in Alaska, wolves fueled by salmon, yes salmon, have taken black-tailed deer, moose, and caribou to very low levels — much lower than if the wolves did not have salmon as an alternative prey. In Nevada, mountain lions that prey on wild horses have a much greater impact on mule deer than cougar populations without feral equines as alternative prey. It has also been

reported that mountain lions have taken bighorn sheep to near extinction on several western ranges where the cats subsist on alternative prey.

In many parts of the West, white-tailed deer and mule deer are sympatric; that is the two species occupy the same areas. Researchers in Alberta have identified predator-mediated competition as a key reason mule deer are declining. Due to behavioral differences, mule deer are more vulnerable to coyote predation than are whitetails. But by preying on both mule deer and whitetails, the coyotes are able to exert much greater predation pressure on mule deer, then if mule deer were the canids' only prey. Again the addition of a second prey species, whitetail deer, allowed the predator, coyotes in this case, to have a much greater impact on the more vulnerable prey, mule deer.

While in British Columbia, predator-mediated competition between whitetails, mule deer, and mountain lions has been documented. Again, mule deer are the more vulnerable prey, but by subsisting mainly on whitetails, the cats are able to take mule deer populations to very low levels — much lower than if whitetails were not present. Whitetail-fueled cougars have also been identified as the factor driving British Columbia's southern, mountain caribou to extinction. Similarly, in Canada's Banff National Park, elk-fueled wolves have been instrumental in the elimination of both mountain caribou and moose.

Which brings us to the question of predator-mediated competition between ever-increasing numbers of elk in the West and declining mule deer populations. By subsisting on elk, could mountain lions be taking mule deer numbers even lower? Given the fact that mule deer are easier for cougars to kill than elk, predator-mediated competition is certainly possible. Although no one has specifically studied this problem, work that I have been doing for San Juan County in southeastern Utah does shed some light on this issue.

Elk Ridge lies to the west of the Abajo Mountains in an exceedingly remote part of one of the largest, and least populated, counties in the entire United States. Except for a few scattered parcels of private ground, the entire area is administered by the federal government, either the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) or the Forest Service. The ranch on the north is owned by The Nature Conservancy, while the allotments on the south are owned by the Southern Ute Tribe and have not been grazed by livestock in many years. There have been no new roads, no subdivisions, no oil or gas development, and just about no new anything on Elk Ridge over the last 50 years. In short, there is nothing on Elk Ridge that game departments

habitually blame for the decline of mule deer. And finally, and most importantly, Elk Ridge is really not elk ridge, but E.L.K. Ridge named after an early Texas outfit that ran cattle in the area during the late 1800's. Elk did not arrive until they were put there by the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) – illegally according to locals.

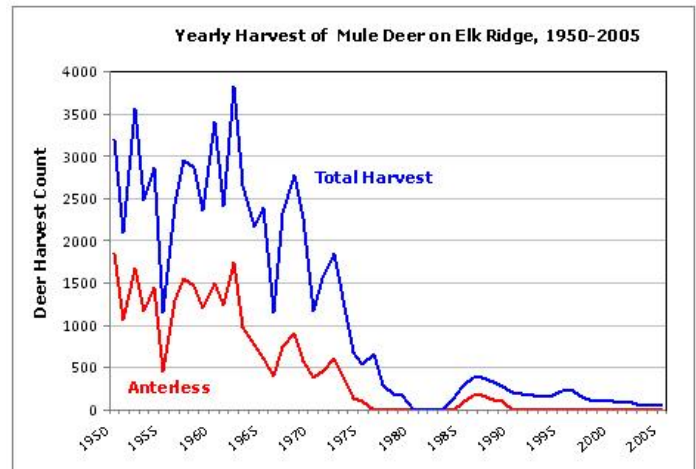
As part of my work for San Juan County, I summarized all the available mule deer harvest data for Elk Ridge — please see the accompanying graph. Between 1950 and 1970, hunters killed an average of just over 2,500 deer a year — 1,500 bucks and 1,000 does. But hunter harvest declined precipitously during the 1970's after mountain lions were protected and effective predator control eliminated with the ban on 1080. This was also about the time that elk first appeared in the area.

In response to declining mule deer numbers, DWR closed the season on Elk Ridge from 1980 to 1983. Elk Ridge reopened in 1984 as a limited-entry, bucks-only unit, yet the deer herd has never recovered, instead it has tracked ever downward. This past season only 40 permits were issued for Elk Ridge, an area where 2,500 deer a year had been harvested for over 20 years. As mule deer numbers fell, the elk population doubled and then doubled again. When I first moved to Utah back in 1986, I drew a limited-entry deer permit on Elk Ridge and during that hunt I never saw an elk. I drew a limited-entry permit for the same area last fall, and this time I saw more elk than deer. In 1986, I shot a nice 4-point buck, while in 2009 I never saw a deer worth shooting.

In addition, I have measured mule deer use on winter ranges throughout San Juan County and the deer simply are not there. On permanent plots in the Elk Ridge unit where DWR recorded substantial deer use in the recent past, deer use last spring was exceedingly low. Moreover, it is not as if the mule deer moved someplace else, because I measured all possible wintering areas identified by DWR and BLM. In my opinion, only one factor can account for the observed data — elk-fueled mountain lions are keeping the more vulnerable mule deer from recovering. Today a single lion on Elk Ridge will kill more deer in a year than all archery, muzzleloader, and rifle hunters combined. Coyotes and black bears are also abundant on Elk Ridge.

Will the mule deer on Elk Ridge ever recover? In Banff National Park where wolves and other predators have significantly reduced the elk population, 80 square miles of prescribed burns did not translate into increasing elk numbers. Despite an abundance of high-quality forage following the fires, burning actually reduced the elk population even further by making it easier for wolves to find the remaining elk. To reiterate, contrary to what most agency biologists will try and tell you, habitat and habitat improvements are largely irrelevant if the underlying problem is excessive predation or predator-mediated competition. And as we have seen, predator-mediated competition is more the norm than the exception. There is

one solution only and it certainly is not increasing the elk population by one-third as recently proposed by certain groups in Utah. In Nevada, a few mule deer hunters have been trying to get mountain lions reclassified as a predator, but to date their pleas have fallen on deaf ears. In Texas, mountain lions have always been classified as a predator and everyone is free to do their own predator control.



Wildlife Management News and Commentary

Alaska Research Tells Why Game Management Unit 20A now Supports “Liberal” Antlerless Moose Harvest

In an Alaska study conducted by Rodney Boertje and seven other scientists, a series of experiments to determine the combination of factors that justify antlerless moose harvest exists at: [Journal of Wildlife Management 71\(5\):1494-1506. 2007 doi: 10.2193/2006-159](#)

This is especially appropriate because Defenders of Wildlife continues to sue to halt all wolf control in Alaska which it claims is ineffective. Yet in its “Winter 2010” issue of *Defenders*, it used the recovered moose population in GMU 20A to admit that wolf control is very effective.

The Alaska study explains: “In 1960, the first moose managers in the new state of Alaska, USA, acquired several high-density moose populations from federal managers. These high densities resulted in part from previous widespread federal predator control, favorable winters, favorable habitat, and the lack of antlerless harvests. The new state managers immediately initiated conservative antlerless harvests. These harvests evolved into liberal antlerless harvests by the early 1970s, although moose densities had already substantially declined from

continued on page 14

Why Only One AK Unit Supports Liberal Cow Harvest – *continued. from Page 13*

adverse winters and increasing predator numbers during 1965-1971. We categorize an antlerless harvest as liberal when the number of antlerless moose harvested is more than 2.0% of the total prehunt population and the general intent is to stabilize or decrease the moose population.”

“The rationale for liberal antlerless harvests during 1971-1974 was to reduce suspected low nutritional status. However, moderate, not low, nutritional status was apparent during 1971-74 in GMU 20A based on browse surveys and twinning rates, and densities of moose were low. Unfortunately, these liberal antlerless harvests clearly contributed to further declines in moose numbers. Consequently, the state legislature transferred the authority to implement antlerless harvests to the local citizen advisory committees. Thirty years later, these committees still have annual veto power affecting antlerless moose harvest and are skeptical of the need for antlerless harvests, despite a 1994 mandate to manage for elevated yields.”

(NOTE: exactly this same thing happened at the same time to Idaho’s once famous mule deer herd in Unit 39. But instead of paying attention to the 19-year Clearwater Elk Ecology Study being conducted at that time by IDFG researcher Mike Schlegel, IDFG Director Dick Woodworth continued to destroy deer and elk herds until he was forced to resign.

His replacement, Joe Greenley, was ordered by the Idaho Legislature to rebuild Idaho deer and elk populations by reducing seasons, limiting nonresident hunters, and increasing the harvest of bears that were preventing elk recovery in the Clearwater.

Instead of giving rural citizen advisory committees the authority to veto antlerless harvest when it is not indicated, the Idaho legislature trusted former Nevada game manager Greenley to get the job done and it worked until he retired and was replaced by radical activist Jerry Conley. In 1984 while Alaska Legislators were passing a mandate to manage wildlife for elevated yields, Conley and his wildlife managers began destroying the Idaho wildlife his predecessor and concerned outdoorsmen had worked for so long to rebuild. – ED)

The Alaska study goes on to explain how using more than one nutrition indicator for more than one year provides proof to the local advisory committees to agree to switch to liberal antlerless harvests and maintain optimum moose production in Unit 20A. The study also shows that the need to reduce the rapidly expanding GMU 20A moose herd resulted from years of intensive control of wolves and bears and that none of the other 13 moose populations in the study qualify for liberal antlerless harvest.

The following comments by **Dr. Charles Kay** are his observations of what we in the lower 48 States should learn from the constant lawsuits and irresponsible rhetoric by Defenders of Wildlife et al in Alaska:

1. DOW and others, including the Federal Government and state F&G agencies, have repeatedly lied regarding the impact of predation and especially wolf recovery. Under no circumstances is DOW to be trusted --- this also applies to all the groups and government agencies with a similar agenda and story line. Nor should any of these NGO organizations ever be given a seat at the table, as they clearly do not understand the difference between science and values. Everyone is entitled to his or her beliefs, but not to hide personal values behind a veil of science.

2. High mule deer numbers in the West, like high moose and caribou numbers in Alaska, occurred during the 1950's-1960's when predator control was effective and widespread. This is also true of sage grouse numbers---a species DOW etc. now want listed under the Endangered Species Act. Protect predators, which decimate the birds, then petition the USFWS to give the grouse full ESA protection, with all that implies. Are “farce” and “scam” too strong to describe this agenda?

3. As demonstrated last fall, especially in Idaho, hunting and/or trapping has little or no lasting effect on wolf populations, and will not limit wolf numbers.

4. The only wolf control that will ever be allowed in the lower 48 is what some federal judge or judges permit. DOW's Winter 2010 article mentions all the times they have sued Alaska over predator management---In fact, as the article explains, DOW is still in court to try and stop predator management in Alaska---and remember wolves in Alaska are not the least bit "endangered", so the ESA is not involved. The feds, however, do not permit the state to do predator control on many federal lands. In fact, predator control has actually occurred on only 7%-9% of the state in 2006-2009. That is to say, the **90+% of the state where predators have not been controlled is still not enough for DOW et al.**

5. If you tell the same lie often enough, like DOW and others have, you have a good chance of carrying the day, and especially of winning the hearts and minds of people back East and elsewhere, who have no first hand knowledge of predators, or of many other things in our world---please refer to my earlier article on "Predation: Lies, Myths, and Scientific Fraud" and/or my article on "The Kaibab Deer Incident: Myths, Lies, and Scientific Fraud". None of this is about "science" except to claim it is on their side, which, in reality it has never been---but "science" these days is an ever increasing slippery subject.

And Dr. Valerius Geist Added His Words of Wisdom

Strictly speaking, the state of Alaska is paying its wildlife branch to feed predators – or am I not seeing things right? Any Martian examining the figures would come to that conclusion. And, heaven forbid, if other agencies are not following that example. And any person buying a hunter’s license.....well, you can figure out what that's paying for. Cheers, **Val Geist**

IDFG Ignores Idaho Law – Claims Idaho Wildlife Policy Set by Commission

By George Dovel

A brazen example of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game’s willingness to ignore Idaho Law and Idaho Wildlife Policy established by citizen initiative in 1937 and enacted into law in 1938, is published on Page 4 of the September 2010 issue of Idaho Fish and Game News. It reads as follows:

“Idaho Fish and Game Policy

Idaho wildlife management policy is set by seven volunteer commissioners. The Idaho Fish and Game Commission’s policy decisions are based on research and recommendations by the professional staff of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, with input from the governor’s office, the state Legislature and hunters and anglers.”

Idaho wildlife Management policy is here:

36-103. **Wildlife property of state – Preservation.** (a) Wildlife Policy. All wildlife, including all wild animals, wild birds and fish, within the state of Idaho, is hereby declared to be the property of the state of Idaho. It shall be preserved, protected, perpetuated and managed. It shall only be captured or taken at such times or places, under such conditions, or by such means, or in such manner, as will preserve, protect and perpetuate such wildlife, and provide for the citizens of this state and, as by law permitted to others, continued supplies of such wildlife for hunting, fishing and trapping.

(b) Commission to Administer Policy. Because conditions are changing and in changing affect the preservation, protection, and perpetuation of Idaho wildlife, the methods and means of administering and carrying out the state’s policy must be flexible and dependent on the ascertainment of facts which from time to time exist. and fix the needs for regulation and control of fishing, hunting, trapping, and other activity relating to wildlife, and because it is inconvenient and impractical for the legislature of the state of Idaho to administer such policy, it shall be the authority, power **and duty** of the fish and game commission to administer and carry out the policy of the state in accordance with the provisions of the Idaho fish and game code. **The commission is not authorized to change such policy but only to administer it.** (emphasis added)

Not only does the Commission ignore its duties outlined in Sec 36-104, at least two Commissioners have made demeaning remarks to citizens who spend their time and money traveling to testify in an effort to prevent the destruction of Idaho wildlife. One of them makes a practice of circulating emails which include name-calling and threats – a practice that should never be tolerated by his fellow Commissioners.

The citizens who entrust the management of their wildlife to the Department and the Commission are entitled to an honest effort to restore a valuable resource that is instead being destroyed. It’s time to practice transparency rather than continue to repeat excuses.

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