

# The Outdoorsman

Bulletin Number 7

October-November 2004

## Mule Deer Management in Idaho

by George Dovel



Mule deer bucks reportedly photographed recently at the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory.



Indian Summer 1966. Harvesting two prime mule deer bucks was still possible in most of Idaho's two-deer units.

The above left photo of a group of mule deer was sent to us as proof that there are still a few mature mule deer bucks left in Idaho. Whether or not it represents what it appears to, Idahoans should ask themselves when they last saw a sight like this in an area that is open to hunting.

The above right photo was taken by me in Unit 26 during a hot dry period at the beginning of the 1966 hunting season. Despite the adverse hunting weather, I located these and several other nice mule deer bucks for the two men who accompanied me on an elk hunt.

Locating and legally harvesting four bucks like those at a single location in Idaho now would be front page news. The biennial and/or annual IDFG reports since 1903 and the federally funded management reports since 1938 provide a clear, indisputable record of why healthy mule deer populations no longer exist in most of Idaho.

### **Vulnerability is the Key**

Before biologists began managing big game, our wildlife managers knew that vulnerability is the most important consideration when establishing hunting seasons. By 1945 and 1946, deer hunting seasons in eastern Idaho, where hunters had reasonably easy access to mule deer, lasted only 10 days, from October 21 to October 30.

Less accessible deer herds with more ability to avoid hunters were temporarily hunted from October 5 to November 10 and the most remote backcountry deer herds were hunted from Sept. 25 to Nov. 10. Panhandle deer were hunted from Nov. 1 to November 30.

### **Three Management Options**

Except for deer in the Panhandle and the remote backcountry areas, neither mule deer nor elk were hunted during the peak of their rut, which allowed most of the females to be bred by a mature male on their first estrus. For deer that had never been hunted or were hunted only in some years, IDFG managers used one of three options:

- (1) Establish a very short season (~three days).
- (2) Allow a longer season but limit the harvest to mature male animals.
- (3) Limit the number of hunters in a longer season.

In most instances they chose the third option and required prospective hunters to enter a special drawing to hunt deer that had been protected from hunting. This worked well with species like mountain goat where only a handful of permits were issued for each area, but required trial and error where more animals needed to be harvested.

*continued on page 2*

*continued from page 1*

### **The Cassia Mule Deer Herd**

Although unregulated hunting in the late 1800s eliminated most big game species from Cassia County, residents recorded seeing bunches of as many as 250 mule deer as late as 1890. During that period settlers from both Idaho and Utah reported killing one or two wagonloads of mule deer each fall for their winter meat supply.

But when the Cassia Forest Reserve was created by Theodore Roosevelt in 1905, mule deer populations were depleted. The area was closed to all big game hunting from 1911-1929 and then opened for four days in 1930 and ten days in 1931.

Several thousand hunters participated in the either-sex hunts and 2,500 deer were killed during the two short seasons. No further hunting was allowed until 1936 when a special draw hunt allowed only 500 deer to be removed.

In 1946 3,250 Cassia division deer permits were issued which resulted in 2,533 deer being killed and checked. The hunter kill success rate of 78% based on total permits exceeded the IDFG goal, as did the statewide check station reported kill of 26,936 deer.

### **November Mule Deer Hunting Halted**

According to 60 years of IDFG records, big game check stations never recorded more than one-fourth to one-third of the actual deer harvest. The 1946 hunter harvest probably exceeded 80,000 and was considered excessive.

The F&G Commission eliminated the 10 days in November from most of the 1947 seasons. It announced that was done to reduce vulnerability during the first 10 days of the active rut and to eliminate stress caused by hunters as the deer began moving toward winter range.

Despite an increase in the number of hunters in 1947, the statewide harvest recorded at check stations decreased by 8,041 deer to 18,895. Reducing the 37-day seasons by the 10 days when the deer were most vulnerable reduced the recorded harvest by 30 percent.

In the Cassia Division, omitting the 10 days in November plus reducing the number of permits to only 1,500 reduced the recorded kill there to 1,259.

Statewide harvests recorded at check stations for the next three years stabilized at 21,924, 22,285 and 22,578, indicating sustained annual harvests probably exceeding 66,000 deer. But 50 years of restoring big game populations was about to undergo a dramatic change.

### **IDFG Reorganized by WMI**

When World War II ended, arms and ammunition manufacturers like the Winchester-Western Division of Olin and Remington Arms found themselves needing a new civilian market for their products. They began a nationwide campaign to promote public big game hunting and private bird shooting, and provided major funding to the Washington, D.C. based Wildlife Management Institute to help spread their message.

In the eastern states, specialists from Olin (Winchester-Western) with help from the WMI created private bird shooting preserves "to preserve the American hunter." Perhaps the most famous of these, the Nilo (Olin spelled backwards) Shooting Preserve, was created by John Olin in 1952 a few miles from the Winchester-Western factory in East Alton, Illinois.

Customers are still treated to a bronze statue depicting the American Hunter holding a ventilated rib shotgun with a few pen-reared pheasants at his feet. Then they shoot sporting clays or trap, or "hunt" for ducks, pheasants and chukars.

Earlier, the WMI had visited western state fish and game agencies and provided each F&G Commission an individualized booklet of recommendations to improve game and fish management. In Idaho they combined the functions of game and fish under one boss and insisted IDFG hire wildlife biologists to maintain healthy game populations and harvests.

Then, although the number of licensed resident deer hunters was rapidly nearing 100,000 in the late 1940s, WMI insisted the Commission needed to encourage hunters from other states to help harvest Idaho's surplus deer and elk to prevent range damage!

### **Concerns For Idaho Big Game**

In the Big Game Section of its Twenty-first Biennial Report published in 1948, IDFG pointed out nearly a 100% increase in nonresident hunters in one year, from 422 in 1945 to 824 in 1946. Then it expressed the following concerns:

"The nation has had the greatest sales publicity program that so far has been experienced. Resorts, dude ranches, airlines, railroads, sporting arms manufacturers, sporting magazines and many other concerns have used game popularity as an aid in their advertising. Game and fish are definite attractions meriting public enthusiasm, but it is time to give some thought to how we can meet this increasing demand.

"Discriminating use of airplanes for removal of game from mountains near state and forest landing fields in remote areas has been desirable. However in 1946 we suddenly experienced a large increase in plane use...especially private planes. Planes fly to remote areas from out of state, obtain game, and fly out without ever stopping in Idaho except to land and hunt in those areas. Local planes fly in and out with little likelihood of being checked by game department personnel."

### **Biologists Bring Changes**

The Twenty-fourth Biennial Report published in 1952 said, "In our efforts to provide the maximum annual harvest of big game on a sustained yield basis, emphasis has been placed on maintaining optimum numbers of game on the various ranges in relation to their food supply. In an effort to increase the supply of game for such large hunter

demand, it has been deemed advisable to employ biologists to assist in obtaining necessary facts.”

Following another WMI recommendation, the five game management Districts were subdivided into game management units. Beginning in 1951, the biologists liberalized harvests statewide and substantially extended season lengths in one new District each year.

They doubled the deer harvest on the Boise River in Southwest Idaho and increased the statewide harvest recorded at check stations by 47%, from 22,578 in 1950 to 33,250 in 1951! That also included a record white-tailed deer harvest of 3,786, 11 % of the total recorded deer kill.

Despite record snow depths in the winter that followed, the biologists convinced IDFG Director Murray not to feed the starving deer and elk “in order to prevent damage to the winter range.” The massive starvation losses set their increased harvest program back but they continued to expand either-sex general seasons to include periods when deer and elk were most vulnerable.

These extended seasons included the peak breeding period and late fall and early winter when both deer and elk need to reduce activity to conserve body fat. In 1954 biologists replaced all controlled hunts and bucks-only hunts with general either-sex seasons.

#### **1940s Trapping and Transplanting Programs**

During the 1940s Idaho game wardens trapped, tagged and transplanted elk, whitetails and mule deer to locations around the state where continued hunting had prevented healthy recovery. The Pocatello area elk herd had become severely inbred, producing animals with club feet, deformed heads and bulls without antlers.

In 1946 a summer hunt removed 68 of the old bulls after 40 young bulls were transplanted from the Jackson herd. Earlier that same year, 172 mule deer were trapped at a Boise winter feed site and transplanted to Owyhee County near Murphy to supplement the local herd.

The Owyhee County deer season was closed in 1946 and remained closed for years. That plus extensive predator control, including the widespread use of 1080 poison, allowed the deer herd to increase rapidly.

#### **Biologists Schedule Deer Slaughter**

By the mid-1950s Owyhee County cattlemen were complaining about having too many deer and biologists decided to hold a three-day general season either-sex hunt. Since most of these deer had never been shot at, game wardens suggested opening the hunt on the first day of the general season to limit participation by hunters from other areas.

Instead, biologists scheduled the hunt before the regular deer seasons opened and advertised it as far away as California. The Owyhee deer hunt in 1956 was described as a “war zone”. On opening day 4,600 deer were checked through the Marsing check station, one of three stations operated in the area.

Several buck racks appeared to qualify for Boone and Crockett listing but none were ever recorded. In the 1950s large mule deer racks from the Owyhee, Big Creek and Soda Springs areas were common and Idaho hunters expressed little interest in having them scored.

#### **Multiple Deer Harvests**

In 1956 biologists added a “Middle Fork” deer tag which allowed a second deer to be harvested along the Middle Fork of the Salmon River. In 1957 they replaced the Middle Fork tag with an “Extra” deer tag that permitted a second deer to be taken in Big Creek, the Middle Fork of the Salmon, Juniper Mountain in Owyhee County and a large area in Bear Lake, Caribou and Franklin Counties.

On November 10, 1957 we counted 4,300 mule deer in Unit 26 during a helicopter flight lasting less than three hours. That represented an average of 7.6 deer per square mile in the 566 square mile unit.

In 1958 biologists used both Middle Fork and Extra deer tags to allow the harvest of three deer by hunting in two different units. In 1960 they added a “Hells Canyon” deer tag making it legal to kill four deer by hunting in three units.

They had already extended the either-sex deer and elk seasons from mid-September to mid-December in back country units and in 1962 they added a “Middlefork Antlerless” deer tag making it legal to kill five deer by hunting in three units!

Eight years after our Unit 26 count of 4,300 deer in one flight, IDFG conducted an extensive helicopter census in the Big Creek drainage and found only 466 deer, less than one deer per square mile. The combination of extended either-sex seasons, multiple bag limits and protection of mountain lions for several years had reduced the famous deer herd by 89 percent.

#### **Inaccurate Harvest Data**

In 1953 biologists began mailing a harvest questionnaire to five percent of Idaho hunters, and a voluntary hunter report card for deer and elk was implemented in 1957. The following comparison of the three harvest reporting methods during three back-to-back seasons 10 years apart illustrates the failure of check stations to reflect total deer harvests:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Check Station</u>	<u>Hunter Report</u>	<u>Mail-in Survey</u>
1950	22,578	n/a	n/a
1951	33,250	n/a	n/a
1960	16,791	30,482	75,213
1961	11,486	27,154	72,421
1970	12,505	22,564	83,125
1971	6,303	15,934	61,826

As deer harvests began to decline in the late 1950s and early 1960s, biologists increased their survey estimates

*continued on page 4*

*continued from page 3*

which made it appear they were still managing big game properly. By 1969 check station and report card tallies both indicated declining harvest trends rather than the increases in harvests reflected by the exaggerated mail-in harvest survey.

### **Changing Deer Counts**

When deer trend counts conducted on the ground at a few locations every year began to show significant population declines, the biologists replaced them with aerial trend surveys. In 1969 the aerial trend surveys, which also showed ongoing declines, were replaced by extensive helicopter counts that attempted to count every animal on winter range in the more productive deer units.

During its April 1969 public hearing, the Commission heard several hours of testimony from hunters and rural legislators describing depleted deer populations and requesting shorter seasons and no female harvest. Then it listened to the biologist in charge of managing Idaho big game insisting Idaho deer populations were healthy and underharvested.

He claimed Idaho's pre-hunting season deer population exceeded 400,000 and told the Commissioners they could safely increase the annual deer harvest to 140,000-150,000 by offering even more hunting opportunity. Then, as now, the biologist offered no facts to substantiate his claims yet the Commission failed to ask how doubling the kill would reverse the reported decline in deer numbers.

### **Biologists Exaggerate Kills**

The Commission ignored the fact-based testimony from experienced outdoorsmen and continued the extended seasons and multiple either-sex deer harvests for the next three years. The biologists claimed a record deer kill of 83,125 during the 1970 season, nearly seven times as many as were recorded at all check stations and four times more than were reported killed by hunters.

The claimed deer harvest in the best deer units from 1969-1971 was higher than the number of live deer actually counted by helicopter in those units. When this was pointed out the biologists simply subtracted a few thousand harvested deer from the handful of units that had been carefully counted during those three years.

The annual Reports and the P-R funded surveys remain unchanged but the "corrected" figures for those three years are included in the so-called "Big Game Harvest History 1935-2003" provided by IDFG. That document uses limited check station harvest records for some years, variations of mail-in and telephone surveys for others, and the mandatory hunter harvest report for others.

Although both check station records and voluntary hunter reports provided up or down trends in harvests, neither could project total harvests. All of the surveys were inaccurate at the unit level where big game herds are managed. Only the current hunter report is accurate.

Shortly after Joe Greenley was hired to restore credibility to IDFG on September 1, 1971, he replaced the inflated harvest survey estimates for the preceding ten years with statistics from the voluntary hunter report cards. Instead of allowing the biologists' inflated 10-year average of 69,042 deer to be printed in the 1971 Summary of Operations and Annual Report, he published a 10-year average harvest of only 22,270 deer.

He wrote that the harvests voluntarily reported by hunters were less than the total but said the inflated survey questionnaires would not be used again until the system had been refined to reflect a more accurate picture of total harvests. After Greenley's retirement, Big Game Manager Lonn Kuck inserted the exaggerated 1960s harvests back into Idaho's deer harvest history to hide the evidence of the biologists 1960s destruction of the mule deer herds.

### **Why is History So Important?**

From 1870-1890 Idaho's population changed from 14,998, to 88,548 men, women and children. Yet only a few thousand hunters armed with relatively short-range iron-sighted weapons killed off most of Idaho's big game.

By 1900 wild game was scarce in Idaho and it took nearly 50 years for dedicated wildlife managers to restore it and create the wildlife paradise that existed in 1950. Twenty years later misguided wildlife managers, who substituted exciting theories for knowledge gained through experience, had once again gutted Idaho game populations.

### **A Return To Responsible Management**

Hunters who later enjoyed Idaho's abundant deer and elk harvests in the 1980s through 1992 need to understand that it was not biologists who began to restore the game during the 1970s. Fighting against formidable opposition at both the state and federal level, a generation of experienced outdoorsmen used biological facts to expose the biological myths of the 1950s and 60s.

With valuable assistance from their legislators, they forced IDFG to return to the limited hunting seasons of the late 1940s and halted the killing of female breeding stock in most units. They restored emergency feeding of big game when it was indicated and demanded a return to healthy recruitment.

The number of nonresident big game hunters had reached 19,749 in 1969, and in 1970 172,780 Idaho deer tags were sold, including 20,209 extra tags. In the 1971-72 Legislative session, a bill was introduced to limit nonresident deer and elk hunters to less than 10,000.

Greenley and the Commission quickly promised to set an annual limit that would never exceed 9,500 nonresident elk or deer tags sold and they kept that commitment. In 1979, the year Greenly retired, the limits on nonresident tag sales were deer - 8,457 and elk - 9,500.

Mule deer does observed with fawns during the summer averaged a healthy 1.6 fawns per doe. Most deer seasons lasted less than three weeks and recorded winter buck:doe:fawn ratios in southern Idaho were **44:100:83**.

Antlerless deer harvest was limited or prohibited in most units except those that allowed early archery hunting. There were only seven controlled deer hunts in the entire state and no general seasons existed in those units.



The return to short seasons and limited doe harvests in the 1970s and early 1980s resulted in a healthy percentage of mature breeding bucks like this one in Idaho mule deer herds.

### **Bonus “Hunting Opportunity”**

But in 1980 when new IDFG Director Jerry Conley inherited Idaho’s recovering game populations, he immediately began to offer expanded big game “hunting opportunity” in order to generate more revenue. He used the extra income to implement an ambitious non-game/fish agenda promoted by the Washington, D.C. based International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

Although the length of most general big game seasons remained about the same, IDFG biologists designed a series of “bonus” deer and elk special hunts in units that already had a general open season. These bonus hunts offered inexperienced hunters the chance to kill a deer or elk during the rut or on winter range when the animals were most vulnerable and easy to approach.

By paying extra money for controlled hunt applications, hunt permits, and archery and muzzleloader permits, the successful applicant could increase his or her odds of harvesting a deer from 15-30 percent to as high as 80-100 percent. By 1990 Conley had increased the number of deer special hunt permits from a few hundred to **15,700!**

Most of these were “bonus” hunts in units that also had a liberal general archery season and a short general rifle season. In 1989 biologists issued an *unlimited number* of “Extra” Deer Tags allowing hunters to harvest two deer in portions of what are now the Southeast and Upper Snake Regions.

They also issued 3,450 “Extra Antlerless” Deer Tags in 1989 allowing harvest of an extra female deer in eight hunts spread over the state. That year, IDFG estimated the statewide deer harvest at 95,200 based on the telephone survey.

### **Breeding Stock Destroyed**

With both antlerless and either-sex tags, the female kill was excessive yet they increased the number of Extra Antlerless tags to 8,925 in 13 separate hunts in 1990. That increased deer tag sales by about 8,500 tags but the estimated 1990 deer harvest declined by 23,100 deer!

Despite the increased hunting opportunity the sharp decline in harvest indicated both the 1989 and 1990 antlerless harvests were too high. Yet biologists, with F&G Commission approval, continued to offer Extra Antlerless deer tags in 1991, 92 and 93. Although a record 170,599 deer tags were sold in 1992, the estimated statewide deer harvest continued its sharp decline to 61,200 and dropped to only 45,600 in 1993.

### **Severe Winter Kill Ignored**

Following the 1992-93 winter, resident deer hunters saw the deer had been decimated by the combination of excessive harvest and starvation. They bought 14,359 fewer deer tags in 1993 despite the fact that “hunting opportunity” remained the same as 1992.

But nonresidents believed the rosy IDFG forecast by Lonn Kuck in national hunting and fishing magazines and they increased their 1993 deer tag purchases to 17,016. Both Conley and his “rubber stamp” F&G Commission had simply ignored the IDFG commitment to the Idaho Legislature to cap nonresident deer tag sales at 9,500.

By 1994 many nonresidents knew IDFG was not telling the truth and they purchased 3,074 fewer deer tags. Resident deer tag sales dropped another 13,476 in 1994.

### **Doe/Fawn Killing Continues**

In an effort to increase harvests and revenue Conley continued to allow doe hunting in all of the general archery and muzzleloader seasons and most of the general rifle seasons across southern Idaho. When he also doubled the number of antlerless permits in 1996 Idaho deer hunters forced Conley to seek friendlier habitat in Missouri.

Four new Directors during the eight years since Conley left have continued to increase the number of antlerless deer permits despite 50% mule deer losses to starvation during the 2001-2002 winter. Of the 12,917 *Limited* Controlled Hunt Deer Permits authorized by the F&G Commission in 2004, 9,226 are for antlerless or either-sex harvest.

Most of these antlerless permits are simply bonus permits provided in addition to the general either-sex archery hunting seasons throughout Idaho. A notable exception are the 13 units in Southeast Idaho closed to antlerless harvest by archers at the insistence of Commissioner Gibbs during the March 2004 Commission meeting (see Bulletin #2, page 3).

The antlerless youth harvest in units 67 and 69 was also halted by Commissioner Gibbs but 36 of the 53 mule deer units in the other regions south of the Salmon River still allow antlerless harvest by juveniles.

*continued on page 6*

*continued from page 5*

Only a handful of mule deer management units in Idaho meet the criteria to allow hunters to harvest females. Populations are severely depressed in most other units yet the biologists continue to recommend and the Commission continues to allow antlerless mule deer harvest in violation of Idaho Sec. 36-103 and 36-104.

These Code Sections define Idaho Wildlife Policy (preserve, protect, perpetuate and manage to provide continued supplies for Idaho citizens for hunting, fishing and trapping); and specify the limited authority, powers and duties of the Commission.

The Commission is specifically required to hold hearings to determine if allowing a hunting season will injuriously affect providing continued supplies (a sustained yield) of that game species. Then if the Commission finds (as it already has) that the population is declining and a female harvest will further reduce the recruitment necessary to restore that game population, it must not allow the season until the population is restored.

According to the Idaho Code, it is a violation of Idaho Law for the F&G Commission to allow juveniles, bowhunters, black powder hunters and 9,000 lucky rifle hunters with special permits to hunt female mule deer when the populations are declining. If that is true why are the Commissioners violating the law?

### **The Tail Is Wagging The Dog**

The answer is that most of them have such a limited knowledge of Idaho wildlife management that they allow Wildlife Bureau staff biologists to prepare season recommendations for them - rather than present them with biological facts they can use to set the seasons themselves as the Code requires. The difficulty Commissioner Gibbs had in getting the Staff to follow his direction in March illustrates the extent to which the tail is wagging the dog.

To those who feel it is appropriate for professional wildlife biologists to establish seasons and bag limits - that might be acceptable if they considered the welfare of the wildlife resource and the citizens who own and pay for its management as their top priority. Unfortunately their existing priority is very different.

### **“Wildlife Based Recreation Opportunity”**

The phrase “providing more hunting, fishing and other wildlife-based recreation opportunity” originated in Washington, D.C. over two decades ago. But it has been the Department’s goal since Conley sold the IAFWA agenda to his biologists and the Commission after he was hired as Director.

When the IDFG Deer Team first met in McCall and Stanley in 1996 to address declining Idaho deer populations, it adopted the following “Vision Statement”: “Recognizing the intrinsic value of Idaho’s deer we will sustain biological objectives necessary to provide optimal deer-based recreational opportunities.”

The Elk Team used almost identical vague wording and unanimously adopted a suggestion by Biologist Ted Chu that providing deer and elk for bears and lions (to eat) was part of the Teams’ mission. The IDFG majority on both teams refused to adopt the suggestion of minority sportsmen members to include “providing continued supplies of deer and elk for harvest by hunters” as part of the teams’ mission.

From early 1996 until the five-year mule deer and white-tailed deer management plans were adopted in July 1998, I recorded all of the team meetings and served on the Implementation Team. Without exception, every IDFG biologist who discussed deer or elk management expressed opposition to managing wildlife populations to achieve a sustained annual yield for hunters as required by Idaho law.

### **Deer Densities**

Recently Wildlife Bureau Chief Jim Unsworth told the media there are 300,000 deer in Idaho and said Idaho habitat will support 600,000. Both IDFG and private census data indicate the 300,000 estimate (about four deer for every square mile of Idaho’s land area) is too high and continues to decline.

Idaho outdoorsmen who spend months in the field in every season traveling their ranch or local hunting or outfitting area, report that mule deer numbers are the lowest they have ever encountered. Several have suggested seeking an injunction to halt antlerless mule deer harvest until the herds recover.

When Colorado managed several selected public-land mule deer populations for sustained yield, their density reached 30 per square mile. White-tailed deer populations managed for optimum harvest in such diverse habitats as West Texas and Anticosti Island, Quebec in the Gulf of St. Lawrence are maintained at 55 per square mile.

Mule deer on some public lands in Idaho with good summer and winter mule deer habitat are presently being managed at only 1-2 deer per square mile. The contrast in deer density on Idaho public hunting lands with deer that spend all or part of each year on protected private or park lands reflects IDFG mismanagement.

With a land area half the size of Idaho, Ohio, which had no deer for at least two decades, now provides annual harvests of up to five deer per hunter.

Minnesota, with slightly less land area than Idaho, and similar winters, has whitetail deer densities ranging from 5-43 per square mile. Despite its 5 million population and several thousand wolves that have decimated the whitetail herd in the northeast peninsula, it’s deer harvest in 2002 totaled nearly 300,000.

Hunter harvests average 10-15 deer per square mile in the better Minnesota areas. Like most other states Minnesota’s deer harvest reached significant lows during the 1970s and reached a peak in the early 1990s. But, unlike Idaho, these states now enjoy record deer harvests.

### Short Seasons Work

They accomplish these record harvests with general seasons lasting only 1-3 weeks and use permit hunts where they become necessary to prevent depredation of crops. Idaho's present policy of providing expanded hunting opportunity rather than animals to hunt does nothing to correct depredation other than stressing deer when they need to conserve energy to survive the winter.

The unprecedented expansion of archery permit sales in Idaho resulted from expanding the number of early archery either-sex deer hunts to include every mule deer unit in Idaho. Providing unlimited either-sex muzzleloader opportunities when mule deer are in the rut or fighting snow in late fall and early winter has caused a similar rapid increase in muzzleloader permit sales.

Regardless of the weapon or age of the hunter, each female mule deer that is killed when populations are declining prevents several generations of does from replenishing the herd. All hunters, regardless of age, weapon choice or affluence, should make the decision to temporarily stop killing the does and fawns that represent the future of mule deer in Idaho.

Idaho biologists have recently completed a draft "White-Tailed Deer Management Plan 2004-2015" which will be presented to the Commission for approval on November 19, in Orofino. A Mule Deer Plan, similar to Montana's plan will soon be presented to the Commission. It is highly doubtful that biologists will admit they have exploited the mule deer population by providing excessive hunting opportunity and unwarranted female harvests.

### Declining Harvests Impact Tag Sales

For the past 14 years the mule deer harvest in Idaho has declined steadily. We are now experiencing the lowest harvests in 60 years and one-third of the animals killed are breeding does.

One result of IDFG biologists mismanagement is the decline in deer tag sales. In 2003 Idaho residents purchased only 98,980 resident deer tags, including the multiple "X" tags which allow the harvest of a second deer in some areas. That is the lowest number of resident deer tags issued in more than 50 years.

Nonresidents purchased a total of 10,370 deer tags including 968 low priced Junior Mentor Tags. Idaho residents also purchased 841 leftover nonresident deer tags, paying the nonresident price to kill an extra deer. The total of 110,191 deer tags sold is the lowest number in 48 years.

Mule deer hunters traditionally provided the highest revenue of all classes of hunters and that loss will have a significant impact on Idaho merchants. It also impacted IDFG license revenue and they have asked the Legislature for a significant fee increase.

Very little of the license, tag and permit revenue from deer hunters is spent to improve deer populations. A significant percentage of income from big game hunters is being used to fund non-game/fish projects.

The F&G Commission has also asked the Legislature for authority to set their own fee increases without Legislative approval. The misuse of sportsmen license fees and the exploitation of Idaho mule deer will undoubtedly impact these requests.

### FACT vs FICTION by Jim Beers

**Fiction:** There is one certain mix and distribution of plants and animals that "belong" and are best for rural America and the developing nations of the world. If they are rare, they are forcibly preserved; if they are absent from any particular area, they are to be forcibly reintroduced. We call them native species and their communities, native ecosystems. All other plants and animals, termed invasive species, should be eradicated. "The date" can be set (1492 AD, 1776 AD, 1806 AD, etc.) to fit any supposition (Columbus, US Constitution, Lewis and Clark, etc.) to fit any cause and an academic can be found to say what was or was not present. Refuting nonsense is impossible since all assertions are tenuous and "experts" always claim the benefit of the doubt.

**Fact:** There is an almost infinite mix and distribution of plants and animals that can thrive in each and every section of the habitable world. None are more proper or "right" than any other. History has shown that societies that make choices about the best mix and distribution of plants and animals considering everything from agriculture and fire control to wood products, recreation, and human wants and needs are the societies that succeed socially and economically. Note western Europe and pre-1970 United States for confirmation of this fact.

**Fiction:** Strong central governments and international rules are necessary to "save" native species. The greatest threat to plants and animals are humans and their activities and only by coercion and punishment can human disturbances and uses be curtailed. Government spending, government land acquisition and enforcement of government rules must be continually increased to "save endangered species," "eradicate invasive species," and regulate human activities from hunting and fishing to ranching, logging, and animal ownership.

**Fact:** Human freedom, private property, and sustainable uses of plants and animals have always resulted in the mix and distribution of plants and animals best suited to a particular society at a particular time. Strong central governments and international rules are always inimical to building and sustaining the "best" and "proper" mix of plants and animals. When plants and animals remain property (either public or private) and when all natural resources (plants, animals, energy, minerals, etc.) are developed and managed for human benefit, biodiversity is maintained and funding is generated to study and manage methods and changes best suited for the future. Note the abundance, diversity, uses, and modifications of the United States in its first 200 years compared to other developing countries for confirmation of this fact.

# The Compass – How IDFG Deceived Sportsmen

*By George Dovel*

In *Outdoorsman Bulletins #3 and #5*, we discussed a controversial 25-page document entitled “The Compass” which was sent to a select list of Fish and Game supporters and others. An accompanying letter from IDFG Director Steve Huffaker invited review and comment.

As we reported, The Compass was a draft 15-year plan of operations for IDFG, quietly orchestrated by the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) in Washington, D.C. It was carefully designed and worded to convince Idaho sportsmen and others to support the use of “free” federal money “to manage species to prevent ESA listing.”

If adopted it will de-emphasize hunting and fishing and allow IDFG to also manage plants, invertebrates and other non-animal/bird life forms, with emphasis on non-hunting/fishing/trapping “wildlife-related recreation”.

When Natural Resources Policy Bureau Chief Tracey Trent presented the revised “Compass” to the Commission for their approval, he said that 67% of the respondents (“stakeholders” [sportsmen] and “the general population across Idaho”) gave it a “thumbs up”.

In Moscow, the Concerned Sportsmen of Idaho (CSI) Board did not believe the document had widespread support so they hired Eco Social Analysts, LLC to analyze the methods IDFG used to obtain input and determine if the claimed widespread support was valid.

The extensive study found that the input only represented opinions of 154 individuals who were neither representative of IDFG “stakeholders” or of any other group. It could not determine whether input from focus groups and other respondents had any bearing on The Compass as was claimed in the document.

## **Non-Game Activists**

When the activists who support Teaming With Wildlife failed to convince Congress to pass the CARA Act, they regrouped and hatched a clever plan to get Congressional support for still another version of CARA. Instead of extolling the virtues of non-game, wildlife watching and non hunting wildlife-related recreation, they asked Congress to use some offshore oil money to help remove the financial burden of species being listed from the states.

IAFWA’s plan would provide state wildlife grants (SWGs) directly to the states and they would use the money to develop plans to prevent potential endangered species from being listed under ESA provisions. With a few exceptions, Congress swallowed the bait hook, line and sinker and the plan became federal law in 2001.

It required passing an amendment to the famous Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid to Wildlife Restoration Law so that offshore oil taxes (rather than sportsmen excise

taxes) would provide money for each state to develop a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS) for assorted plants and life forms to prevent ESA listing.

The money would be funneled through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to the states (like regular P-R taxes) and require matching state funding (like regular P-R taxes). But the determination of what the plan must contain, and approval of how the money would be spent was put in the eager clutches IAFWA (UNlike regular P-R taxes).

When Jerry Conley was convincing the Idaho F&G Commission to adopt IAFWA programs (Teaming With Wildlife (TWW), Watchable Wildlife, Project Wild, the Natural Resource Policy Bureau database, etc.) IAFWA was forming partnerships with animal rights and anti-hunting extremist groups.

## **Anti-Hunting Group Oversees State Wildlife Grants**

The IAWFA Teaming With Wildlife Committee’s State Wildlife Grants Working Group that told the state game departments how to organize and “sell” this non-hunting/fishing/trapping program to sportsmen has three members including Sara Vickerman representing the blatantly anti-hunting/trapping group **Defenders of Wildlife**.

In a memo to IDFG dated September 15, 2003, the group recommended its TWW contact attend “The Institute For Participatory Management and Planning training sessions to learn their “Systematic Development of Informed Consent Methodology”, and IAPP which teaches its “inform-consult-involve-collaborate-empower” strategy.

IDFG hired Zoologist Rita Dixon to head the SWG/CWCS effort based on input from the Working Group. In March, IDFG Communications Bureau Chief Roger Fuhrman 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 Compass was the result of the SWG Working Group’s explicit directions and memorandums, including not using “Hot-button” words like “reserve”, “preserve” and “protect” which may promote adverse reactions from people who fear eventual restrictions on land use.

## **“Be Honest, Up Front With Stakeholders” Ignored**

Deceiving the Commission and the Legislature in order to get its private agenda approved has become standard operating procedure with some IDFG officials. Perhaps that is why they did not heed the national Working Group’s advice to be honest and not withhold information in presenting The Compass for approval.

There was no mention in the vague wording of The Compass about having already spent several million dollars



of SWG money for an agenda that must be paid back if the CWCS plan is not completed by next October. There was also no mention of the fact that sportsmen's license money has been used to promote the non-game/fish agenda in *The Compass*.

In March 2004 when Rita Dixon gave her presentation about CWCS and the SWG money her group had already received, outgoing Commissioner John Burns asked her if any sportsman license dollars would be used. She responded that the matching funding had already been secured but failed to mention the source(s).

She also failed to mention that the \$1-\$3 match required for developing the plan abruptly changes to \$3-\$3 when the plan is completed in a few months. Her group of botanists, etc. have already collaborated to protect an assortment of creatures that transmit disease or cause crop damage and livestock injuries but no one has indicated who will pay for that protection.

#### **Non-Game Survey Funded by Sportsmen**

Following criticism of the flawed input gathering process used to develop *The Compass*, IAFWA approved another SWG grant covering the 20 western states included in the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. This grant funded another survey concerning "management of Fish and Wildlife in the West" and was sent to an equal number of men and women according to IDFG Planning and Human Resources Specialist Michele Beucler.

She advised a questionnaire recipient that Idaho sportsmen license money provided the matching dollars for this survey. It contained numerous nongame questions approved by the Colorado State University's Human Dimensions in Natural Resources Unit.

Surveys soliciting opinions about non-game and endangered species management from people who "know little about wildlife" may not legally be funded with Idaho sportsmen license dollars. The results of this uninformed opinion survey will probably be used to reinforce state fish and game agencies' expansion into non-game areas.

### **THE POSSIBLE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF THE COMPASS**

William A. Warren, Ph.D.  
Eco Social Analysts, LLC

*(In addition to completing the analysis of input to "The Compass" Dr. Warren provided this opinion of possible management implications if the Compass plan is adopted.)*

My major concern with the *Compass* is the potential for it to precipitate the same type of policy gridlock, litigation, and acrimony that has occurred in federal land management in the West. The present sorry condition of federal land management has many causes, but they include an attempt by the agencies, especially the USFS to move from a clear and measurable mission, to its

current state of trying to be all things to all people and provide a full range of public (and increasingly incompatible) "values." The *Compass* states that it seeks "social acceptability" for its management. The problem is there is no agreement among people about what is *acceptable*.

The *Compass* directs the IDFG away from its past emphasis on the concrete and measurable goal of promoting sustainable game and fish populations for harvest, toward a new emphasis that is nebulous, unachievable, and un-measurable. The *Compass* commits the IDFG to a goal of being all things to all people, of satisfying all "values" regarding fish and wildlife (and plants). The *Compass* uses terms such as "balance" (between game and predator populations), "diverse fish and wildlife," "healthy ecosystems," etc. to describe these new ends the IDFG will attempt to achieve.

Such terms are not only indefinable, they have been superceded by advances in ecological science that have discarded what amounts to teleological notions of "nature." Contemporary understanding of ecological phenomena recognizes that "nature" is not supposed to be any particular way, have any particular number or type of species or ecological communities, and as the Darwinian revolution should have made clear, humans and human activities are just as a legitimate part of "nature" as any other species or process.

Contemporary ecological science understands "nature" as a product of history, chance, chaos and disturbance, not the achievement of some grand design to achieve equilibrium, "balance" and "naturalness" that humans can somehow subvert. "Appropriate" states of nature, of wildlife populations, or the like, cannot be determined by more research because they are not objective states of nature unrelated to human wants. Terms such as "balance" and "healthy" are political terms that seek to legitimize what a particular individual or group wants "nature" to be.

To change IDFG's primary mission from one that is practical, measurable, and generally agreed to by its present constituency (sportsmen), to a mission that is at its root political, nebulous, un-measurable, and which seeks to satisfy all interest groups, risks making game management in Idaho the victim of the total gridlock, litigation, and bloodletting that characterizes federal land management throughout the West.

To attempt to provide all "values" to all people (as the federal land management agencies have done or been forced to do) satisfies no one. This is especially so where parties on opposing sides of natural resource and environmental controversies are unwilling to compromise what they believe are "sacred" principles, and where interest groups seek to impose their "nature morality" on others who disagree.

*Continued on page 10*

*Continued from page 9*

Despite all of the hype in resource management circles about “collaboration,” “consensus,” “dialogue,” and “changing values,” etc., these processes are not what’s driving resource management. Resource management in the West has been increasingly driven by zero-sum legal contests where interest groups seek to coerce their opponents through the courts, and the media.

On a more practical note, just how is IDFG going to “manage” nongame? When I was taking wildlife management as an undergraduate, the first thing the professor told the class was to remember “you’re not managing wildlife, you’re managing people.” And that is exactly what game management primarily is, the management of the take of fish and wildlife by hunters and fishermen. But *nongame* by definition are not hunted, so what is it exactly that IDFG is going to do to “manage” *nongame*? The IDFG has no significant land holdings, so providing habitat is not an option. Yes, the IDFG can advise other landowners on what they can do to benefit wildlife, but they’re already doing this. How much more would it take for a “game” biologist to suggest what habitat alterations would also enhance *nongame*? I also see mention in the *Compass* about providing wildlife viewing facilities – does the state of Idaho really need to provide *facilities* to view wildlife in a state that is mostly in public ownership, and whose private lands are still largely un-urbanized?

I think almost everyone wants to see all of Idaho’s great wildlife heritage protected (game and nongame), I know I do; but is the *Compass* the right vehicle to do this? The IDFG Commissioners should think critically about the repercussions that could result from implementing the *Compass*, irrespective of the short term gains in funding and PR that the document might bring. Does the Commission *really* think that the leaders of the Moscow environmental community (that appeal all timbers sales and have a zero cut, zero cow, policy on federal lands), or the John Marvel’s of the state, will sit down with hunters, trappers, and the IDFG, and agree to work together for the good of all?

In the mid 1980’s, in a publication called “Idaho Wilderness: How Much Less?,” the Idaho Wildlands Defense Fund stated their position on Wilderness designation in Idaho as recommending “2.9 million acres” (out of 8 million acres eligible) of new Wilderness. But they also go on to state “And we propose releasing 4.1 million acres, 52 percent of the total, for non-wilderness management, *including road building and development.*” [emphasis added] How things have changed! Today, some 20 years later the heirs of these early Idaho wilderness advocates seek to stop all manipulation of “nature” on public lands. Hunting, fishing, and trapping are in fact *the last* extractive uses of public lands that haven’t been 20 years later the heirs of these early Idaho wilderness

advocates seek to stop all manipulation of “nature” on public lands. Hunting, fishing, and trapping are in fact *the last* extractive uses of public lands that haven’t been widely challenged as disrupters of “nature’s” “balance” on “pristine” federal lands (although greens in New Jersey tried to stop bear hunting by going to federal court to demand that a federal National Recreation Area, where much of the bear hunting was to occur, conduct an EIS on the hunt before the hunt could take place). How much longer do you think this will last when hunting increasingly stands out as the last extractive use of public lands permitted?

There are elements in the *Compass* that throw open the door to nature moralists and say “Come on in. Tell us how you think we should manage wildlife and ecosystems. We will listen.”

## The Compass and Related Subjects

*(The following White Paper was presented to each Fish and Game Commissioner by Concerned Sportsmen of Idaho prior to the scheduled discussion and action on the Strategic Plan on November 19, 2004)*

Dear Idaho Fish and Game Commissioners:

The *Compass* crisis is a federally mandated scheme that purposely circumvents Idaho ballot boxes to build broader public support for what once was a federal mission of keeping plant and animal species off of the Endangered Species List. Through federal appropriated State Wildlife Grants (SWG), the federal government requires matching funding from the State of Idaho that does not exist in Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) revenues (mainly license dollars and federal matching funds from excise tax dollars collected on sportsmen’s equipment). Since tax check offs, donations and special license plates do not provide enough revenue for a vastly expanded spectrum of non-game activities initially undertaken by the Jerry Conley IDFG and carried on today, the obvious source of an “alternative funding source” will be a portion of Idaho’s general revenues.

For almost twenty-five years, the IDFG has spent license and federal matching funding for such non-hook and bullet endeavors as Teaming With Wildlife (TWW), Watchable Wildlife (WW) and numerous other dollar-sucking passions mandated in Washington, D.C. and agreed to by an IDFG significantly out of touch with its license, tag and permit buying constituency of hunters, anglers and trappers. Big game hunting, mainly that of elk and deer, brings in the greatest portion of license, tag and permit revenues. Those revenues subsidize the Fisheries Bureau and support any non-game programs within the IDFG.

The sad result is that only a very small fraction of those big game license dollars are actually spent on the management of elk and deer. Now the IDFG, faced with compliance by the October 2005 federal matching fund deadline, wants to hijack the Department away from hunters, anglers and trappers and deliver it to the environmental organizations that often oppose responsible game, fish and furbearer management. In delivering the IDFG to those who comprise and support extreme environmental organizations, the IDFG is dismissing the legal and fully credible election results of Idaho's local and state elections. That federally driven usurpation of Idaho's democratic election processes will result in the hijacking of the IDFG away from its pay-as-you-go constituency of hunters, anglers and trappers.

The federal government, through the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), is attempting to ease its pain and expense by gaining state compliance from those states possessing strong hook and bullet oriented fish and game departments. Idaho has one such department. Secondly, the USFWS is attempting to force a new constituency on fish and game oriented departments, as well as sportsmen, by requiring state matching funding to come from sources other than license fees and other matching federal funds. By creating the likely reality that states will match federal funds through the use of general revenues, the federal government will strengthen the impact of extreme environmentalists on Idaho state game, fish and furbearer management. Enclosure 2 is the plan Idaho wrote and adopted to deliver the IDFG to the USFWS and extreme environmental organizations. It includes the necessity for Idaho to report to out of state organizations.

Increasing the involvement and impact of environmentalists on the IDFG is precisely what the Compass is designed to do. Introduced as a homegrown IDFG strategic plan (covering 15 years), the Compass is merely a document designed to comply with federal pressure to create a USFWS-like Idaho State Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The Compass was stealthfully brought before the Idaho Fish and Game Commission at its July 2004 meeting in St. Maries when two others were absent and two commissioners were attending their first meeting after having been recently appointed. Nowhere in the Compass is the need for federal compliance by October 2005 mentioned. After the Idaho Fish and Game Commission wisely delayed a decision on the Compass, the draft Compass disappeared from the IDFG Website for three months until making a recent return prompted by a Clearwater sportsman. If the Compass is such a good deal, why hasn't the IDFG been more forthright in advertising it and extolling its virtues? Why no explanation of the linkage between federal funds, the need for state matching funds and the Compass?

The need to keep species off the Threatened or Endangered Species (TES) lists is legitimate and real, but the Compass is completely unnecessary should the Idaho Fish and Game Commission and the Idaho Legislature embark on a process to significantly realign and reorganize Idaho's fish and wildlife related responsibilities.

The Office of Species Conservation (OSC) is a perfect fit for much of the non-game and Threatened or Endangered Species (TES) programs that drain the revenues and dilute the political power of Idaho sportsmen.

Transferring the IDFG Natural Resources Policy Bureau (NRPB) into the OSC would be an extremely efficient initial step that would prepare OSC for the tasks it inherits. The NRPB is a costly entity that deals with other governmental agencies and extreme environmental organizations on a regular basis. By transferring the NRPB non-game and TES functions out of the IDFG and into OSC, along with those IDFG personnel who have performed those NRPB non-game and TES functions, the IDFG can remain a hook and bullet department as mandated in Title 36 of the Idaho Code. OSC would fund the salaries and overhead expenses of those transferred to it and their overhead and OSC could contract some of its required work with the IDFG based on appropriate levels of remuneration. IDFG would only be responsible for hunted, fished and trapped species along with predators such as coyotes. IDFG would provide co-management input for such species as TES salmon, steelhead and sage grouse that are presently harvested. Responsibility for TES plants could be transferred to OSC in coordination with the Department of Agriculture or Department of Lands. Watchable Wildlife could be transferred to the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Sportsmen have long questioned the methods and integrity of the analysis and reporting of public comment received by IDFG and further reported to the IDFG Commission. The CSI had concern for the IDFG content analysis of the Compass-related public comment reported to the IDFG Commission at the July 2004 Commission meeting. The CSI engaged the services of EcoSocial Analysts, LLC to do a content analysis on the public comment received by the IDFG. That report is found at enclosure 5. An EcoSocial Analysts, LLC representative will give a report of their findings to the Idaho Fish and Game Commission in Orofino.

The Compass, driven by heavy federal pressure, is meant to dilute the influence of sportsmen and increase the influence of extreme environmentalists on Idaho's fish and wildlife. An implemented Compass will result in higher taxes in Idaho or at the very least fewer tax dollars spent on public safety, health and welfare, education and other vital budget areas once the IDFG agenda is supplemented by general revenues. The Compass is not good for Idaho sportsmen, outfitters, farmers, ranchers, woolgrowers,

*Continued on page 12*

Continued from page 11

loggers, mill owners and others in the business community.

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission and the Idaho Legislature can either bow to this federal intimidation or boldly organize and act to get the IDFG entirely out of the non-game and TES business. Let the OSC raise the necessary revenues to do a fiscally responsible job of tending to the non-game and the TES species

Jim Hagedorn, President  
Concerned Sportsmen of Idaho



Dee Eldridge & Patti Dovel with moose she killed on Nov. 4, 2004

## Good News From Alaska and Maine

Despite substantial contributions from HSUS and other national animal rights groups, the effort by local extremists to ban bear baiting failed to pass by a large margin on election day.

Alaskans are apparently tired of well funded organizations from the "lower 48" interfering with the state's game and predator management. Recent setbacks with Alaska's Governor and courts have apparently taken some of the wind out of the sails of those who denounce aerial predator control and trapping.

The effort to defeat the initiative was lead by Alaskans For professional Wildlife Management, the coalition which included the local Safari Club Chapter and the National Rifle Association.

In Maine Question 2, which would have made it a crime to hunt bear with bait, traps or dogs, was also defeated but by a smaller margin. Idaho's defeat of a similar initiative several years ago was cited by the NRA which helped defeat the Maine initiative.

As legislators and biologists learn more about proper game management groups like Defenders of Wildlife and Friends of Animals will seek other causes to raise funds.

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

To receive future bulletins, please fill out and clip the coupon below and mail it with your donation to:

**The Outdoorsman**  
**P.O. Box 155**  
**Horseshoe Bend, ID 83629**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Amount Enclosed \_\_\_\_\_