

Hunting wolves is a tough game. I know. I did it. Hunting will not control wolves. Sincerely, Val Geist

Wolves scarce during special hunt

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By Eric Barker of the Tribune

Outfitters have reported two kills in season that ends June 30

The wolf control partnership between the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and four Lolo Zone outfitters has been slow to produce results.

Outfitters reported killing just two wolves as of Monday in a special season that began last month.

"It's difficult catching up with these wolves in rugged country, steep country and heavily timbered country," said Dave Cadwallader, supervisor of the department's Clearwater Region at Lewiston. "That has been the challenge from day one. Even hunters during the long season didn't hit the quota."

Last month, the department authorized four outfitters to kill as many as five wolves each, for a total of 20, during the spring black bear hunting season. Outfitters and their licensed guides are permitted to hunt wolves during the short season that ends June 30.

Cadwallader said the Kamiah-based Flying B Ranch killed two wolves in the Weitas Creek drainage. The others, Boulder Creek Outfitters based out of Peck, B Bar C Outfitters based out of St. Maries, and Cayuse Outfitters based out of Kamiah, have not reported any wolf kills. The outfitters have 72 hours to report kills.

The department authorized the special hunt it characterizes as a wolf-control activity, to help reduce predation on the Lolo elk herd.

The number of elk in the zone has been in a long-term decline. In the 1980s, game surveys showed a Lolo elk population of more than 16,000. Last winter's survey predicted the herd now numbers about 2,100.

Fish and Game officials say wolf predation is now the primary cause of elk mortality in the zone made up of hunting units 10 and 12 in the upper Clearwater Basin.

Idaho conducted a seven-month long wolf hunting season in much of the state last fall. The department set a statewide harvest goal of 220 wolves. Hunters killed 188. But the state was divided into 12 wolf hunting zones and each zone had an individual harvest goal. Hunters met the quota in many areas, such as the Dworshak/Elk City, Hells Canyon/Palouse and the Middle Fork zones. But hunters killed only 13 wolves out of a harvest quota of 27 in the Lolo.

The Lolo zone is remote, with limited access and is characterized by steep, brushy slopes that give wolves and other wildlife ample cover and escape routes. Cadwallader is hoping hunters will have another chance to harvest wolves this fall.

Federal Judge Donald Molloy is conducting a hearing on the status of gray wolves in his Missoula, Mont., courtroom today. A coalition of environmental and animal rights groups is suing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and hopes to have wolves in Idaho and Montana placed back under federal protection that does not provide for hunting.

"Hopefully we will be allowed to continue that and have a hunting season this fall and progress to long-term management of another big game species in Idaho and keep our hunters involved and engaged and as time goes on people will see they are not easily taken as everybody thought," he said. "It takes a lot of time and effort. Outfitters are as good as anybody and they are having difficulties."

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