

Update on Sage-Grouse for the
Natural Resource Interim Committee
September 17, 2014

BLM/USFS EIS Timeline

- The State (IDFG, OSC, and Governor's Office) is assisting BLM and US Forest Service in development of the final alternative in the Idaho/southwest Montana EIS.
- The EIS team will be working on the effects analyses this fall.
- BLM expects to submit a draft of the final EIS to the BLM Washington DC office in November.
- BLM anticipates releasing the EIS for public review in February.
- There is a 30 day protest period and 30-60 day Governor's consistency review.
- BLM anticipates the Record of Decision will be in April, 2015.
 - Original target date was September 2014.

USFWS Timeline

- Court approved settlement directs FWS to publish a proposed decision if sage-grouse warrant listing or not by September 30, 2015.
 - Becoming more unlikely that deadline will be met.
 - Secretary of Interior can extend the deadline by 6 months.
- FWS is currently collecting conservation efforts data that will be used in their assessment.
 - The Department and Idaho Department of Lands will submit data by the end of October 2014, including;
 - Acres of juniper removed.
 - Wildfire burned acres rehabbed.
 - Feet of fence marked.
 - Support of three NRCS Sage-Grouse Initiative biologists (stationed in Rexburg, Burley, and Mt. Home) providing technical assistance on private lands.
 - Creation of five Rural-land Fire Protection Associations (RFPAs).

Sage-Grouse Counts

- The Department, with the assistance of federal agency biologists and volunteers, counted 1,440 of the 2,237 known lek locations in Idaho.
 - Idaho has spent approximately \$14 million since 2001 on sage-grouse management and research. A majority of these funds are sportsman's dollars (license and federal excise tax on firearms and ammunition).
- Male attendance at lek routes was up 6% as compared to 2013 but is still down from the long-term average.
- The Legislature appropriated funds to the Governor's Office of Species Conservation to increase efforts counting leks in 2014 and 2015.
 - Approximately 400 more leks were counted in 2014 using these funds.

Raven Control Update, September 17, 2014

2014 Actions

FY14 Budget Instruction, Senate Bill No. 1171. "Legislative Intent: It is the intent of the legislature that the Department of Agriculture work together with the Department of Fish and Game to fund up to \$100,000 for a project to evaluate and monitor the impacts of raven control on sage grouse survival."

The Department received a scientific collecting permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to remove ravens at 3 study sites in southern Idaho.

- The permit allows the take of 1,750 ravens and 250 eggs each year, in 2014 and 2015.
- Lethal control may include a combination of poisoning, shooting, and removing raven nests and eggs.

The Department requested that USDA APHIS-Wildlife Services assist us by using the corvicide DRC-1339.

- Wildlife Services needed to complete a supplemental Environmental Assessment to conduct the work. The public comment period for the supplemental ended on April 8, 2014.
- Wildlife Services was not able to get the supplemental EA approved in time to assist us in 2014.

The Department, therefore, conducted baiting and shooting of ravens and nest/egg removal. This action was conducted by Department Conservation Officers.

- Officers operated about 11 bait stations 2 times per week. The effectiveness of these methods was considerably less than utilization of DRC-1339.
- **Officers killed 12 ravens and removed 17 nests with 69 eggs.**
- In total, they spent 266 hours on the project, which is about 22 hours per adult raven killed.

Results of raven control efforts in Idaho, 2014.

Raven Control Area	# of ravens killed	# of nests removed	# of eggs destroyed	# of hours
Greater Curlew Valley	9	17	69	97
Zone 8B (INL, Birch Cr)	0	0	0	89
West Central	3	0	0	80
Statewide	12	17	69	266

In order to gain a better understanding of raven distribution and densities, Department staff conducted surveys for ravens in conjunction with sage-grouse lek routes throughout southern Idaho.

- 653 raven surveys were completed throughout sage-grouse habitat.
- Features that may subsidize raven populations, such as elevated structures, were also recorded.
- These data are currently being analyzed and a project report is expected by October 8. This information will also form the basis of a raven management plan.

Preliminary estimates are that the **Department spent \$23,090** (\$2,003 in operating and \$21,087 in personnel) on raven activities in 2014.

2015 Planning

Department staff met with Wildlife Services in July 2014 to determine a future course of action.

- Wildlife Services offices nationwide are required to re-do all NEPA documents for their predator control activities.
- Wildlife Services Idaho will include the option of raven control to benefit special-status species, such as sage-grouse in a new Environmental Assessment.
- The public comment period for the EA is expected in December.

Idaho Wolf Management Update – September 17, 2014

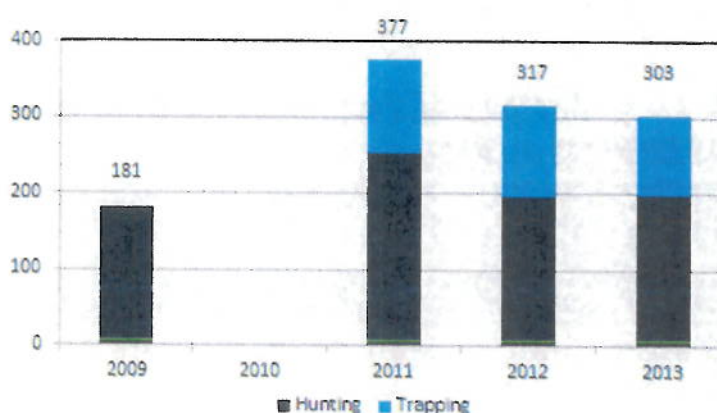
Wolf Season Changes

- Season adjustments have been made incrementally each year.
- Statewide bag limit of 5 wolves per hunter and 5 wolves per trapper
- Year-round wolf hunting on private land in the Panhandle, Clearwater Regions
- 43,000 wolf hunting tags and 500 wolf trapping tags purchased during 2013

Wolf Harvest

- More liberal seasons have not increased total harvest
- With harvest, mean pack size has decreased from 8.1 to 5.4 wolves per pack

Idaho Wolf Harvest by Hunting Season



Wolf Monitoring

- Under the 2009 delisting rule, IDFG is required to document the presence of a minimum of 150 wolves and 15 breeding pairs (an adult male, an adult female, and at least 2 pups as of Dec. 31) annually. Monitoring is a top priority.
- At the end of 2013, a minimum of 659 wolves were estimated in 107 documented packs
- This number has declined 23% since harvest began in 2009.
- 20 packs were documented as breeding pairs at the end of 2013
- Since January 1, IDFG, Nez Perce Tribe, and USDA Wildlife Services staff have captured and radio-collared 59 wolves, including 27 pups marked with light weight radio collars
- To date, 33 of 107 documented wolf packs are radio-collared.
- Monitoring is becoming more expensive as wolf numbers decrease. We are continually exploring new techniques.
- Approximately \$700,000 in monitoring costs for this year
- This will be the last year we have federal funding

Idaho Wolf Management Update – September 17, 2014

Wolf Control

- IDFG hired a trapper to target wolves in the Middle Fork Elk Zone to reduced impacts on the declining elk population. 9 wolves were killed
- IDFG requested WS for aerial control in the Lolo Zone. 23 wolves were killed
- From January 1 – August 31, 2014, 2013, USDA Wildlife Services killed 23 wolves in response to 38 depredations in which 20 cattle, 63 sheep, and 3 dogs were killed by wolves (Table 1).
- The number of livestock depredations during August 2014 was the lowest recorded since 2004.
- The Idaho Wolf Control Board will result in enhanced funding for control actions

Table 1. Confirmed wolf depredations and mortalities in Idaho, 2003 to August 31, 2014 (preliminary data).

CALENDAR YEAR	Confirmed Depredation incidents	Depredations				Wolf Mortality					
		Cattle	Sheep	Dogs	Total	WS	IDFG Control Action	10j / 36-1107	Other	Calendar Year Harvest	Total
2003		7	130	3	140	7		0	8		15
2004		19	176	4	199	17		0	21		38
2005		29	166	12	207	24		3	16		43
2006		41	237	4	282	35		7	19		61
2007	84	57	211	10	278	43		7	27		77
2008	144	104	215	14	333	94		14	45		153
2009	146	76	295	14	385	87		6	45	135	273
2010	109	75	148	0	223	67		13	18	46	144
2011	109	71	121	6	198	37	13	13	33	200	296
2012	122	73	312	2	387	59	14	2	21	329	425
2013	78	40	404	5	449	74	17	3	22	356	472
2014 Through 8/31 only	38	20	63	3	86	23	25	1	11	111	171