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.
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 corvidicide 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.

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

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.
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

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 lightweight 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
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).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CALENDAR YEAR</th>
<th>Confirmed Depredation incidents</th>
<th>Depredations</th>
<th>Wolf Mortality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>Dogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>176</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>237</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>84</td>
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<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
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<td>73</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through 8/31 only</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>63</td>
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