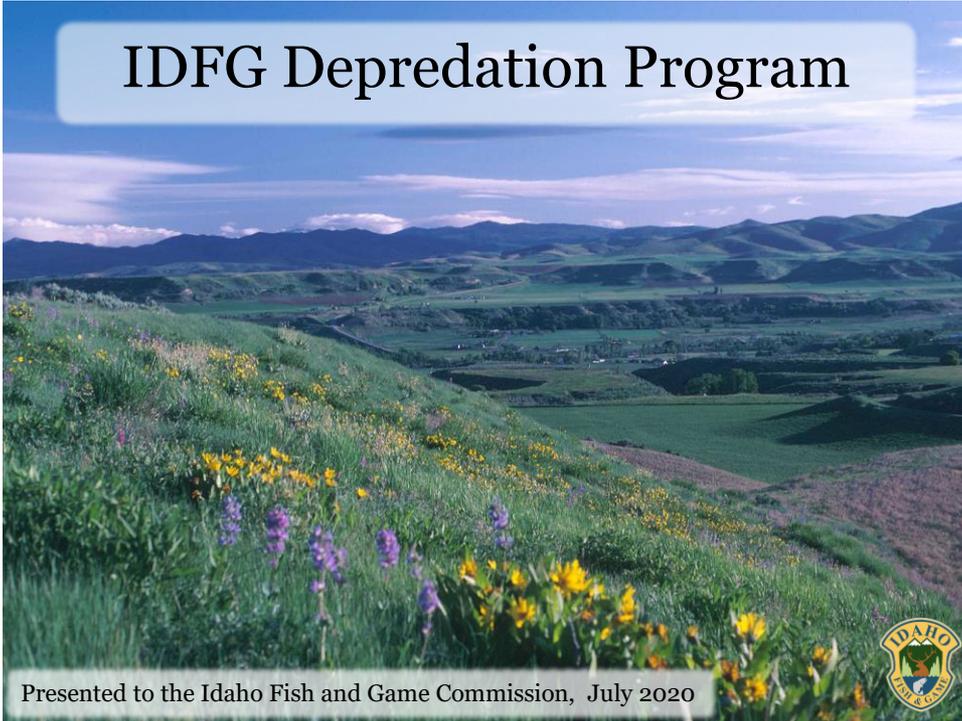


IDFG Depredation Program



Presented to the Idaho Fish and Game Commission, July 2020

Landowner-Sportsman Program History

- Established 1984 to provide technical assistance and materials.
- Fish & Game Advisory Committee created in 1989
 - Program expanded: compensation became available for damage caused by deer, elk, pronghorn, moose, black bear & mtn lions (delisted grizzlies added in 2008)
- Administered by a Landowner/Sportsman Coordinator in each region with guidance from Wildlife Bureau staff
- Components:
 - Depredation Prevention and Compensation
 - Landowner Appreciation Program (LAP)
 - Access programs



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Goal: *to improve relationships among Idaho's landowners, sportsmen, and the Department*



Depredation Prevention & Compensation

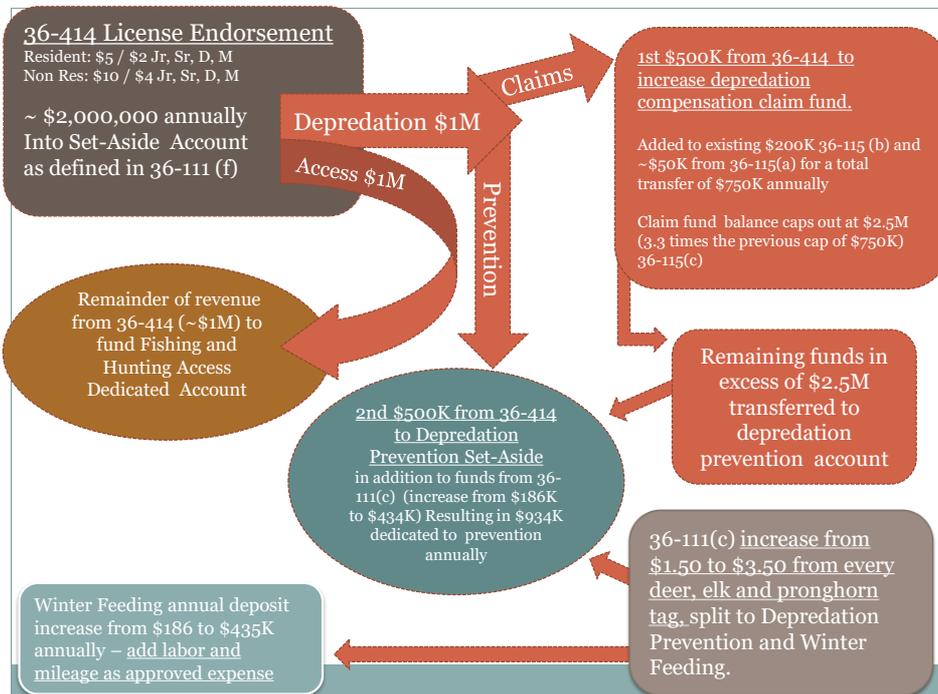
- Program founded on principle of shared responsibility
 - ✓ *“Prevention of depredation shall be a priority management objective of the department,”*
 - ✓ *and it is the obligation of landowners to take all reasonable steps to prevent property loss from wildlife or to mitigate damages by wildlife*
- Goal is prevention & long-term solutions



(2017) H.B. 230, S.B. 1118 changes

- Access/deprecation fee (\$5 res & \$10 non-res)
- Modified hunter access requirement for filing
- Notification changed from 10 to 20 days (electronic ok)
- Damage liability changed from 10 to 20 days prior

- Lowered damage amount/deductible from \$1,000 to \$750
- Provided for retention of animal - kill permit
- Claims submitted within first 60 days of next fiscal year if occurred in last 60 days of FY



Increased Capacity



Funding and prioritization:

- 7 additional technicians (1 per region)
- Seasonal hunt coordinator (Salmon region)
- Seasonal/volunteer hazing staff (all regions)
- Consolidation of landowner programs in HQ

This increase in capacity and consistent oversight of program administration is intended to result in quicker, more efficient responses for landowners



2019 Legislative Session



Additional changes to deprecation statutes:

Limit on individual claims to 10% of annual appropriate

- (Max claim = \$110,000)

Added additional damages eligible for compensation:

- Seed beds
- Irrigation equipment



Streamlining of Process

1. **New landowner guide**
 - Farm Bureau engagement
2. **New Depredation webpage**
 - Downloadable forms
 - Additional resources
 - Current statutes and rules
3. **Removal of notary requirement on forms**
4. **New fencing materials agreement**
 - Allows for quick reimbursement of materials
5. **Changed guidance on “reasonable access”**
 - Fully consider any access being provided by a landowner.
 - Access in response to depredation - remove prior year
 - No access may be the best solution in specific cases

Implemented with intent of a quicker turn-around of claims and less work for landowners.



Depredation Prevention & Compensation

- Respond to over 1,000 complaints annually



- Process ≥ 85 claims for payment annually last 2 years



Prevention: Sportsmen



- Hunts designed to reduce numbers or change behavior of depredating wildlife
- Depredation and Landowner Permission Hunts (LPH) provide landowner oversight and control of hunters



Prevention: Hunting seasons



During the 2017 and 2018 hunting seasons:

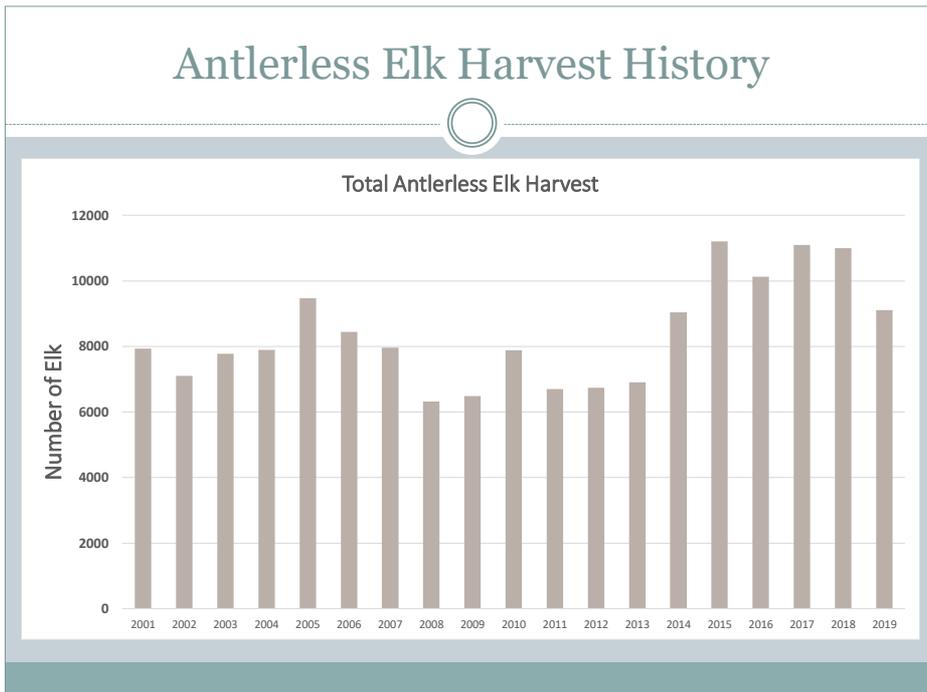
- 460 additional controlled bull elk tags
- 6,840 additional controlled cow elk tags.
- 3,000 extra controlled cow elk tags
 - includes Landowner Permission Hunts
- Weiser River Zone
 - antlerless controlled hunt to general season hunt



2019 / 2020 season setting provided additional emphasis on targeting deer and elk impacting private lands. Antlerless CHs in Smoky-Bennett, Pioneer, Big Desert, and South Hills converted to general rifle seasons.



Antlerless Elk Harvest History



Depredation Prevention

Stored crops:

- > 340 stack yards built in the last 4+ years (\$1.4M+)
- ~ dozen stack yards planned for spring/summer 2020
- Landowners provided material to protect stored forage



Other Tools

Winter range restorations:

- Seeded public lands to increase/improve forage to entice wildlife away from private land (~ \$423K spent over last two years on winter range rehab).

Fencing mitigation:

- While IDFG is not statutorily liable for damage to fencing, Dept works with landowners to upgrade fences for better big game passage to reduce future damage.

Research on Depredation Prevention

- **Cameras**
 - Investigate real-time notification of depredations to provide immediate hazing or lethal response
- **Radio collars**
 - Examine the movements of depredating animals to better manage them during regular hunting seasons
- **Hazing techniques**
 - Test new methods of changing animal behavior – motion detectors



Research on Depredation Prevention

- Collaborative research with University of Idaho
 - Fear-inducing treatments (noise/scent/motion and dogs)
 - Taste-based deterrents (bitter taste and nausea)
 - Exclusion with temporary modifications to existing fences
 - Targeted lethal removal
 - Drones to count/haze animals



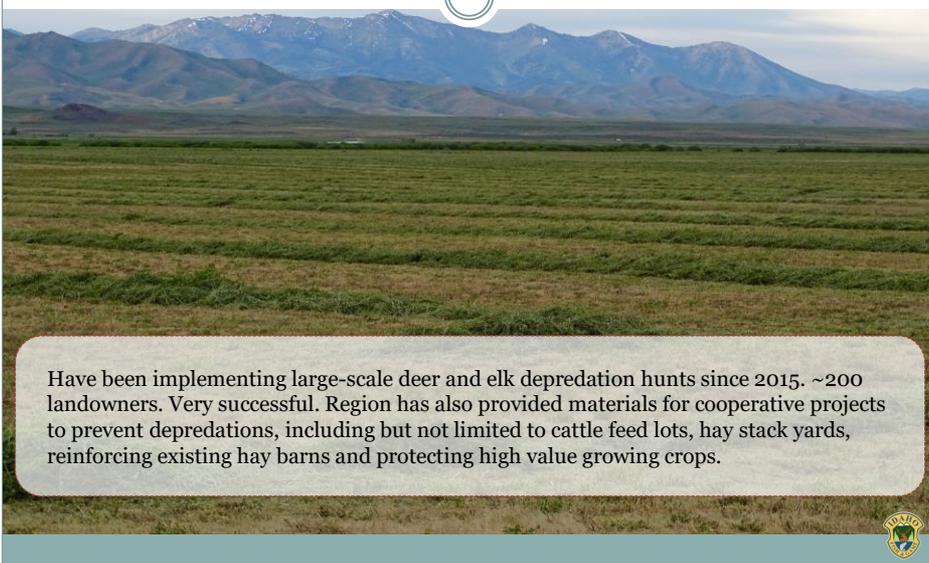
Compensation & Claims

- Idaho Code 36-115 created a big game depredation account to be used to pay compensation for damage caused by wildlife to agricultural crops, stored feed, private pasture and rangeland, livestock, bees, hives, and honey.
- Damage that can't be prevented is eligible for compensation.

Compensation & Claims

- To be eligible, landowner must notify department w/in 72 hours of noticing damage; allow Dept opportunity to assess damage; and allow reasonable access to hunters.
 - *“The owner or lessee must have allowed hunters reasonable access to the property or through the property to public lands for hunting purposes during the preceding hunting season or as a measure of response to depredation, provided such access does not impact on their operations.”*
- Director may pay not more than half of the amount of claim at time filed, then balance paid after all claims totaled at end of fiscal year.
 - If balance in account is sufficient, balance of claims will be paid in full
 - Otherwise balance payments will be pro-rated and paid proportionally based on remaining balance in the expendable depredation account.

Region 1



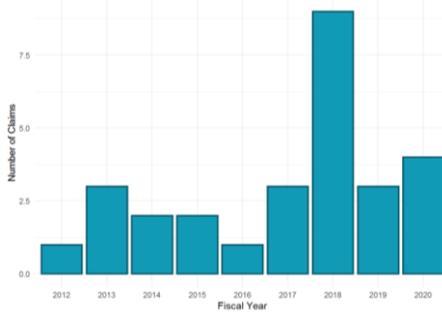
Have been implementing large-scale deer and elk depredation hunts since 2015. ~200 landowners. Very successful. Region has also provided materials for cooperative projects to prevent depredations, including but not limited to cattle feed lots, hay stack yards, reinforcing existing hay barns and protecting high value growing crops.



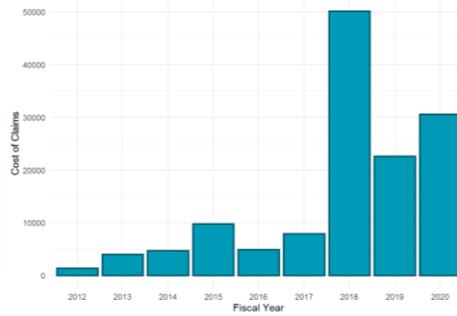
Region 1



Number of claims per year - Region 1



Cost of claims per year - Region 1



Region 2



Clearwater Region responds to 50-100 depredation complaints in a year.

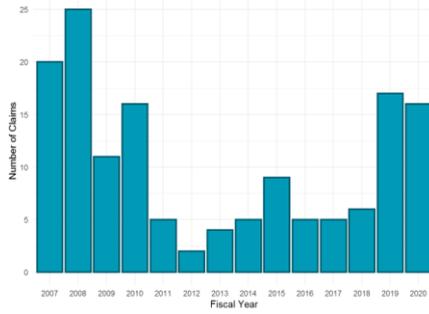
Winter depredations are driven by weather. Spring often sees deer and elk trampling and grazing on emerging/newly seeded crops. Summer is the most active time for depredations due to the limited forage in canyons. In Fall, depredations are largely controlled using general and controlled hunt seasons. Staff administers Landowner Permission Hunts and facilitates connecting sportsmen to landowners with depredations.



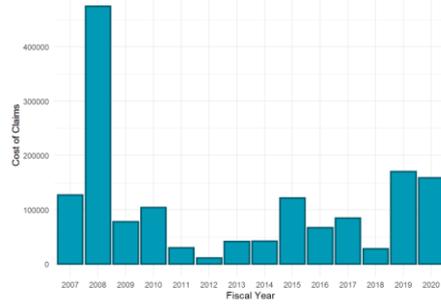
Region 2



Number of claims per year - Region 2



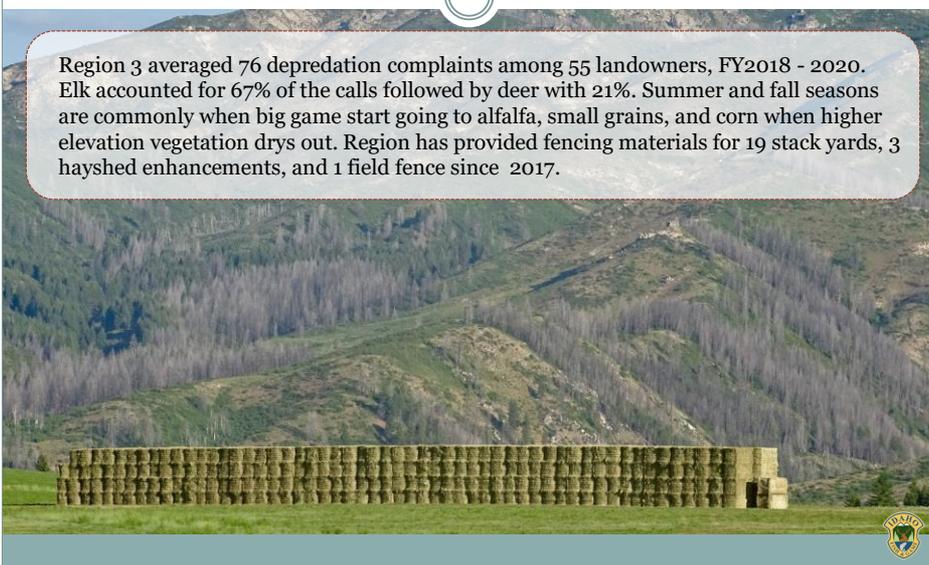
Cost of claims per year - Region 2



Region 3



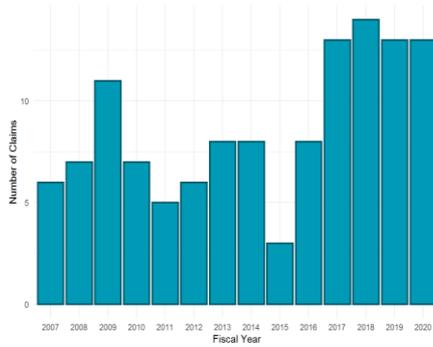
Region 3 averaged 76 depredation complaints among 55 landowners, FY2018 - 2020. Elk accounted for 67% of the calls followed by deer with 21%. Summer and fall seasons are commonly when big game start going to alfalfa, small grains, and corn when higher elevation vegetation dries out. Region has provided fencing materials for 19 stack yards, 3 hayshed enhancements, and 1 field fence since 2017.



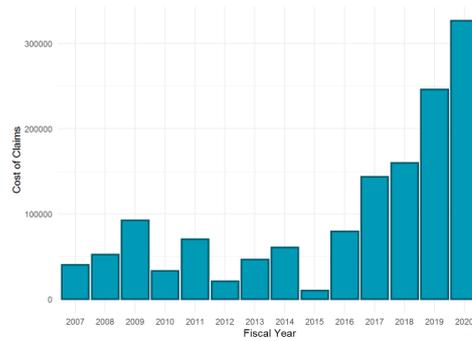
Region 3



Number of claims per year - Region 3



Cost of claims per year - Region 3



Region 4



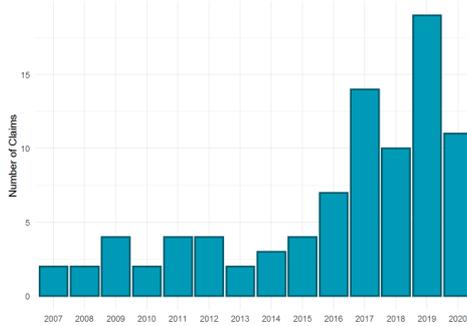
Most damage is caused by elk. All Magic Valley elk zones are at or above population and objectives. In 2019 over-the-counter antlerless elk hunts were implemented in all zones. Where public hunting access is not allowed or feasible, regional personnel and landowners have lethally removed elk. In last 3 years, the region annually responded to ~150 big-game depredation complaints, implemented ~14 emergency depredation hunts, and issued 30 kill permits (allowing the take of 90 animals). Since 2018, permanent stackyard materials have been provided to 16 landowners.



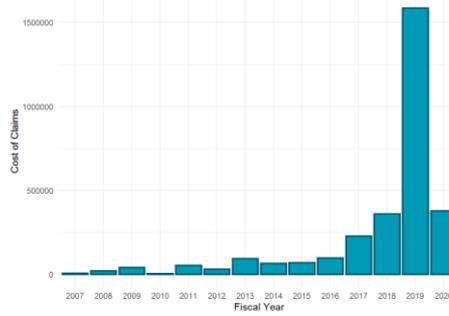
Region 4



Number of claims per year - Region 4



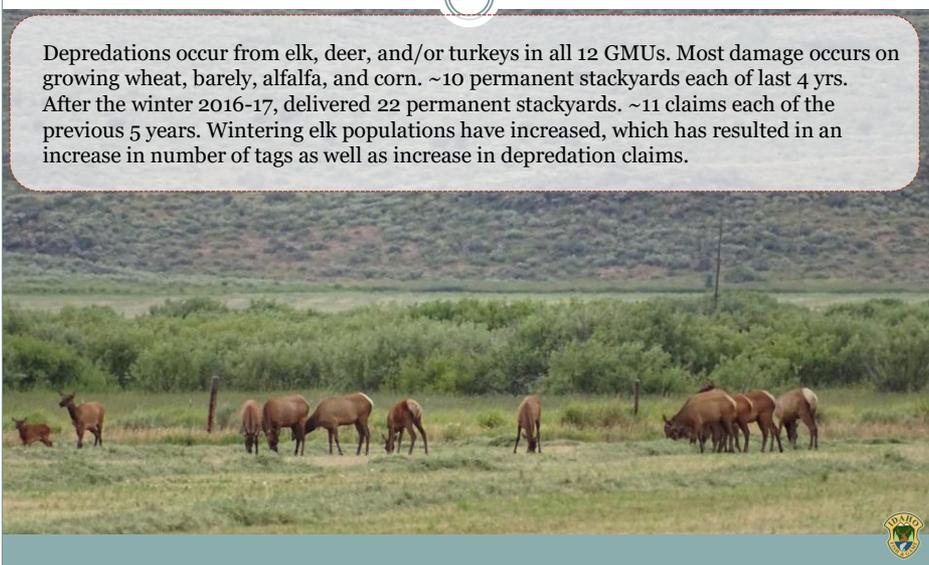
Cost of claims per year - Region 4



Region 5



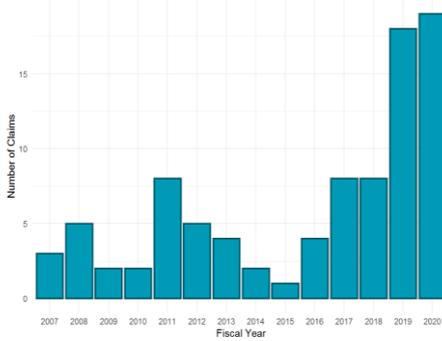
Depredations occur from elk, deer, and/or turkeys in all 12 GMUs. Most damage occurs on growing wheat, barely, alfalfa, and corn. ~10 permanent stackyards each of last 4 yrs. After the winter 2016-17, delivered 22 permanent stackyards. ~11 claims each of the previous 5 years. Wintering elk populations have increased, which has resulted in an increase in number of tags as well as increase in depredation claims.



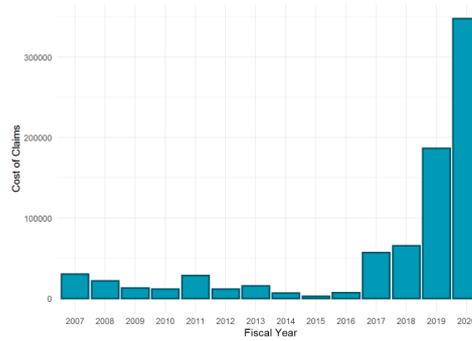
Region 5



Number of claims per year - Region 5



Cost of claims per year - Region 5



Region 6



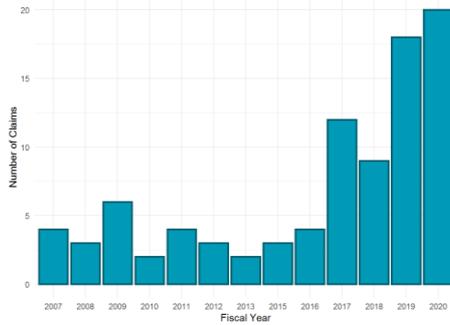
Unit 50 remains the highest concern for elk depredations; Unit 63 has the most pronghorn depredations. Teton Basin and surrounding area has had an increase in elk depredations with many of these elk migrating to lower elevations around during the winter. Unit 69 has seen newer elk depredations with some herds remaining in wintering areas instead of migrating back. Pronghorn and elk depredations remain high in unit 63 due to the INL and Camas NWR. Large desert wildfires last year led to animals finding forage in agricultural fields and haystacks. Deer depredations remain relatively stable on agricultural land but are increasing in residential areas throughout the region.



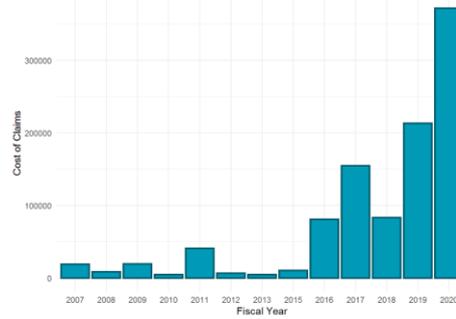
Region 6



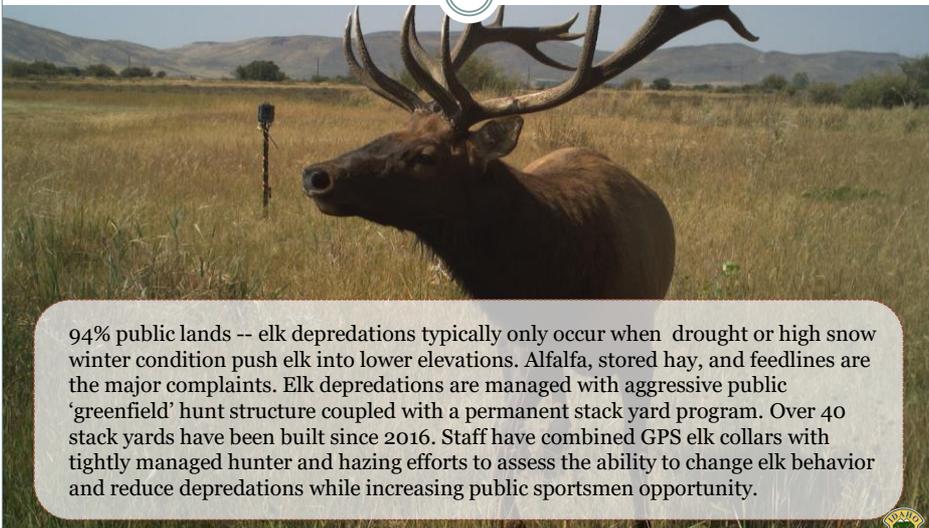
Number of claims per year - Region 6



Cost of claims per year - Region 6



Region 7



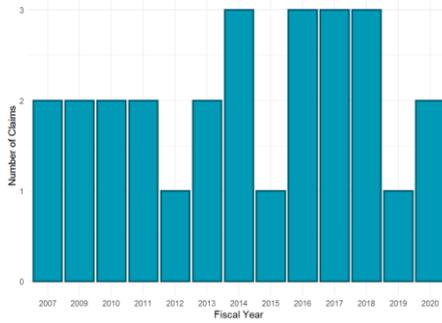
94% public lands -- elk depredations typically only occur when drought or high snow winter condition push elk into lower elevations. Alfalfa, stored hay, and feedlines are the major complaints. Elk depredations are managed with aggressive public 'greenfield' hunt structure coupled with a permanent stack yard program. Over 40 stack yards have been built since 2016. Staff have combined GPS elk collars with tightly managed hunter and hazing efforts to assess the ability to change elk behavior and reduce depredations while increasing public sportsmen opportunity.



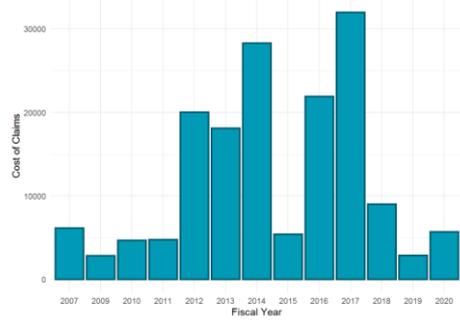
Region 7



Number of claims per year - Region 7



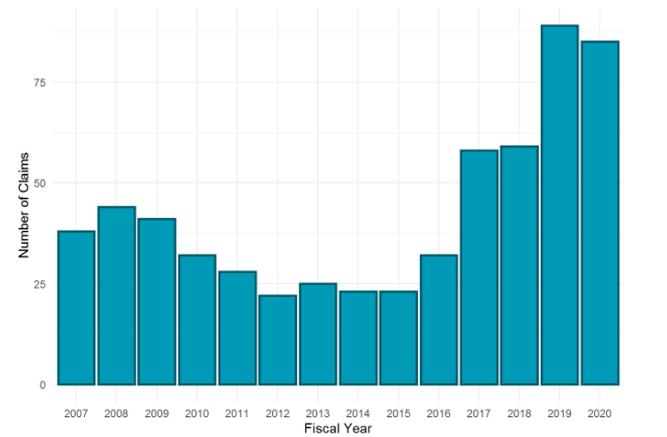
Cost of claims per year - Region 7



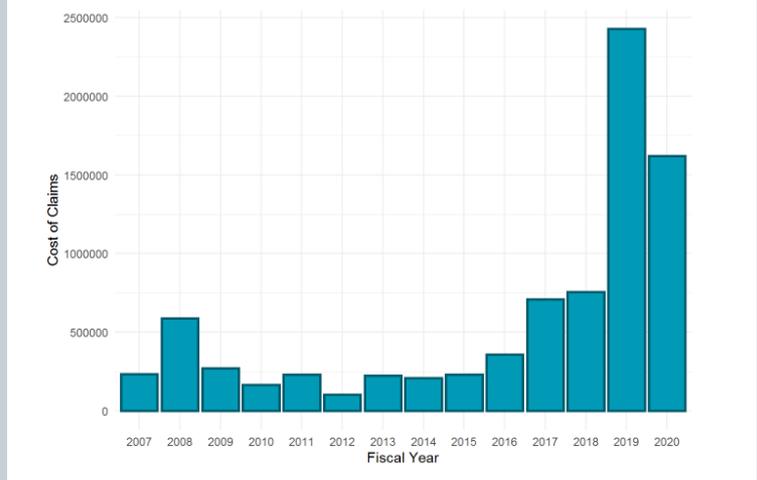
Statewide



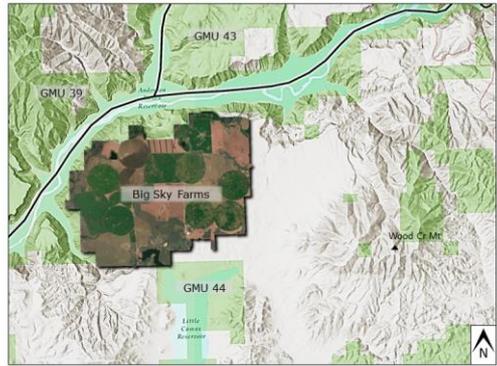
Number of claims per year - Statewide



Statewide



Big Sky Farms-Case Study



History



- Since 2017 regional staff have been actively engaged in depredation prevention efforts at Big Sky Farms.
- In 2018 the region implemented night time sharpshooting in response to increasing elk numbers (~450), escalating damages. Despite efforts, including the lethal removal of over 80 elk, damages resulted in a \$1.2 million claim.
- 2019-Despite intensive efforts by the region to mitigate elk damage (removal 106 elk), substantial damages still occurred. While damage estimates in 2019 were nearly 75% lower than estimates in 2018, total damages still exceeded \$270,000.



Elk Trampling in Kamut

(photo by claims adjuster)



Challenges

- Traditional tools for depredation relief, like non-lethal hazing, LPH hunts, landowner kill permits, and depredation hunts have proven ineffective.
- Seen shift in elk behavior to nocturnal activity.
- Landownership patterns.
- Must use actions that do not jeopardize the farm's organic status.



2020 Proposed Actions

- Additional 3 elk radio-collared in July (5 total)
- Monitor elk locations daily and implement non-lethal preventative efforts immediately after elk are observed
 - Continued non-lethal actions if elk are effectively deterred
 - If elk return within 8-hours of a hazing event, non-lethal actions considered ineffective
- Lethal actions on antlerless elk will be implemented immediately if non-lethal actions ineffective
 - (estimate of 300 elk using Big Sky Farms).
- Goal- remove 2 – 3 antlerless elk/shooting event should effectively limit the herd from increasing in size.
 - Number of elk removed will not exceed 135 (est cost \$62,000).



What about the Meat?



- Elk will be field dressed and all legally required and edible meat will be retained.
- Meat will be immediately stored and frozen, and delivered to a professional processing facility.
- Processed meat will be distributed to local food pantries by Idaho Hunters Feeding the Hungry.
- IDFG will seek help from the general public interested in assisting with field dressing, carcass disposal, and transportation of meat to processing facilities.



Trapping and Translocating



- Goal: Implement a trap and translocation program to reduce the size of the elk herd.
- Trapping will occur: early fall and mid-spring.
 - Only antlerless elk will be relocated.
 - IDFG would aim to move approximately 100 antlerless elk
 - × (70 in fall and 30 in spring).
- Elk will be trapped using a baited corral trap, or by driving elk into a corral trap via helicopter.



Trapping and Translocating

(continued)



- All elk will be tested for disease following USDA/ISDA protocols prior to release. Elk testing seropositive for brucellosis will be slaughtered for additional lab testing (brucellosis, TAHD, and CWD).
- Release Sites: TBD
- Costs: Estimated costs are \$46,640 for operations and \$48,960 for personnel



Key Take-aways



- Program has grown tremendously and by necessity
- Despite increased funding and intensive multi-focused prevention efforts, number of claims and total costs have grown.
- Despite increased funding for compensation, expendable depredation fund has not grown as expected.
- Demands for staff time for prevention and compensation has increased.

Key Take-aways (con't)



- Increase in conflicts and costs are result of multiple factors: difficult-to-resolve depredations on high dollar crops (elk in corn, organic crops), severe weather conditions (severe winters, summer drought), robust deer, elk, and pronghorn populations near agriculture, private land refugia (no sportsmen access) adjacent to crops.
- Since program was implemented in 1989, claims have been paid in full every year Except FY2008 and FY2020.

Key Take-aways (con't)



- Without additional statutory/policy changes, prorating of depredation claims may become the new normal rather than the rare exception.

