

MINUTES
HOUSE RESOURCES & CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

DATE: Thursday, April 22, 2021

TIME: 1:30 P.M.

PLACE: Room EW40

MEMBERS: Chairman Gibbs, Vice Chairman Lickley, Representatives Moyle, Wood, Boyle, Vander Woude, Gestrin, Mendive, Kauffman, Blanksma, Addis, Moon, Manwaring, Okuniewicz, Yamamoto, Rubel, Davis (Burns), Mathias

**ABSENT/
EXCUSED:** Chairman Gibbs

GUESTS: Ed Schriever and Paul Kline, Idaho Department of Fish and Game; Doris Ann Asmus-Jones, self; Naomi LeGere-Gordon, Idaho Wool Growers Association; Zak Miller and Chyla Wilson, Idaho Farm Bureau; Jay Smith, Cameron Mulrony, and Wyatt Prescott, Idaho Cattle Association; Ron Ford, self; Jonathan Oppenheimer, Idaho Conservation League; Zoey Hanley, Defenders of Wildlife; Brody Harshbarger, Harshbarger Farms; Steve Miller, self; Rusty Kramer, Idaho Trappers Association; Chase Whittaker, Whittaker Commercial Cattle; Royce Schwenkfelder, Weiser River Cattle Association; Aaron Lieberman, Idaho Outfitters and Guides Association; Clayton Mecham, self

Chairman Lickley called the meeting to order at 1:31pm.

MOTION: **Rep. Mathias** made a motion to approve the minutes of the April 15, 2021 meeting.
Motion carried by voice vote.

S 1211: **Senator Burtenshaw**, District 35, stated he is here today representing the cattlemen, wool growers, outfitters, trappers, and sportsmen. He explained, work began on a wolf bill in February after the Idaho Department of Fish and Game released the latest state-wide wolf count. Many versions of wolf bills were drafted by several legislators, but during the two-week recess of the Session in late March, the cattlemen, wool growers, outfitters, trappers, and with limited input, the Department drafted **S 1211**. Senator Burtenshaw clarified the purpose of **S 1211** is to expand the options and opportunities to control the wolf population in Idaho, not to wipe out 90% of the population.

Senator Burtenshaw provided an overview of the amendments to **Idaho Code, Section 22-5304** as outlined in **S 1211**. The amendments will allow the addition of private contractors that can be hired by the Wolf Control Board to take wolves; the annual amount transferred from the Idaho Fish and Game Fund to the Wolf Control Fund will increase from \$110K to \$300K; wolf trapping season will be open year-round on all private property as long as individuals are in compliance with the permission requirements; any method utilized for the take of any wild canine in Idaho will be available for the taking of wolves, and all wolf tags will be valid for hunting, trapping, and snaring in any unit when seasons are open at the time of take. Additionally, there will be no limit to the number of wolf tags an individual can purchase, all appropriate fish and game education requirements must be met, and the reporting requirement for wolves taken without a permit as a result of livestock and domestic animal depredation is increased from 10 to 30 days. With a permit from the Director, wolves may be disposed of by any federal or state agency, private contractor, political subdivision of the state of Idaho, or agency of another state, when the population has exceeded the recovery goal of 150 wolves as stated in the Idaho Wolf Conservation and Management Plan, in an effort to maintain a balance

of all wildlife populations. Any take must be reported within 30 days. The Board will be authorized to renew or transfer these permits to a different contracting party.

Ed Schriever, Director, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, stated he is before the committee today representing the Fish and Game Commission. He stated the Commission shares the bill sponsors' stated objectives to reduce Idaho's wolf population, to reduce wolf predation on livestock and domestic animals, and reduce negative impacts on Idaho's game populations. He indicated the amendments to **Idaho Code, Section 36-201** on page 3, lines 30-33, is counter to the stated intent. The amendments significantly affect the Commission's authority and discretion to adapt seasons for foothold traps and snares on private lands as well as methods of take statewide. He stated it is also inconvenient and impractical for the Legislature to administer Idaho's wildlife policy, but rather should rely on the Commission to adapt to changing conditions when managing Idaho's wildlife, hunting, fishing, and trapping (**Idaho Code, Section 36-103(b)**). He concluded, the proposed amendments to **Idaho Code, Section 36-201** interfere with the Commission's ability to manage wildlife responsibly, so therefore the Commission is **in opposition** to **S 1211**.

In response to committee questions regarding his statement of consequences detrimental to shared objectives, **Director Schriever** provided the following example. Wolf hunting is already open to all units in the state either 11 or 12 months of the year. In some units the trapping season, which includes both foothold traps and snares, is shorter than year-round. Recently, the Commission added a month to the front end of the foothold trapping season, opening it in October rather than November, which doubled the harvest of wolves taken by foothold trapping. The snaring season generally starts mid-November once hound hunters have finished bear hunting. If the Commission were to open the trapping season to all methods available for the taking of coyotes as legal methods of take, it removes the Commission's ability to differentiate a snaring season from a foothold trapping season. As a result, the Commission may have to consider shortening the trapping season in order not to inadvertently kill hounds in snares while under the control of a bear hunter. As written, the language in **S 1211** interferes with the Commission's ability to manage wildlife, impacts hunter/hound safety, and could result in the reduction of the number of wolves taken utilizing foothold traps.

In response to a committee question regarding methods of take of wild canines, **Director Schriever** stated with a permit from the Director, hunting at night with the aid of lights is a legal method of take as is using night vision devices.

Terry Jones, a dairy farmer from Emmett Idaho, **Steve Miller**, a rancher in Blaine County, **Zak Miller**, a rancher from Fremont County, **Chase Whittaker**, a rancher from Lemhi County, and **Royce Schwenkfelder**, a rancher from Cambridge Idaho all spoke **in support** of **S 1211**, indicating they are concerned with the growing number of wolves in Idaho. It was noted that trying to obtain assistance and reimbursement from Fish and Game for loss of livestock was a difficult process with little compensation, if at all. It was also stated since their reintroduction, wolves have caused \$1.6M in losses to cattle, sheep, and guard dogs, a senseless slaughter, and the wolf numbers need to come down.

Naomi LeGere-Gordon, Idaho Wool Growers, spoke **in support** of **S 1211**, stating this bill will make tools available and untie the hands of the wool producers who want to defend their livelihoods from brutal wolf attacks.

Zoey Hanley, Defenders of Wildlife, spoke **in opposition** to **S 1211**, stating this is an assault on Idaho's wolf population on two levels. The first is by opening it to private contractors to hunt and trap wolves with no limit on the number or season to near impunity, and the second is at an institutional level where more financial resources are being made available to the Wolf Depredation Control Board for lethal control measures. She stated important decisions about wildlife management and policy should be based on science, not politics. She indicated, **S 1211** politicizes wolf management in Idaho by stripping the Fish and Game Commission's authority to scientifically manage the wolf and placing the fate of the wolf in the hands of the Legislature, an action the Commission opposed.

Rusty Kramer, Idaho Trappers Association, spoke **in support** of **S 1211**, stating he agrees with **Ms. Hanley** that decisions need to be made based on science, not emotions. He indicated wolves in Idaho are ten times over their carrying capacity and this bill is an attempt to keep conflicts as minor as possible between humans and wolves by providing more tools to manage wolves.

Chyla Wilson, Idaho Farm Bureau, spoke **in support** of **S 1211**, stating all methods of wolf control and management are supported within the Bureau's policies. **S 1211** adds more tools to manage the increasing wolf population in the state.

Jay Smith and Wyatt Prescott, Idaho Cattle Association, spoke **in support** of **S 1211** and the collaborative nature of how this legislation was written. Remarks included noting the wolf population in Idaho is ten times the number necessary and that wolves cost ranchers money when they kill livestock. This lost revenue takes away opportunities to help support local communities, schools, and businesses.

Senator Burtenshaw stood and closed. He stated this is not an attempt to wipe out the wolf population, but rather an attempt to try and gain control of the depredation problem. He clarified, nobody wants to reduce wolf numbers below 150 as stated in the Wolf Conservation and Management Plan or turn wolf management back to the federal government, but rather provide additional tools available to manage wolf populations. He remarked, wolves are apex predators and have successfully increased their numbers and are holding steady at approximately 1,500 wolves statewide. He stated the industry is asking for help and took the lead in drafting **S 1211** to address the wolf problem on private property, not federal or state lands, to be able to take wolves when they see them. He remarked, the status quo is no longer enough.

MOTION: **Rep. Wood** made a motion to send **S 1211** to the floor with a **DO PASS** recommendation. He spoke to his motion recognizing there is a wolf problem and although nobody would recommend poisoning, believes until that method is utilized, it will be hard to make a dent in the wolf population with the more traditional methods of hunting and trapping. He indicated there are areas within **S 1211** that need to be fixed regarding protecting guard dogs from wolf attacks and hounds being accidentally killed in snares, so encourages more work on this bill next Session.

VOTE ON MOTION: **Chairman Lickley** called for a vote on the motion to send **S 1211** to the floor with a **DO PASS** recommendation. **Motion carried by voice vote. Reps. Rubel, Mathias, and Burns** requested to be recorded as voting **NAY. Rep. Moyle** will sponsor the bill on the floor.

ADJOURN: There being no further business to come before the committee, the meeting was adjourned at 2:56pm.

Representative Lickley
Chair

Tracey McDonnell
Secretary