2011 Fish and Game Wolf Season Proposals-Questions and Answers

How many wolves are in Idaho? There are more than 1,000 wolves in Idaho. Fish and Game currently has active radio-collars on more than 70 wolves in Idaho.

What is Fish and Game's wolf management objective? Consistent with the 2002 Idaho Wolf Conservation and Management plan approved by the Idaho Legislature and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Fish and Game's objective is to have a sustainable wolf population while addressing wolf conflicts. To keep state management, Fish and Game must meet federal recovery goals. However, the current population is too high from a conflict standpoint, with wolves approaching homes and communities, killing livestock and domestic animals, and causing too great an impact on elk and deer populations in certain areas. Conflict levels are variable from year to year, but Idaho will manage wolves at levels greater than the federal recovery criteria of 15 breeding pairs and 150 total wolves.

Why does Idaho have to manage wolves and other wildlife? In 1938, the people of Idaho enacted laws by ballot initiative regarding state wildlife resources. The Idaho Legislature has amended these laws, but since 1938 Idaho law has directed the Commission to manage Idaho's wildlife, including managing for a surplus of fish and game to support public hunting, fishing and trapping.

Why does Idaho need to control wolves, black bears and mountain lions where predation suppresses elk, deer, or moose populations? Idaho law, dating back to a 1938 ballot initiative, requires Fish and Game to manage for a surplus of elk, deer, and other wildlife for public harvest. When predation from wolves, mountain lions, or black bears has unacceptable impacts to other game populations, IDFG develops predation management plan to address the situation.

Why is IDFG proposing wolf harvest seasons? In Idaho, regulated public hunting and trapping is the preferred method for addressing wildlife conflicts, whether the conflict comes from predation by wolves, black bears or mountain lions, from elk and deer eating crops, or from beavers damaging property. Idaho's current wolf population is causing unacceptable levels of conflict, so IDFG is proposing hunting and trapping seasons to reduce Idaho's wolf population.

Has IDFG considered options other than public harvest to reduce the wolf population? Relocation, sterilization and other nonlethal measures are not practical on a large scale. A 2009 state law directed IDFG to ask every other state if any wanted Idaho's surplus wolves. No other states did, and the federal government has not offered to move wolves elsewhere. IDFG will conduct agency control actions as needed to address specific conflicts, but state policy is to use public harvest when feasible.

Why is IDFG proposing general seasons in several zones? Idaho uses general seasons with mandatory reporting requirements for most big game species in Idaho. Fish and Game is

proposing general seasons where hunters did not reach harvest limits in 2009, where experience in Idaho and elsewhere indicates that hunter success will continue to be low, and in zones with high conflict levels.

Why is IDFG proposing harvest limits in several zones? In zones with open country where IDFG expects hunter success and agency control actions to be higher, IDFG has proposed harvest limits. Among these zones are two that are late winter/spring dispersal areas between Yellowstone Park and other populations in Montana and Wyoming. (This is a conservative approach because recent research confirms wolves are dispersing throughout the northern Rocky Mountains, and Idaho wolves are breeding with populations in other states and vice versa.)

What protections are in place to prevent overharvest? All wolf harvest must be reported within 72 hours, and skulls and hides must be presented at Fish and Game offices within 10 days, so biologists can record sex, age and other information to monitor harvest. Fish and Game will provide up-to-date harvest numbers by zone on its website. The Director of Fish and Game will close areas or the entire harvest season if mortality is excessive.

Why is IDFG proposing a trapping season? Fish and Game is proposing a trapping season in areas where experience in Idaho, Alaska, and western Canada indicates hunting alone will not be effective in reducing the wolf population. These include areas where access is limited, terrain is difficult, and where wolves are having significant impacts on other big game animals or approaching isolated communities such as Elk City. Fish and Game proposed these areas and this timeframe to allow trapping when pelts are prime, and when there is less potential for conflict with other hunting seasons and recreational uses.

How does IDFG regulate wolf trapping? Commission rules require all trappers to complete a training course before they begin trapping for wolves. There are also rules restricting the placement of traps and the types of traps that may be used.

Will IDFG allow aerial gunning or poisons? Federal law prohibits use of aircraft for public hunting. IDFG and federal agencies may use aircraft for agency control actions in appropriate circumstances. Federal law prohibits poisons for the killing of wolves.

Has IDFG considered the effects of hunting on pack behavior or the wolf breeding cycle? There is research that where harvest (or other mortality) disrupts wolf packs, packs will reform fairly quickly so that the overall wolf population is not affected. IDFG has proposed harvest seasons so they do not overlap with active denning.

What if public hunting and trapping isn't enough to address wolf conflicts? IDFG will continue to authorize agency control actions when needed to address specific wolf conflicts involving populated areas, depredation on livestock or domestic animals, or predation management plans.

Are there any areas that will be closed to wolf hunting and trapping?
Federal law restricts hunting in national parks and national monuments. City ordinances may restrict the discharge of firearms or the use of traps within city limits. There are other areas the Fish and Game Commission may close to public hunting or trapping for reasons of public safety, conflict among uses, or wildlife management considerations.