

MEMO TO FILE

From: Hilary Cooley, Idaho Wolf Recovery Coordinator

 8/25/11

Date: August 24, 2011

Subject: Review of IDFG 2011-2012 Wolf Hunting Regulations

In October 2010, the Idaho Fish and Game Commission rescinded the 2008 Wolf Management Plan, a Service-approved plan, which they had been operating under since 2008. On July 28, 2011, the Idaho Fish and Game Commission approved wolf hunting regulations for the 2011 – 2012 season. These regulations follow the 2002 Wolf Management Plan. In a memo to the Region 6 Solicitor from the Region 6 ARD dated July 6, 2011, the Solicitor outlined three triggers for a status review. One of these triggers is: "a change in State law or management objectives that would significantly increase the threat to the wolf population." We have reviewed the State's 2011-2012 regulations and have determined, for the following reasons, that they do not represent a significant threat to the Idaho wolf population:

- The wolf hunting regulations are consistent with the Service approved Idaho Wolf Conservation and Management Plan. Plan was adopted by the Idaho Legislature in 2002 and approved by the Service in 2004. The 2002 Plan states that IDFG will manage for a population above 150 wolves and 15 breeding pairs, which are the Service's minimum population recovery goals. Idaho continues to indicate their goal is to manage wolves to reduce conflicts, ensure a self-sustaining wolf population and maintain state management authority (IDFG 2011).
- Harvest limits are imposed in areas along the ID/MT/WY border where genetic connectivity is a concern. Wolf hunting will be closed in the Beaverhead and Island Park Zones in December, prior to the peak snowmobile season in Island Park and prior to late-winter/spring wolf dispersal between Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. Genetic diversity is so robust in the GYA that even under a worst case scenario, potential impacts to gene flow and genetic diversity from human caused mortality are unlikely to represent a meaningful threat in the foreseeable future. Finally, the States remain committed to remedial action should monitoring indicate a problem related to this issue, including use of human assisted migration if necessary (Groen et al. 2008).
- Idaho is proposing general seasons (with no statewide harvest objectives) 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 wolf-ungulate and wolf-livestock conflict levels. Many of these same areas are also open for regulated trapping. Harvest limits are proposed in areas where Idaho expects high hunter success and where necessary to ensure Idaho populations remain connected to wolves in other states.
- Despite not having a statewide harvest objective and many areas without quotas, the hunting season will be regulated, with a 72 hour mandatory reporting requirement. The Director of IDFG can close areas or the entire harvest season within 24 hours if mortality is excessive. Wolf harvest will be monitored daily and will be posted to IDFG's website.

Finally, as committed to in the post-delisting monitoring portion of our 2009 delisting rule, around April 1, we will publish an annual analysis of the State's annual wolf population reports and the status of the region's wolf population. This assessment will consider the numbers of packs, breeding pairs, and total number of wolves in mid-winter by State and by recovery area as well as any changes in threats.

Because this analysis will be conducted after official 2011 population data are available, the analysis will allow us to take into account most of the season's hunting and trapping mortality and provide a more complete assessment of the impact of Idaho's hunting and trapping season.