

Idaho Fish and Game agency director retiring

By Nicole Blanchard
The Idaho Statesman

When Virgil Moore leaves the Idaho Department of Fish and Game office for the last time, it won't be without tears.

After more than 40 years in wildlife management, the 67-year-old IDFG director will retire this month, leaving a legacy that includes rebuilding multiple animal populations, managing wolves delisted from the Endangered Species Act and making great strides toward further funding the agency, which cares for all of Idaho's wildlife resources.

"One of the special parts about working in this arena is this agency," Moore told the Statesman in December. "Fish and Game has a special culture that is conducive to long careers — I refer to it as our Fish and Game family, and I mean that in the closest sense."

Other than a yearlong stint as the director of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in 2006, Moore spent his entire career with the Idaho agency.

"Virgil does see Fish and Game as a continuation of his family, and he's serious about that," said Sharon Kiefer, deputy director of programs and policy at Fish and Game. Kiefer, who has worked with Moore since 1987, spent holidays with the director's family and even lived in Moore's basement for a short time while she looked for an apartment in Boise.

"My first Thanksgiving at their home in 1990, Virgil and his wife gave me a Christmas cactus, and it's still alive," Kiefer said. "When I look at it, I always think about them and their graciousness."

From pastime to passion in the outdoors

Originally from Missouri, Moore moved to Idaho in 1974 to pursue a graduate degree in zoology from Idaho State University. At 22 years old, he didn't imagine he would have the opportunity to interact with each of Idaho's "critters," as he often calls them, in a meaningful way.

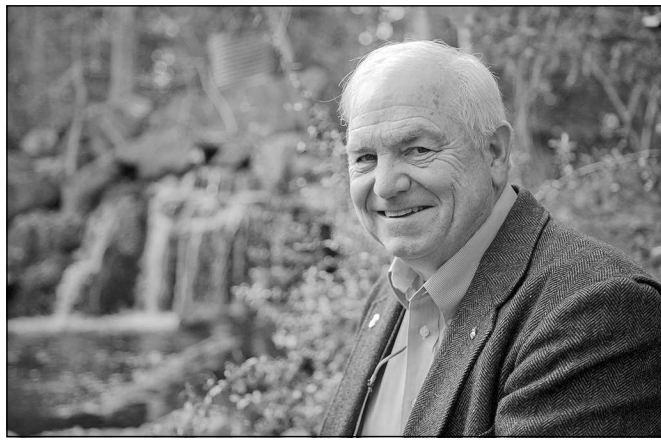
In his time at Fish and Game, he rebuilt trout populations, kept sage grouse from the Endangered Species List, boosted elk to all-time high numbers and did some inadvertent mutton busting while trying to fit a radio collar on a bighorn sheep.

"Feeling the heartbeat of the animal and then seeing the biological information so we can better understand their needs, that is part of who we are," Moore said.

When he retires, he'll continue to hunt. He harvested a bull moose last year, a lifelong goal of Moore's. He plans to get a yellow Labrador retriever puppy now that he has the time to train a dog for bird hunting. And, of course, he'll fish.

Moore said he was originally a fish guy — when he was growing up in Missouri, deer and turkey populations were too low to allow hunting. So he started his wildlife career in fisheries, working to address population issues in Yellowstone cutthroat trout on the South Fork of the Snake River.

"I got to walk miles of beautiful country in the Snake River Basin," Moore said. "If



Darin Oswald / Idaho Statesman-TNS

Idaho Fish and Game Director Virgil Moore is retiring after 30 years with the agency.

anything told me I was on the right track with the right agency, that was it." There, he set himself up to ascend through the ranks at Fish and Game, where he would later become chief of fisheries. He also forged relationships he still tends today.

"I can remember going out in the field, we're using electric fishing gear," said Chip Corsi, now a supervisor at Fish and Game's Coeur d'Alene office.

"Those were complicated pieces of equipment, not just something anyone would think, 'Oh, I can fix this,'" Corsi recalled. But when the gear malfunctioned, Moore wouldn't hesitate to tinker with it, a skill that proved valuable in the field.

"You didn't feel like that was the end of the trip," Corsi said. "I think it empowered others around him to come up with creative solutions when things weren't going according to plan."

Not just critters, but connections

Creative solutions became something of a hallmark of Moore's tenure with the agency — he addressed issues with wildlife habitats and populations by assessing the problem from all angles. At his first project on the South Fork, he was part of a team that devised a plan to protect trout from overharvesting. At the same time, Moore still allowed anglers and other Idahoans to use the resources they relied on. The fish began to thrive, and so did Moore's relationships.

"It was successful because we knew the biology — but then we also understood what the people wanted," Moore said. "It was this blend of biological and social sciences. It was one of the most phenomenal responses, and it not only secured but enhanced the future of the fish."

Corsi called the partnerships "pretty cutting-edge stuff."

"He's fostered collaboration with others," Corsi said. "Prior to that, (conservation) regulations had excluded bait fishermen. He took a hard look at the data and said, 'We can keep them in the fold.'"

Moore also worked to keep ranchers and Idaho's neighboring states on the same page when it came to managing wild wolves. He came to the helm of Fish and Game in 2011, just as wolves were again being delisted from Endangered Species Act protections in Idaho. After a tumultuous few years of the animals repeatedly gaining and losing protections, wolves have stayed under state management for Moore's entire

directorship.

"We've been managing our wolves very well," Moore said. "There are a lot of social issues around wolf management ... but a lot of the angst has been relieved. It's not gone, we've got some hot spots, but it's gotten better."

Moore wants to see those collaborations live on through a nationwide deal he hopes his successor, deputy director Ed Schriever, can help see through. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act, which stalled in Congress, would allot \$1.3 billion in existing revenues from energy and mining operations on federal land to wildlife agencies.

"It would have been the pinnacle of any career to be associated with getting that act approved," Moore said.

Currently, Fish and Game receives designated funding from the Idaho Legislature, but the bulk of its revenue comes from hunting and fishing licenses, Moore said. With a tight budget, the agency isn't able to address all of Idaho's wildlife needs.

"The bottom line is that we're unable to fulfill the directive given to us 80 years ago," Moore said.

Living by the mission

The Fish and Game directive, in Idaho Code 36-103(a), has become something of a mantra for Moore.

Fish and Game's mission is clear: the preservation, protection, perpetuation and management of Idaho's wildlife.

"He has the mission statement printed on the back of his business card," Corsi said. "He's found a way to be true to that and still offer word-class hunting and fishing opportunities."

Through his career, Moore said, the three lines of that statement have helped ground his decision-making. He knows it will guide Fish and Game staff when he leaves, too.

"It's my anchor," Moore said, holding one of his business cards. "If I ever get (lost), I flip this over and reread it ... All wildlife, including all wild animals, wild birds, and fish, within the state of Idaho, is hereby declared to be the property of the state of Idaho. It shall be preserved, protected, perpetuated, and managed. It shall be only captured or taken at such times or places, under such conditions, or by such means, or in such manner, as will preserve, protect, and perpetuate such wildlife, and provide for the citizens of this state and, as by law permitted to others, continued supplies of such wildlife for hunting, fishing and trapping."



Gary Lewis / For WesCom News Service

Lengthening or widening the spool increases casting distance. The other way to deal with line friction is on the rim of the spool. The lure weight and momentum pull line from the spool. Line pulling against the spool creates cast-killing friction. Note this WaveSpin spool rim is designed with a series of ramps that reduce friction as line peels off the reel.

Cast farther, catch more fish

By Gary Lewis

For WesCom News Service

Across the river a fish cleared water and crashed back down. The first cast fell short. Downstream the lure tumbled, the clack of blades on boulders, the flash of the chartreuse and brass. But not in the trench where the fish lay.

Try again. Two hands on the rod, held back at 45 degrees.

There was rhythm and balance, a sweet spot to find. The cast, the parabolic arc. Like a bullet, the lure sailed, almost to the far bank.

At the splashdown, I dropped the rod and began a slow crank, felt the thump of the blade. A fish pummeled the spinner then charged downstream and into the main current then reversed and streaked toward me. When the rod went limp, I thought I'd lost it, but then saw the line knife upstream. Moments later a 10-pound oceangoing rainbow charged into shallow water at my feet then streaked away again.

Steelhead could be anywhere in a river, but they tend to move upstream along the banks. Often people wade in and cast to the middle of the river when steelhead are at their feet. But there are times when the best lies are on the opposite bank.

On a river like the McKenzie, the Rogue or the Deschutes, sometimes the angler can't reach that slot.

It is easy to be a better caster, whether with fly rod or spinning gear. And if the goal is to catch more fish, it makes sense to throw for distance. Extend a cast by 10 percent and over the course of the day, it is possible to raise more fish.

Imagine a 15-foot improvement when casting for rainbows on a big lake.

Over the course of a day and maybe 200 casts, that's 3,000 extra feet of coverage. And fish out on the fringes are not as likely to be spooked as fish close in.

Friction is a killer

It starts with how we hold the rod. Most people start the cast with the rod horizontal behind them. The lure scribes a high arc and the line towers, subject to being blown off target.

For distance, use two hands. Open the bail and pin the line to the fore-grip with the tip of the index finger. Load the

rod just past 12 o'clock, make a smooth stroke, close the arc, stopping the forward motion at 45 degrees, and release the line. To put the lure on target, stop the line before the lure hits the water. That's proper form. Now we get tricky.

Remember that thing called friction. The line is the biggest problem. Want extreme distance? Use small diameter braided line instead of monofilament. Or buy a low-memory mono or fluorocarbon. Monofilament comes off the spool in coils and rattles going through the guides. Every touch of the line is friction and every touch reduces casting distance.

Rod length plays a part in the equation. A longer rod can provide a longer cast, but accuracy begins to diminish. And pay attention to the guides along the length of the rod. The best guides in rod building now are made with ceramic, zirconium, titanium oxide and diamond polished. Yes, they are expensive and no, you don't get them on the bargain rods.

Now look at the reel. Reels that are made for longer casts have either taller or wider spools. And the rim is a giveaway. Pick a reel with a bevel on the rim to reduce friction. And keep enough line on the spool to minimize the jump from spool to rim.

To improve an existing rod, examine the guides. Dirt buildup kills distance. Clean those guides and replace them if they are grooved from too much use.

Then spray on a line conditioner. Lines get dirty too and that causes friction. I like Real Magic because I can spray it on the reel and then up and down the rod for lubrication on every touch point. And this one thing by itself will increase casting distance.

Same thing with fly-casting. Clean and condition the line, clean and lubricate the guides and load the rod with a proper 10-and-2 stroke. That line will shoot like it did when it was new.

On the river this winter, pay attention to the seams closest to the shore. The fish could be lying right next to that opposite bank. Or they could be at your feet.

— Gary Lewis is the host of "Frontier Unlimited TV" and author of "Fishing Central Oregon," "Fishing Mount Hood Country," "Hunting Oregon" and other titles. Contact Gary at www.GaryLewisOutdoors.com.

Backcountry Festival set

The annual Eastern Oregon Backcountry Festival is set for Jan. 25-27, with events in La Grande and at Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort.

The event is a fundraiser for the Walla Walla Avalanche Center in Joseph.

• Friday, Jan. 25 — Ski film "All In," 6:30 p.m. at the Gilbert Center. General admission \$15, or \$10 for students. There will be an auction and raffle as well.

• Saturday, Jan. 26 — Third-annual

Kip Rand Memorial Uphill/Downhill race at Anthony Lakes. The top man and top woman will each win a season pass to the ski area, or \$250 cash.

• Sunday, Jan. 27 — Michael Hatch, director of the EOU Outdoor Program, will lead a ski tour into the Angell Basin near Anthony Lakes

More information available at eou.edu/outdoor/eastern-oregon-backcountry-festival-2019/

SHOWS

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A buddy of mine worked for one of the top backpack companies in the country and they had a booth in back. I don't know how many people I saw who walked in the front door and walked straight to the first booth and bought a backpack. I know for sure that Robert had much better packs in back. Look around before

you buy.

GUIDES

If you've been wanting to hire a guide to hunt/fish this is a great place to meet them. At the Boise show I see some of the guides I know from up in Alaska.

And if you want to go on an exotic safari, SCI and DSC are the two shows to hit. You can sign up for all manner of big game, bird hunting

or fishing adventures. It's almost painful to walk the aisles and see all of the cool hunts they are offering if you're on a peon salary.

Most of the time you can tell by talking to a guide if he is any good or not. But for sure, check references. You don't want to waste 10 days and \$25,000 on a bad deal.

And to get even deeper, you need to determine if their set-up is for you. You need to be honest with yourself

What is your main goal? To some people it is important that they are back to the lodge by dusk and served a great dinner cooked by a chef. And to sit around the proverbial campfire and drink until midnight.

To other outdoorsmen the whole objective is to hit it hard-core and be successful. Different guides specialize in different flavors. Make sure you pick the right flavor or you'll be disappointed.

Be crystal clear on what is provided and what isn't. Do they handle the shipping back of your trophies? Get all of the necessary tags etc. etc. There can be a lot of hidden costs that they take for granted that you knew about but you didn't have a clue.

And you even have a gun show in La Grande on Feb. 23-24. I always find stuff I can't live without at every gun show. Don't you? Let the shows begin!

