

People & Places

Biologist changing way wolves are tracked

Dave Ausband relies less on collars and more on cameras, analysis of scat

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

COEUR D'ALENE, Idaho — Dave Ausband has been given the job of implementing a new and more accurate approach to tracking and counting wolves in Idaho.

The effort should produce the best estimate of the state's wolf population ever. Biologists believe many wolves go uncounted using traditional means such as radio collars.

After this winter, the state Department of Fish and Game plans to move away from the use of radio collars as its chief tool for monitoring wolves.

Ausband said radio collars may retain a limited role in tracking wolves where conflicts are reported with livestock, but the broader program will shift toward DNA analysis of wolf scat and a network of roughly 200 remote trail cameras scattered throughout Idaho. The cameras will cover Eastern Idaho and "big chunks" of the Frank Church wilderness that have been missed by collaring. They should also help Ausband monitor cougars and black bears.

Fish and Game hired Ausband, 41, in May as a research wildlife biologist, giving his position a new focus on large



Photo submitted

Dave Ausband, who joined the Idaho Department of Fish and Game in May as a research biologist specializing in wolves and other carnivores, poses with a tranquilized wolf. Ausband will help the department shift from monitoring Idaho's wolf population with radio collars to using scat and remote cameras.

carnivores, and a special emphasis on wolves.

Ausband explained it's costly to capture and collar wolves, and using collars has become too labor-intensive for tracking the Idaho wolf population of at least 770 animals.

There are currently 88 col-

lared wolves in Idaho.

"We don't collar anywhere near all of the packs in Idaho, which means there are known big holes in our map," Ausband said.

The University of Idaho will conduct the DNA analysis of wolf scat, which should provide Fish and Game biol-

Western Innovator  
Dave Ausband

Age: 41  
Hometown: Coeur d'Alene, Idaho  
Position: Research wildlife biologist specializing in carnivores



Education: Bachelor's and master's degrees and is completing a Ph.D. in wildlife biology at the University of Montana

Family: Wife, Liz, and a 9-year-old son, Sam

Innovation: Developing a predictive model to locate wolf rendezvous sites throughout Idaho and helping the department move away from radio collaring as its primary means of monitoring wolves in favor of scat analysis and remote trail cameras.

ogists with "fingerprints" to assess the numbers of breeding females, litter sizes, sex, population trends and other elusive data.

Lisette Waits, head of UT's Department of Fish and Wildlife Sciences, said DNA from fecal samples will also be matched against saliva on livestock carcasses to determine which individual wolves are responsible for depredations, and against DNA of harvested wolves to estimate harvest rates.

Waits, who has been working on DNA analysis of scat and hair since 2007, said they are "accurate and cost-effective approaches" for understanding wolf populations.

Ausband has created a predictive model to narrow possible locations of wolf rendezvous sites, where wolves gather in large concentrations with their pups. The model should reduce the search area by 90 percent for the Fish and Game interns and part-time employees who will seek out rendezvous sites and scat.

Ausband, originally from Pennsylvania, has spent the past nine years studying how to better monitor wolves, including Idaho packs, for the University of Montana and will soon complete his doctoral thesis analyzing the effects of hunting on wolves.

Jim Hayden, a Fish and Game regional wildlife manager, said the state will spend in excess of \$400,000 this year on wolf management, with federal dollars and matching funds from Idaho hunting licenses and firearms and ammunition taxes. He hopes Ausband's approach may prove to be cheaper and more effective, given that additional federal funding for managing wolves as an endangered species is no longer available to the state.

"I think it will be a fascinating project — very useful not just to Idaho, but to anybody who manages wolves," Hayden said. "I think it will help us refine our management."

Artist paints, sculpts old saw blades to create nature scenes

By TIM HEARDEN  
Capital Press

MILLVILLE, Calif. — A former fruit picker and heavy equipment mechanic, Joseph Harper was recovering from a major spinal injury in 1984 and wanted something to do.

He started watching Bob Ross' "The Joy of Painting" series on TV and thought he'd try his hand at it. While he started on canvas, he ended up painting anything he could find.

"I couldn't walk at the time, so the kids would bring things in to me and set it up in front of me," said Harper, 74, a longtime Northern California resident who now lives in Camas, Wash.

He ended up specializing in painting and sculpting old industrial saw blades, including two-man rip saws and 25-inch circular blades used in lumber mills. He has worked with more than 300 such blades, turning the often rusted remnants of the region's once-dominant timber industry into three-dimensional pastoral or nature



Photos by Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Joseph Harper of Camas, Wash., holds one of his art pieces — an old industrial saw blade painted and sculpted into a nature scene with the help of some Bondo putty — outside his brother's gallery in Millville, Calif., on Nov. 21.

scenes.

He donates proceeds from the sales of his works to a church program that feeds low-income children.

"It changes their lives," Harper said. "I see a lot of good things happen to kids when you do things for them. ... All the donations help the work of the Lord."

A native of Dairyville,

Calif., Harper was the second of nine children, and he recalls gaining a strong Christian faith and appreciation of hard work while picking fruit with his parents and siblings in the orchards of Tehama County.

He married his high school sweetheart, Mary, in 1960. They now have five children, 11 grandchildren



An old industrial saw blade has been painted and sculpted into a natural scene with the help of some Bondo putty.

and five great-grandchildren, he said. After high school, Harper became a heavy-duty mechanic and welder, working on heavy cranes and other equipment as well as diesel trucks.

After an accident that crushed his spine, Harper never returned to mechanic work but "wanted to pick up something to keep me busy," he said.

With saw blades, Harper starts by welding closed the hole in the middle, and he's long since switched from oil to acrylic paints because they dry faster, he said. When a friend requested a

three-dimensional image, he got the idea of using Bondo — a putty used for auto body repair — to craft rocks, birds and other figures and attach them to the blade, making them part of the image.

Nowadays, he sells the pieces for an average of \$20 to \$40 and gives the funds to the needy children.

"When you work for God, you just keep doing it," he said.

Harper said he never considered art as a profession, however.

"I have a hard time keeping up with the orders that I get" through word of mouth, he said during a Nov. 21 reception at his brother's Harper Gallery in Millville. "It's a hobby to me. When it's raining really hard in Washington, I can look out the window from a room like this and see the deer, and I paint."

Some of his works will be shown at the Harper Gallery through Dec. 13. The gallery at 23445 Patrick Lane is open Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Calendar

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Dec. 12-16

Meridian FFA Produce Sale, Meridian, Idaho, High School Professional Technical Center, Meridian, 208-350-4160. For the 2015 holiday season, let the Meridian FFA Chapter provide quality produce for you, your family and friends.

Thursday, Jan. 7

Idaho Irrigation Equipment Show

& Conference, 8 a.m. Nampa Civic Center, Nampa, Idaho.

Jan. 8-13

American Farm Bureau Annual Convention, Orlando, Fla.

Jan. 12-14

Potato Expo 2016, Mirage Hotel and Casino, Las Vegas.

Jan. 12-14

Far West AgriBusiness Association annual winter conference, College of Southern Idaho, Twin Falls.

Jan. 14-15

Oregon Mint Growers 67th Annual Meeting, Salishan Lodge & Golf Resort, Gleneden Beach, Ore.

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Correction

The Dec. 4 story, "Scoular acquires Legumex Walker pulse business," incorrectly stated that the special crops division acquired by Scoular

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