

Subscribe to our weekly Idaho email newsletter at CapitalPress.com/newsletters

Idaho



Courtesy U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Idaho's minimum, documented wolf population has been on a steady decline since the state began allowing hunters to kill the animals.

Hunting stops growth in Idaho's wolf population

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — As hunting is resulting in a slow but steady decline in Idaho's wolf population, a Boise State University poll taken earlier this year showed strong statewide support for hunting wolves.

Idaho's minimum, documented wolf population has been on a steady decline since the state began allowing hunters to kill the animals.

It peaked at 856 in 2009, the first year Idaho allowed hunters to take wolves, before a lawsuit that resulted in the animals being put back on the endangered species list halted that hunting season.

Since wolves were permanently delisted and hunting resumed in 2011, the population has slowly declined and was 786 at the end of 2015.

"The overall wolf population has stabilized since state management (and hunting) began in 2011," said Idaho Department of Fish and Game spokesman Mike Keckler. "That's when that 30-40 percent population increase we were seeing annually stopped."

A poll taken in January shows support for the hunts.

"Our ... survey showed it's not popular to be a wolf in Idaho," said Corey Cook, dean of BSU's School of Public Service, which conducted the poll. "People didn't express a lot of support for wolves."

The phone survey of 1,000 Idahoans was conducted in all regions of the state and the results — strong support for wolf hunting — were the same.

The poll results showed that 72 percent of people surveyed supported wolf hunting while 22 percent opposed it.

Fifty-one percent of respondents strongly supported wolf hunting compared with 13 percent who strongly opposed it.

Even in Boise, Idaho's largest urban area, 64 percent of respondents favored allowing hunters to take wolves while 28 percent opposed that.

The poll results show that Idahoans understand hunting is an important wolf management tool, said Idaho Farm Bureau Federation spokesman John Thompson.

"It certainly is a good thing to hear," he said. "You certainly wouldn't expect to find that (support) in some of the other states that wolves are moving into."

After wolves were re-introduced into Idaho in 1994 and 1995, the animal's population grew rapidly, expanding at a rate of 30-40 percent annually.

Hunting has stopped that growth.

"We're getting over the honeymoon period (and) people see hunting as a good tool in the management toolbox," Thompson said.

While wolf hunting has been successful in controlling the animal's population in Idaho, IDFG numbers show that wolves are getting smarter when it comes to avoiding hunters.

During the 2010-2011 hunting season, Idaho's first full year of wolf hunting, 181 wolves were killed by hunters. That number rose to 376 the next year but has declined each year since then, to 319 and then 303 and 249 last year.

So far this season, 154 wolves have been killed by hunters in Idaho.

When it came to state efforts to reduce the wolf population, support was solid but a little less favorable than for hunting.

Wheat Commission fully funds \$1M endowments

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — The Idaho Wheat Commission has fully funded two \$1 million research endowments five years earlier than planned.

The endowments, which were established in 2012 to bolster the University of Idaho's wheat research capabilities, support a wheat breeding and a wheat agronomist professorship at UI's Aberdeen Research and Extension Center.

The commission kicked off the endowments with \$500,000 and planned to contribute \$150,000 a year over 10 years until they were fully funded.

But several good wheat production years provided the commission with more funding than expected and the IWC also used some of its reserve money to help pay the endowments off sooner, said IWC Chairman and Soda Springs farmer Jerry Brown.



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Wheat is harvested in Eastern Idaho in late July. The Idaho Wheat Commission has fully funded two \$1 million wheat research endowments.

"Those two positions are very valuable to us," he said. "We're getting some good bang for our buck with what we're investing in the university."

IWC board member Ned Moon, marketing manager for the Jentsch-Kearl Farms in Rupert, said fully funding the endowments early was also a way to show the industry's commitment to the university and

Michael Parella, the new dean of UI's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.

"The (research) work they do there really affects and benefits the entire wheat industry in the state of Idaho," he said. "The money was there to fully fund the research endowments sooner rather than later (and) the time to do it is now."

Juliet Marshall, the recip-

ient of the cereal agronomics professorship, said the endowment will allow her program to purchase necessary new equipment, such as that needed to test for falling numbers. She will also direct some of the money toward graduate students.

The agronomics program performs important tasks for Idaho wheat growers such as testing varieties for resistance to various diseases and "they provide a lot of technical support to the industry as well," Brown said.

"It's going to help us so much," Marshall said of the endowment. "It gives us a lot of freedom to put the money toward things we think are extremely important to make our program better."

Jianli Chen is the recipient of the wheat breeding professorship.

The focus of her program is on using advanced methods to increase breeding efficiency and develop superior cultivars.

Besides using some of the

money to enhance the salaries of herself and her staff, Chen uses some to boost her program's limited travel fund. She said traveling to various meetings is important when it comes to marketing her varieties and seeking additional support for the program.

Chen used some of the money this year to help fund a new post-doctorate position.

IWC board members named one endowment the "Potlatch Joe Anderson Cereal Agronomics Professorship" and the other, the "D. Blaine Jacobson Wheat Breeding Professorship."

Anderson, a Potlatch area farmer, is the former commissioner who originated the UI endowment idea, and the commission's spending on wheat research has doubled during Jacobson's 15-year tenure as executive director, Brown said.

"Both of those gentlemen have contributed an awful lot to the Idaho grain industry," Brown said.

New UI Bear Lake County hire brings ranching expertise

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

MONTPELIER, Idaho — Les Nunn has been meeting with ranchers and determining how to best help them during his first few months as the University of Idaho's Bear Lake County Extension educator.

The position had remained vacant for six years — one of many university casualties of the economic downturn — before Nunn was hired in June.

With UI now on sounder financial footing, Nunn is among a flurry of hires UI officials have made lately.

Nunn, 41, explained too much time has passed to attempt to resurrect former programs or to press forward under the job description of his predecessor, Joel Packham.

He plans to reinvent the position.

"Because there hasn't been a lot going on in this position, people are accustomed to not having an educator here," Nunn said. "It's taken a while to get things going again and looking for the assistance we can provide."

Nunn was raised in Central British Columbia, where his family ran a couple of ranches. He earned an associate degree from Rick's College and a bachelor's degree in re-



Courtesy of Les Nunn

Les Nunn is the new University of Idaho Extension educator serving Bear Lake County, Idaho. His expertise is in ranching and ranch management.

source recreation and tourism at UI. For a while, he managed recreation facilities in Hell's Canyon for Idaho Power.

He then earned a master's degree in ranch management from Texas A&M University-Kingsville before working for more than six years as assistant operations manager

for a large ranch in Sheridan, Wyo.

In January, Nunn got a call from his college friend, UI Extension agricultural economist Ben Eborn, notifying him of the Bear Lake County job opening.

"I didn't think we had much of a chance to get some-

body like him to work for the university, but it turned out he was interested," Eborn said.

Nunn will spend about 60 percent of his time assisting ranchers, 30 percent in community development and 10 percent with the 4-H program. With his community development mission, he'll work with

general businesses in the area, and plans to reach out to offer support to the local tourism industry.

Many ranchers in his area — known for its high elevation and extreme winters — have full-time day jobs and small herds, so he's planning to offer courses in the evenings to accommodate their schedules. He's developing a course in ranch management and strategies for weathering low commodity prices, which he plans to offer in January.

Nunn will also encourage producers to share their good animal welfare practices with the public to change negative perceptions about the industry.

"He knows how to talk with the ranchers. They respect him," said Wayne Jones, UI Extension interim Eastern District director, acknowledging Nunn has had to "start from scratch" in his job.

In addition to Nunn, UI hired Jennifer Werlin in April to fill a position in Teton County, Nikki Dalton during the mid-summer to work in Bannock County and Joseph Seagers in August for Jefferson County.

Jones said UI anticipates making additional hires soon for Oneida and Butte counties.

Ag seminars will focus on conserving farm resources

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

MONTPELIER, Idaho — University of Idaho Extension agricultural economist Ben Eborn has added some special topics to the agenda of the upcoming Idaho Ag Outlook Seminars to inject some hope into what would otherwise be a dreary slate of commodity outlook presentations.

The seminars, in their third year, will be hosted Dec. 6 at Burley Inn for Magic Valley residents and Dec. 7 at the Idaho Falls Residence Inn for those in Eastern Idaho. The agenda for both locations starts with registration at 8:30 a.m. and ends at 4:30 p.m.

University and USDA experts and commodity group leaders are scheduled to present their usual projections on the beef, hay, potato, dairy and grain markets, as well as the overall global and U.S. agricultural market outlooks and the long-term weather forecast.

With commodity prices down across the board, Eborn said UI has added panel discussions — which will include growers and industry experts — about how to use technology to conserve farm resources, emphasizing that growers can be proactive and improve their own situations.

"The outlook for all of these other commodities was so gloomy, we felt we'd better put something else in there,"

Eborn said. "Otherwise, we'd have a bunch of depressed people leaving the conference."

UI's Power County Extension educator, Terrell Sorrensen, is also scheduled to discuss the steps Idaho has taken to improve its water outlook relative to elsewhere in the U.S. and the world.

His talk will delve into Idaho's new groundwater management area, the 2015 settlement agreement between groundwater users and Idaho's Surface Water Coalition, discussions about removing dams in the Lower Snake River and other topics.

"We're in a good situation compared to the rest of the world, but where I think we're ahead of the curve, we definitely want to stay ahead," Sorrensen said.

The cost to attend is \$30, which includes lunch and a 200-page book with slides from all of the presentations included.

Call 847-0344 for information and to register.

"The feedback we've gotten is that it helps (growers) make marketing decisions and planning decisions as far as what to plant and when to try to market their crops and their livestock," Eborn said.

Eborn said the seminars are also popular among lenders, who usually comprise about half of the crowds.

Growing businesses from the ground up.

Our local experts don't just know your industry, they live it. With years of real-world experience, they understand the details and demands of your unique business. And they're always ready to roll up their sleeves and lend a hand. See how good your relationship with a bank can be.

 **Columbia Bank**
WHERE RELATIONSHIPS RULE

Find out more at columbiabank.com or call 877-272-3678.
Member FDIC. Equal Housing Lender