

# 'I don't think people realize (wolves are) all around us'

WOLVES from Page 1

To some, given Idaho's overall opposition to wolves, the state has reached something of an equilibrium in regard to wolf numbers and their impact on livestock and wildlife.

Rancher Wyatt Prescott, former executive vice president of the Idaho Cattle Association, said that, all things considered, the state is doing a pretty good job of managing the predators, and the stable population and depredation numbers show that.

"We're in a good spot," he said. "But we still need to remain active in managing wolves that are taking out livestock."

But those at ground zero — producers who continue to lose animals to the predators — feel differently about wolves.

"You're not in a good place if you're producing the livestock they are killing," said Richard Savage, a past president of the cattle association. He ranches in Clark County, near the Montana border in Eastern Idaho. "That's still a major concern."

Wolves in Idaho were taken off the federal endangered species list in 2011 by an act of Congress. The state then assumed management of the animals from the federal government for a five-year probationary period. In 2017, the state assumed full management of wolves without federal oversight.

Idaho stopped estimating its wolf population after 2015, when the population was about 786. It had varied between 681 and 786 from the years 2010 to 2015.

"Based on the trend between 2010 and 2015, I'd say the population remains within that range," said Idaho Department of Fish and Game wildlife biologist Jim Hayden, who manages the wolf program. Idaho now manages wolves based on the total number of packs — 108 — using a network of trail cameras across the state to monitor them.

## More wolves

Some livestock producers believe the wolf population is much higher than the estimate.

Wilder, Idaho, sheep rancher Frank Shirts said wolves howl around his sheep every night in the hills.

"They have way more wolves than they think they have," he said at his ranch 40 miles west of Boise. "If the men aren't with the sheep 24 hours a day, wolves are going to be in there because they're everywhere out there."

The Farm Bureau's Thompson agrees.

"I don't think people realize they're all around us," he said. "They're in the Boise foothills. They're everywhere that coyotes are."

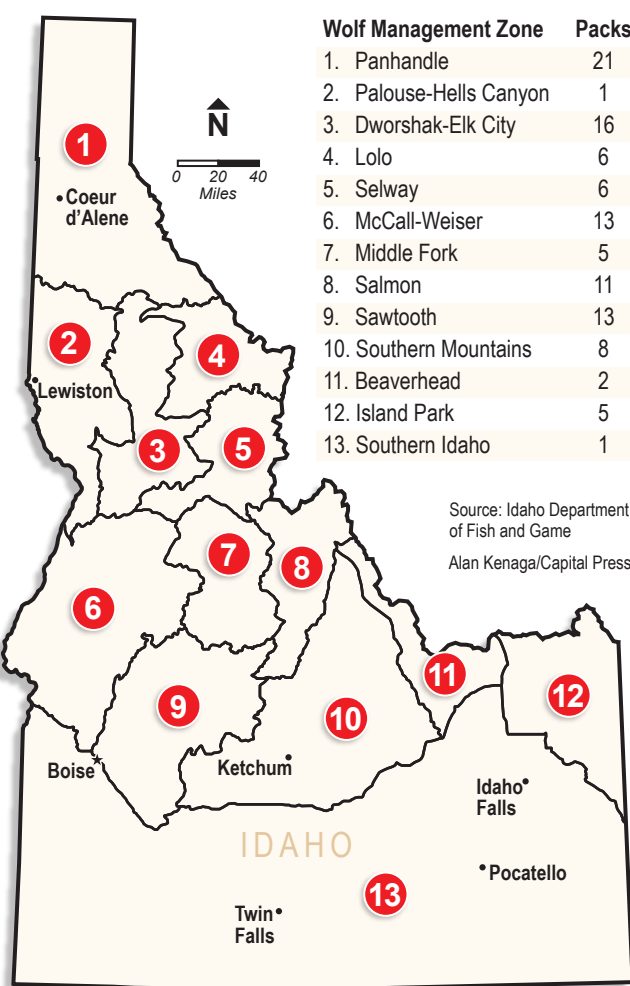
Idaho's wolf population had been growing at about 28 percent a year and peaked at about 856 in 2009. But that trend stopped once the state began a wolf hunting season



Sheep rancher Frank Shirts is shown at his ranch near Wilder, Idaho, on Jan. 25. He believes there are a lot more wolves in Idaho than the generally accepted estimate of around 700. He said the predators cost him a couple hundred thousand dollars a year because of weight loss in his lambs due to the presence of wolves.

## Known wolf packs in Idaho, 2015

Biologists documented 108 packs statewide at the end of 2015 with a mean pack size of 6.4 wolves, down slightly from 2014. Additionally, there were 20 documented border packs in Montana, Wyoming and Washington whose territories overlap with Idaho.



for part of 2009 and then resumed it in 2011 after a lawsuit temporarily halted it.

Idaho hunters have harvested between 205 and 358 wolves annually since 2012. About 62,000 wolf hunting tags are purchased each year.

## Impact of hunting

Hunting has "absolutely had an impact," said Todd Grimm, the Idaho director of Wildlife Services, a USDA agency that resolves conflicts between humans and animals.

"When sportsmen and trappers are able to remove (up to) 350 wolves a year, it stops wolves from overpopulating in those areas and spill-

ing over into the agricultural areas," Grimm said.

But not everyone supports hunting wolves, including Defenders of Wildlife, one of the conservation groups that has been most active in supporting the animals in Idaho.

The organization advocates non-lethal control methods to keep wolves away from livestock over shooting and trapping and believes the evidence shows that non-lethal control reduces livestock depredations in the long-term, said Suzanne Stone, the group's regional director.

"Lethal control can cause more livestock losses long-term than using non-lethal



A wolf in Northern Idaho is shown in August 2016. Since peaking in 2009, Idaho's wolf population has gradually decreased to about 700, according to state officials.

control methods," she said. "If your goal is to minimize livestock depredations, then you need non-lethal methods to do that."

Thompson said non-lethal methods are expensive and have never been proven to be effective.

"I think that's a load of crap," he said about the assertion non-lethal control works better than lethal control for problem wolves.

## Attacks add up

Since wolves were re-introduced in Idaho in 1995, 396 livestock producers have had confirmed wolf depredations, according to Wildlife Services.

The agency has conducted more than 2,150 wolf depredation investigations in Idaho since 1995 and confirmed more than 1,400 attacks on livestock and domestic animals. Confirmed and probable wolf kills of livestock and domestic animals since then include 4,068 sheep, 1,055 cattle, 102 dogs, 10 horses and one bison, according to Wildlife Services.

That doesn't include hundreds more animals that were injured by wolves.

And it doesn't include other losses that ranchers believe

are because of wolves but that they can't prove, partly because the animals can't be found, said Shirts, who estimates he has lost 300 sheep to wolves. Most of those are unconfirmed.

Shirts also says the pounds that his lambs don't put on due to the presence of wolves is where he takes the biggest financial hit. He estimates harassment by wolves makes his average lamb eight pounds lighter. At \$1.50 a pound, that's about \$12 a lamb — and he runs 15,000 lambs a year.

"Weight gain losses are costing me a couple hundred thousand dollars a year," he said.

Stone, of the Defenders of Wildlife, said, "There is no proof that wolves being present causes weight loss in livestock."

Given the total number of livestock that die for other reasons such as illness, Idaho's wolf depredation numbers are minimal, Stone said. "We've never had a large number of livestock lost to wolves in Idaho."

She said her group would like to see more wolves out there and have them less harassed than they are now.

"I think Idaho is still heavy-handed when it comes



Idaho Department of Fish and Game  
A wolf in Northern Idaho is shown in June 2017. Since peaking in 2009, Idaho's wolf population has stabilized, according to state officials.

to wolves and has a lot to learn," Stone said. "We're hopeful Idaho will learn to live with wolves and let go of some of these archaic killing programs and work on improving their management."

Ranchers directly impacted by the animals have a far different take. Most would prefer the state take more lethal control actions.

## 'We're paying'

"There are a lot of wolves in Idaho," said Cascade, Idaho, cattle rancher Phil Davis, who has had more than 60 confirmed cattle losses due to wolves. "We have to use every tool we have available to us to keep the numbers at an acceptable level."

Shirts said pro-wolf advocates have no skin in the game and don't feel the pain the producers do.

"These people that want to hear them howl, they're not paying anything for that," he said. "We're the ones paying for it. How would they feel if someone was sneaking into their house and eating the groceries out of their house every day?"

Ranchers are indemnified for livestock that is confirmed as killed by wolves, but it doesn't make up for the added time, effort and expenses of dealing with the predators, the lost weight or the losses that can't be confirmed as wolf kills, they said.

Dustin Miller, who manages the Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation, said the state will always maintain a robust population of wolves to prevent the federal government from putting them back on the endangered species list, but it will also continue to respond to problem wolves and the concerns of the livestock community.

Idaho is now "managing wolves ourselves and we intend to keep it that way," Gov. Butch Otter, a rancher, told Capital Press in an email.

"With more than 700 of the big carnivores now roaming our state, Idaho wildlife managers are working full-time to ensure wolf numbers stay above recovery thresholds while aggressively removing those that prey on livestock and weaken our deer and elk herds," Otter said.

## Government can levy fines of up to \$50,000 a day for not reporting emissions

EPA from Page 1

The pork and poultry trade groups attached to their brief a letter signed Jan. 19 by 10 Democratic senators taking the EPA to task for not giving more guidance to producers.

The senators, who didn't comment on whether the rule was necessary, urged the EPA to ask the court to delay the rule. The lawmakers said they were concerned unprepared farmers would be sued for not complying.

"In our view, the agency has been woefully late in rolling out guidance on this matter, and needs more time to ensure that our constituents, who face legal liability for untimely or inaccurate reporting, understand the reporting requirements," the senators wrote.

The court ruled last year producers have to report

manure emissions to comply with the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, commonly known as the Superfund law. The federal government can levy fines of up to \$50,000 a day for not reporting emissions. The law also allows environmental groups to sue to enforce the law.

The Waterkeeper Alliance led a coalition of environmental groups that sued the EPA to force producers to report emissions. Efforts to obtain a comment from the organization Tuesday were unsuccessful.

The D.C. court has granted two previous delays. EPA filed a motion for a third stay Jan. 19. It told the court it would spend the time educating farmers and developing streamlined reporting forms.

## 'Its importance is felt well beyond the borders of Europe'

GMO from Page 1

For U.S. agriculture, Europe's approach to gene editing is significant because the technology is expected to become more widely commercialized among American farmers in coming years.

Already, the USDA has cleared numerous gene-edited crops for the market without subjecting them to the environmental review required under the deregulatory process for GMOs.

Apart from affecting exports of such crops to the European Union, the continent's biotech policies have a "huge impact" on other global regions, particularly in the developing world, said Mary Boote, CEO of the Global Farmer Network, which supports gene editing.

"Its importance is felt well beyond the borders of Europe," Boote said. A French agricultural union representing small growers, Confédération Paysanne, claimed that new gene-edited crops resistant to herbicides should not be exempt from the EU's "GMO directive" for regulating genetically engineered crops.

The directive involves environmental analysis, labeling, traceability and monitoring requirements for GMOs.

Crops developed through traditional mutagenesis, in which radiation or chemicals randomly alter plant genes, are exempt from the GMO directive.

However, Confédération Paysanne argued that targeted mutagenesis — including the CRISPR or TALEN methods of gene editing — is a new technology that shouldn't qualify for this exemption.

Advocate General Michal Bobek found that targeted mutagenesis should remain part of the exemption as long as the alteration can occur naturally and doesn't incorporate foreign genes.

However, he held that member nations of the European Union may still develop their own rules for such targeted mutagenesis.

Bobek's view is heartening, as gene editing can accomplish the same changes as traditional breeding but much faster, said Boote of the Global Farmer Network.

"It's meant to give some direction," Boote said of the advisory ruling. "It's not the end of the conversation but it is good news."

The distinction drawn between gene editing and transgenic methods is a key part of the decision, she said.

"That may be the most important thing to come out of this, not only for how it's regulated but for public perception," Boote said.

Hanson, of the Center for Food Safety, is skeptical the advisory decision will warm European consumers to gene editing, since the public in Europe is more resistant to food biotechnology than in the U.S.

Countries within the EU, such as Germany or France, can still decide to prohibit planting of gene-edited crops, even if the European Justice Court adopts the advisory opinion, he said.

Gene editing will also probably continue to fall under the international definition of genetic engineering established by the United Nations, he said.

The Center for Food Safety isn't entirely opposed to CRISPR and other gene editing technologies, but the group believes the U.S. and Europe should adopt new laws to regulate such crops.

Bobek's ruling makes the same mistake as the USDA by approaching gene editing based on laws that predated the technology, Hanson said. "Trying to fit new techniques into old laws doesn't work so well."