

Fish and Game: Number of domestic animals killed by wolves has increased

Delisting advocates decry predator's endangered status

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TWIN FALLS - Wolves in Idaho have killed 325 cattle, sheep and dogs so far in 2008, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game says.

The reported kills through Nov. 24 - 212 sheep, 100 cattle and 13 dogs - are 47 more than in all of 2007.

Steve Nadeau, the department's large carnivore coordinator, said wolves in the last two years have tended to move onto private land.

"You can't just keep stuffing wolves on top of each other," he told The Times-News.

He said the biggest problem area stretches across the middle of the state, in a rough triangle that stretches from Weiser to Fairfield to Salmon.

Wolves were reintroduced into Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho in the mid-1990s. There are an estimated 1,500 wolves in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming, with 700 to 800 of them in Idaho.

Nadeau said his agency is doing aerial surveys in Idaho to see if those numbers have changed.

Idaho officials had planned a hunting season on wolves this fall until U.S. District Judge Donald Molloy of Montana restored the predator's endangered status last summer.

Since then, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that it planned to end federal protections for gray wolves in Montana and Idaho.

"It's crazy that they're not delisted in Idaho," said Stan Boyd, executive director of the Idaho Wool Growers Association. "To me, it goes to show you that the Endangered Species Act doesn't really work."

Through Nov. 21, Fish and Game had documented the killing of 136 wolves in the state. Federal authorities killed 86 that had been preying on livestock, and 13 were killed by people protecting livestock or dogs. Nine wolves were killed illegally. Most of the remainder died for unknown reasons, the agency said.

Jenny Harbine, an attorney with the environmental group Earthjustice, said it does not plan to oppose the killing of wolves that prey on livestock.

"We haven't sued over the rule that allows that, and don't intend to," Harbine said. "Our goal is to find a way to live with wolves."

Had a wolf hunting season taken place in Idaho this year, Fish and Game officials estimated it would have reduced the wolf population in the state by 200 to 250 animals.

Wayne Wright, chairman of the Fish and Game Commission, said the state is preparing to manage wolves again if they are delisted and management of the species is returned to the state.

"We'd like to make sure we have all the tools ready to implement," Wright said.