Meeting Report
Wolf Conservation Stakeholder Subgroup
March 13, 2014

CDFW Headquarters Building
1416 9th Street, Room 1341
Sacramento, CA 95814

Photo courtesy of Bruce Bohlander

California Department of Fish and Wildlife

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1.0 Introduction

On March 13, 2014 the Wolf Conservation Subgroup (WCS) of the California Wolf Stakeholder Working Group (SWG) convened in the Conference Room of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Office of General Counsel. This was the second meeting of the WCS, which was established to help the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW, Department) develop a consensus-driven framework of strategies for wolf conservation and management in California.

2.0 Meeting Objectives and Mechanics

The purpose of the meeting was to continue discussion of potential topics for inclusion in a Wolf Conservation chapter in the California Wolf Plan.

Objectives of the meeting as initially planned were:

1. Introductions and Housekeeping
2. Review/discuss Chapter 3 (Wolf Conservation) of the Washington Wolf Conservation and Management Plan
3. Review/discuss elk information from Idaho
4. Review and discuss Oregon and Washington conservation objectives
5. Discuss preliminary 2013 information on wolves in Oregon and Washington – implications
6. General discussion on California strategy
    a. Potential landscape management units
    b. Conservation (population) objectives
    c. Phasing/timing
    d. Regulatory component
    e. Mexican wolves
7. Planning
8. Public questions

The meeting was attended in person by seven stakeholders and two CDFW staff. Appendix A provides a list of participants, their affiliations, and their contact information; Appendix B contains the meeting agenda; and Appendix C contains the PowerPoint slides presented.

Mr. Mark Stopher, who serves as chair of the Wolf Conservation Subgroup (WCS), led the WCS through discussion of the agenda items, using handouts and PowerPoint slides. The meeting concluded after the WCS provided a list of potential agenda items for the next meeting, which is scheduled for April 9 in Sacramento.

3.0 Meeting Outputs

Major Issues Discussed:

- Based on tables from the elk PR Report from Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game (IDFW), population objectives and trends for six elk management zones in Idaho demonstrate that, while some management zones are experiencing declines in elk herds as popularly reported in blogs and other gray literature, other zones are experiencing increases. In some cases elk populations are well above the objectives for their respective zones. In addition a graph, also from the IDFW elk PR Report, displays the causes of mortality for cow elk in eleven elk management zones. Of these, six zones included mortalities from wolves, only two of which were below the target survival threshold of 85%. Of the five zones not including wolf predation, two were below the 85% survival threshold, both of which experienced harvest. In particular, the Island Park Zone, which is adjacent to Yellowstone National Park where significant wolf populations occur, the majority of elk mortalities were attributed to harvest. The take home message was that, while wolves do appear to contribute to elk declines in some areas of Idaho, elk declines in other areas are attributed to other causes. Further, not all areas where wolf predation on elk occurs are experiencing elk declines below their target survival thresholds. Finally, it is important to consider the underlying information when considering wolf impacts on ungulates, rather than simply accepting rhetoric.
- With respect to the possible strategy of dividing California into wolf management zones as suggested at the general SWG meeting in February, the members of the WCS agreed that the concept has merit, and should be discussed further by the SWG. The issues they considered were how a zonal approach might facilitate differentially applying a conservation strategy if wolves slowly populate one part of the state before reaching other regions; how to integrate stakeholders from other parts of the state, such as the Sierra, into the stakeholder process; and how much effort to put now into developing strategies for regions where wolves are less likely to occur. The consensus was that the WCS would do more information gathering and engage in some further conversation on the issue, before presenting a recommendation to the SWG.

Placeholder Items:

Consider public polling for statistically relevant information on public attitudes toward wolves in California.

Action Items:

Look into what studies are being done in Oregon and Washington with respect to effects of wolves on ungulate populations there.

Put together some information comparing mule deer and white-tailed deer; how they are similar and how they differ with respect to their interactions with predators.

Put together some information on the energy needs of wolves and the interaction with where those sources come from and where they will be at different times of year.

Find out the basis for the numbers that were set in Oregon and Washington for wolf populations there.

APPENDIX A
WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

Name	Affiliation	Email
Stakeholders		
Noelle Cremers	California Farm Bureau	ncremers@cfbf.com
John McNerney	The Wildlife Society – Western Section	jmcnerney@cityofdavis.org
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Lesa Eidman	CA Wool Growers Association	lesa@woolgrowers.org
Amaroq Weiss	Center for Biological Diversity	aweiss@biologicaldiversity.org
Randy Morrison	Mule Deer Foundation	randy@muledeer.org
Damon Nagami	Natural Resources Defense Council	dnagami@nrdc.org
Pamela Flick	Defenders of Wildlife	pflick@defenders.org
California Department of Fish and Wildlife Staff		
Karen Converse	Environmental Scientist – Wolf Program	karen.converse@wildlife.ca.gov
Mark Stopher	Senior Policy Advisor – CDFW	mark.stopher@wildlife.ca.gov

APPENDIX B - AGENDA

PROPOSED AGENDA

Conservation Objectives Subgroup
1-4 PM March 13, 2014
Room 1341, 1416 Ninth Street, Sacramento
Teleconference Line 888-379-9287, Participant Code: 476990

Proposed Agenda

1. Housekeeping, Introductions and Updates

2. Review/discuss Chapter 3 (Wolf Conservation) of the Washington Wolf Conservation and Management Plan [Please bring a copy]. The intention is to use this as a model for the considerations we may use in developing conservation objectives and management strategies for California. [60 minutes].

3. Review/discuss elk information from Idaho. [10-15 minutes, wolf-ungulate interactions are principally a subject for the wolf-ungulate subgroup].

4. Oregon and Washington Conservation Objectives (see western states background information handout) [10 minutes]

5. Preliminary 2013 information on wolves for 2013 in Oregon and Washington - implications [20 minutes]

6. General discussion of California strategy [45 minutes]
    - Potential landscape management units
    - Conservation (population) objectives
    - Phasing/timing
    - Regulatory component
    - Mexican Wolves

7. Planning [10 minutes]
8. Public questions (last 10 minutes)

APPENDIX C
POWERPOINT SLIDES PRESENTED

Slide 1

Conservation Objectives Subgroup
1-4 PM March 13, 2014
Room 1341, 1416 Ninth Street, Sacramento

Slide 2

Proposed Agenda

- Housekeeping, Introductions and Updates
- Review/discuss Chapter 3 (Wolf Conservation) of the Washington Wolf Conservation and Management Plan
- Current Oregon information
- Review/discuss elk information from Idaho
- Oregon and Washington Conservation Objectives (see western states background information handout
- Preliminary 2013 information on wolves for 2013 in Oregon and Washington - implications
- General discussion of California strategy [60 minutes]
  - Potential landscape management units
  - Conservation (population) objectives
  - Phasing/timing
  - Mexican wolf
  - Regulatory component
- Planning
- Public Questions

Slide 3

Preliminary Considerations for California Wolf Conservation Objectives

- Distribution and abundance of suitable habitat
- Distribution and abundance of wild ungulates
- Population levels scaled to habitat and prey
- Habitat connectivity
- Population viability
- Public policy (e.g. CESA, Fish and Game Code, etc.)
- Conflicts

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Washington Experience

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A. Scientific Basis for Conservation Planning

State wildlife agencies have employed several approaches for setting recovery objectives for wolves that are intended to ensure long-term viability. WDNR (1999) determined that the objectives for Wisconsin had to achieve four standards. They needed to:

- meet or exceed federal recovery criteria,
- be compatible with existing information on wolf population viability analysis,
- represent a population level that could be supported by the available habitat, and
- be socially tolerated to avoid development of strong negative attitudes toward wolves.

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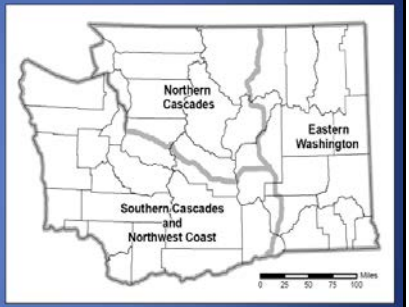
Considerations

- Population viability (size, distribution, metrics)
- Genetic diversity and gene flow
- Suitable habitat
  - Road density
  - Carrying capacity (energetics)
  - Landscape connectivity

Slide 7

Recovery Objectives

- Delist at 15 successful breeding pair for 3 consecutive years
- Or 18 successful breeding pair for 1 year
- Distributed among 3 recovery regions



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Pack Status Summary

Recovery Region	Pack	Pack Status	Successful Breeding Pairs	Min Count	Captures	Collared 12/31/13
Eastern Washington	Carpenter Ridge	Confirmed	No	2	0	0
	Dirty Shirt	Confirmed	No	2	0	0
	Diamond	Confirmed	Yes	9	2	1
	Huckleberry	Confirmed	Yes	6	2	1
	Nc'icn	Confirmed	No	5	0	1
	Ruby Creek	Confirmed	No	2	1	1
	Salmo	Confirmed	Yes	4	0	1
	Smackout	Confirmed	No	2	3	1
	Strawberry	Confirmed	No	3	1	2
	Wedge	Confirmed	No	2	0	0
	Misc/Loners			1		1
Northern Cascades	Lookout	Confirmed	Yes	5	0	0
	Wenatchee	Confirmed	No	2	0	0
	Teanaway	Confirmed	Yes	6	3	2
	Misc/Loners			1		0
S Cascades & NW Coast	None	None	None	0	0	0
	Statewide	13	5	52	12	11

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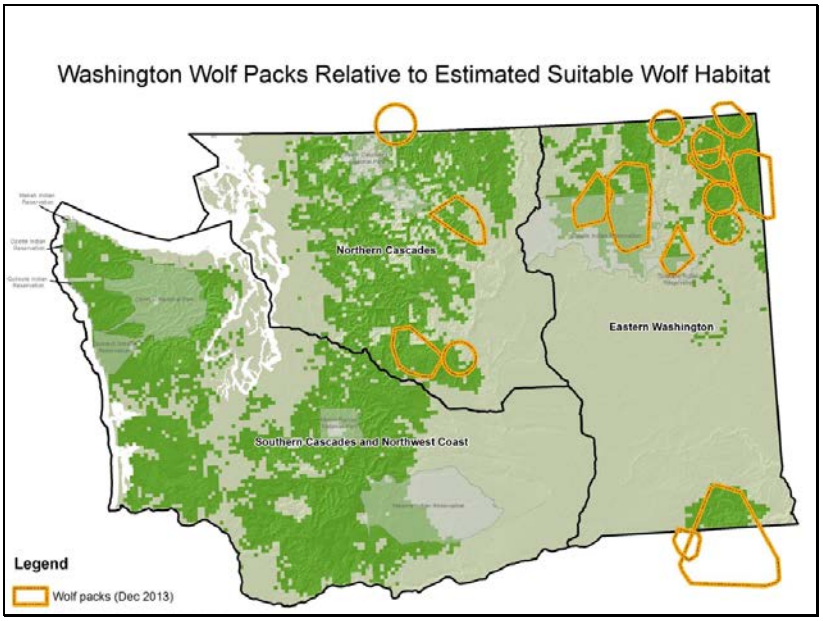

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Table 4. Range of numbers of packs, lone wolves, and total number of wolves that might correspond to numbers of successful breeding pairs at different recovery stages in Washington.

	Endangered to threatened	Threatened to sensitive	Sensitive to delisted
No. of successful breeding pairs	6	12	15
Estimated equivalent no. of packs	7-17	14-33	17-42
Estimated no. of wolves in all packs combined	36-124	71-241	87-307
Estimated no. of lone wolves	4-22	8-43	10-54
Total estimated no. of wolves present	40-146	79-284	97-361
Total estimated no. of wolves present, using 14 wolves per successful breeding pair[a]	84	168	210

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Oregon Experience

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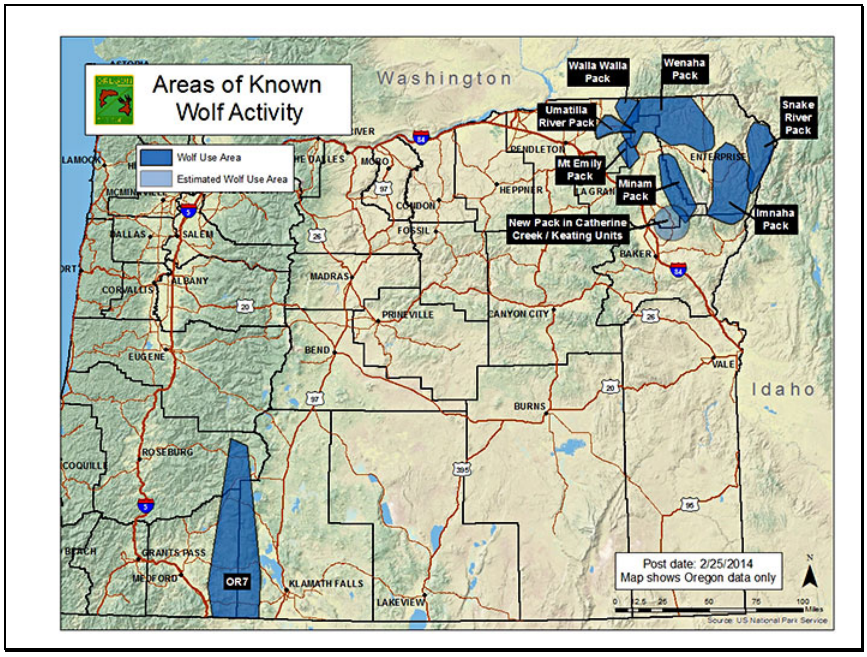

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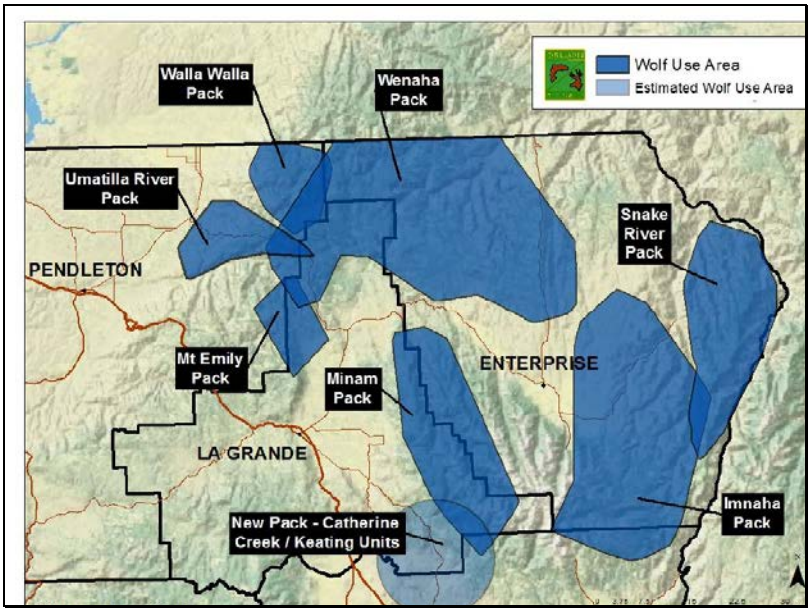

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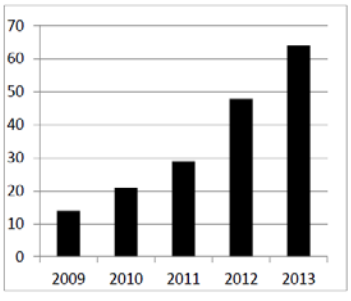

Figure 2. Estimated minimum wolf population in Oregon (2009-2013).

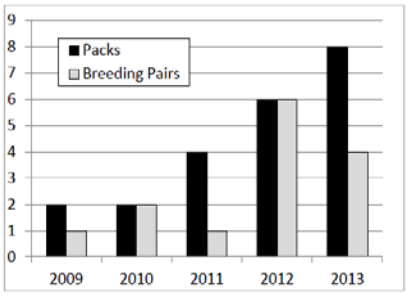

Figure 3. Number of packs and breeding pairs in Oregon (2009-2013).

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Idaho Elk-Wolf Example

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How does existing information inform this issue?

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Idaho Elk Management Plan

2014-2024

Idaho Department of Fish and Game
January 2014

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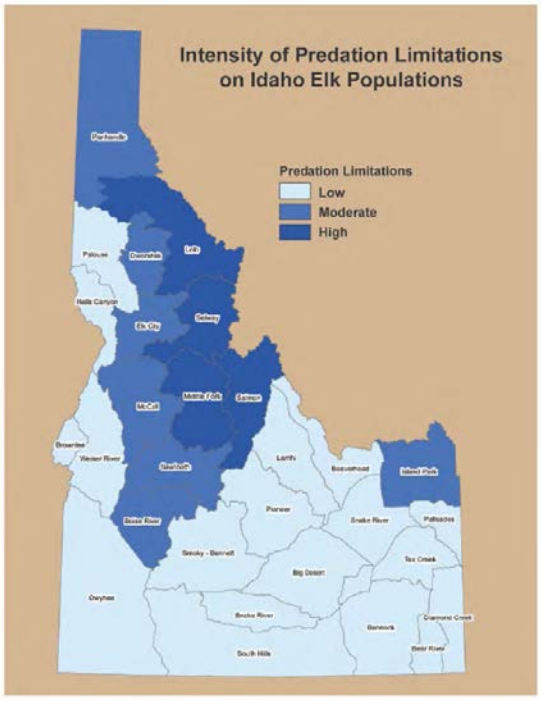

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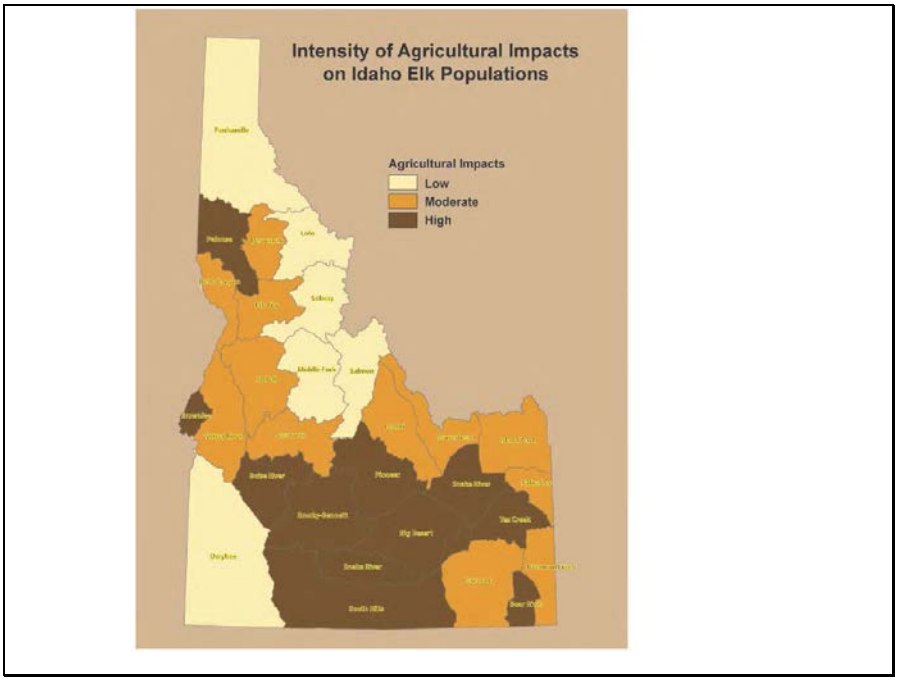

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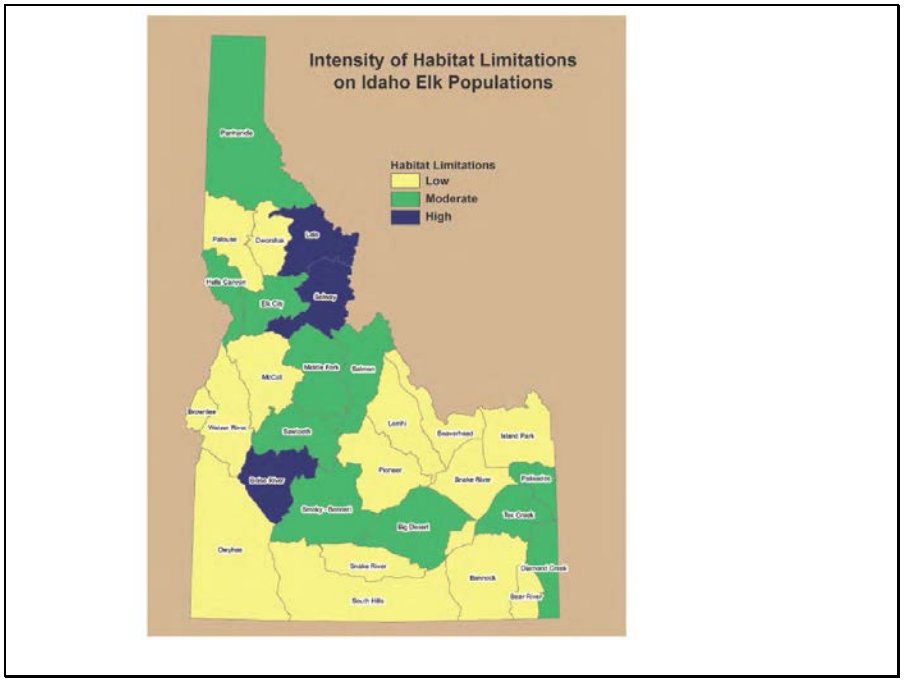

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Elk Herd examples – how were they selected?

- Elk present
- Wolves present
- Poster child example – “The Lolo Zone”
- One of Stopher’s favorite places
- Yellowstone adjacency (Island Park)
- Three more samples within elk distribution – no insider or particular knowledge

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Lolo Zone Factors

- Habitat maturation and fire suppression
- New roads – 1900 miles of new roads for management & recreation in 1/3 of the zone
- Loss of major winter ranges
- Catastrophic winter loss 1996-97 (30-48%)
- Predation by lions and bears (lions↓ bears↑)
- Predation by wolves beginning in mid 90’s

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Lolo Zone

Game Management Units 10, 12

Population Objectives • Current Status • Harvest Information

Proposed 10-year Management Direction:
• Increase the zone's elk population.

Long-term Population Objectives

Objective		
Cows	Bulls	Adult Bulls
6100-9100	1300-1900	725-1200

The Lolo Zone elk population is limited by habitat conditions and predation. Elk numbers in this zone peaked in the late 1980s and have since been on a long-term decline. Lack of early successional stage forest was a primary factor behind the initiation of this decline. Since then, the decline has been severely exacerbated by high elk predation rates by black bears, mountain lions, and most recently wolves. Restoring this elk population will require liberal predator harvest through hunting and trapping seasons, and control actions in addition to improvements in elk habitat at a landscape level.

Lolo Zone Population Surveys

Survey 1 - 2006				Survey 2 - 2010			
Cows	Bulls	Calves	Total	Cows	Bulls	Calves	Total
3254	979	865	5098	1358	594	182	2134
	30*	27*			44*	13*	
*per 100 cows							

Short-term goals are to stabilize this elk population and then begin to realize a positive growth rate. Retaining the population objectives from the previous plan as long-term goals (despite the current greatly reduced elk population) represent a desire to ultimately restore this population to levels achieved in the 1990s.

Lolo Zone Elk Harvest

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Palouse Zone

Game Management Units 8, 8A, 11A

Population Objectives • Current Status • Harvest Information

Proposed 10-year Management Direction:
• Maintain bull elk population within proposed objectives;
• Decrease cow elk population within proposed objectives.

Proposed Zone Population Objectives

Objective		
Cows	Bulls	Adult Bulls
1125-1725	115-415	

The Palouse Zone elk herd is highly productive and has shown substantial growth over the past decade. Habitat conditions are favorable to elk due to timber harvest and high quality agricultural crops.

Palouse Zone Population Surveys

Survey 1 - 2004				Survey 2 - 2009			
Cows	Bulls	Calves	Total	Cows	Bulls	Calves	Total
1814	148	706	2668	2153	411	676	3240
	8*	39*			19*	31*	
*per 100 cows							

Elk population growth in the Palouse Zone is limited by social tolerance and agricultural impacts. Addressing these impacts will require the continuation of long elk hunting seasons to maintain dispersed pressure on elk in agricultural areas. Developing mutually acceptable approaches between Fish and Game staff and area landowners to deal with elk depredation problems will also be emphasized.

Elk population objectives represent an increase in cow numbers over the previous elk plan but are lower than current levels. The priority management goal for the zone is to maintain high harvest rates and to address social tolerance issues.

Palouse Zone Elk Harvest

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Middle Fork Zone

Game Management Units 20A, 26, 27

Population Objectives • Current Status • Harvest Information

Proposed 10-year Management Direction:

• Stabilize/maintain the elk population; long-term objective is to increase elk numbers towards eventual recovery.

Long-term Zone Population Objectives

Objective		
Cows	Bulls	Adult Bulls
3850-5750	690-1030	390-810

The Middle Fork Zone elk population is limited by predation. Elk numbers in this zone were higher in the 1990s and early 2000s and have since declined. Likely the decline has been exacerbated by high elk predation rates. Restoring this elk population will require liberal predator harvest through hunting and trapping seasons, and control actions. Recent fires in this zone could provide a boost of nutrition if habitat response is favorable to elk.

Middle Fork Zone Population Surveys

Survey 1 - 2006				Survey 2 - 2011			
Cows	Bulls	Calves	Total	Cows	Bulls	Calves	Total
5137	834	1007	6978	3341	462	420	4223
	16*	20*			14*	13*	

*per 100 cows

Short-term management goals involve stabilizing the elk population, followed by steps to realize positive growth rates. Retaining similar population objectives from the previous plan as long-term goals (despite the current greatly reduced elk population) represents a desire to ultimately restore this population to levels achieved in the 1990s. The bull/cow and adult bull/cow ratios have been adjusted to 18 to 24/100 and 10 to 14/100 respectively during this recovery process.

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Weiser River Zone

Game Management Units 22, 32, 32A

Population Objectives • Current Status • Harvest Information

Proposed 10-year Management Direction:

• Decrease cow elk population within proposed objectives;
• Maintain bull elk population within proposed objectives.

Population objectives for the Weiser River Zone involve reducing overall elk numbers in areas where agricultural concerns are high while continuing to provide a broad range of hunting opportunity.

Proposed Zone Population Objectives

Objective		
Cows	Bulls	Adult Bulls
3300-5000	670-1000	325-500

Weiser River Zone Population Surveys

Survey 1 - 2007				Survey 2 - 2013			
Cows	Bulls	Calves	Total	Cows	Bulls	Calves	Total
5372	909	1571	7852	7461	1116	1894	10471
	17*	29*			15*	25*	

*per 100 cows

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Beaverhead Zone

Game Management Units 30, 30A, 58, 59, 59A

Population Objectives • Current Status • Harvest Information

Proposed 10-year Management Direction:

- Maintain the elk population within proposed objectives.

Proposed population objectives for the Beaverhead Zone provide a necessary balance between hunter opportunity, hunter success and crop/property damage concerns on agricultural lands.

Proposed Zone Population Objectives

Objective		
Cows	Bulls	Adult Bulls
2050-3075	555-830	330-485

Beaverhead Zone Population Surveys

Survey 1 - 2005				Survey 2 - 2009			
Cows	Bulls	Calves	Total	Cows	Bulls	Calves	Total
2467	706	797	3970	3257	862	1333	5452
	29*	32*			26*	41*	
*per 100 cows							

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Island Park Zone

Game Management Units 60, 60A, 61, 62, 62A

Population Objectives • Current Status • Harvest Information

Proposed 10-year Management Direction:

- Add unit 62 from the dissolved Teton zone;
- Maintain the elk population within proposed objectives.

The Island Park Zone will now include unit 62 from the dissolved Teton Zone. The unit 62 elk herd is small and shares part of its range with some current Island Park Zone elk. The addition of the unit 62 elk herd will allow better management of the entire Island Park Zone elk population, while providing better hunter opportunity.

Proposed population objectives for the Island Park Zone balance hunter opportunity and hunter success with crop and property damage on agricultural lands.

Proposed Zone Population Objectives

Objective		
Cows	Bulls	Adult Bulls
1200-1800	400-575	250-375

Island Park Zone Population Surveys

Survey 1 - 2006				Survey 2 - 2010			
Cows	Bulls	Calves	Total	Cows	Bulls	Calves	Total
1069	315	364	1748	1476	313	722	2512
	29*	34*			21*	49*	
*per 100 cows							

Island Park Zone Elk Harvest

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Island Park Zone

- Elk population hard to monitor (migratory into MT and Yellowstone)
- Pop peaked in 1999-2000
- 1970's >50% pine beetle infestation and loss
- Increased timber harvest and roads improved access and reduced habitat value
- Large domestic elk ranching operations in last ten years impacting elk winter range
- Predation not a major threat in PR report

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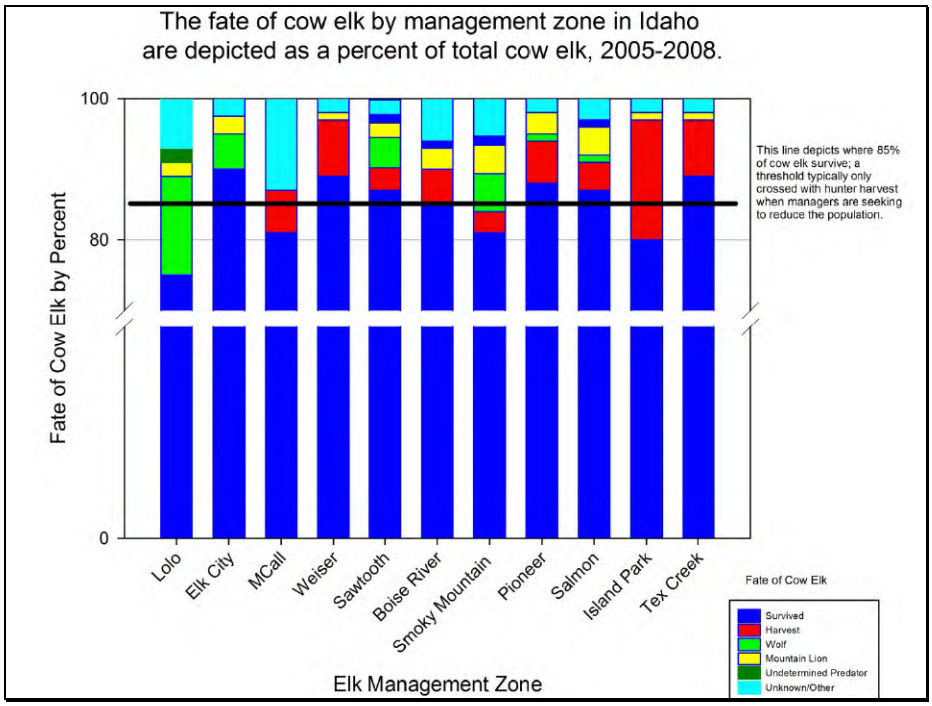

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Elements of California Strategy

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Components

- Landscape planning
- Conservation goals (population objectives)
- Phasing/timing
- Regulatory framework

Slide 33

Combined grid cells that indicated wolf pack potential (in any of 3 models)

Potential Wolf Management Units

- Northwestern Management Unit
- Northeastern Management Unit (Great Basin subunit)
- Sierra Nevada Management Unit

Distribution and habitat use maps should change and be adaptive to new information

Uncertainties:
- Use of coast range and southward
- Barriers of I-5, I-80, and Great Basin Desert
- Southern expansion to Sierra Nevada
- Importance of Elk as prey influencing distribution
- Use of east or west slopes of the Sierra Nevada

Landscape:
- Central Valley barrier
- Landscapes connectivity in potential management units
- Ungulate diversity

Map produced by Wildlife Investigations Lab
Wildlife Branch
California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife
Feb. 2014

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Proposed Schedule

	SWG`	Wolf-Ungulate	Wolf-Livestock	Conservation
January 29	Redding			
February 3			Sacramento	
February 19			Sacramento (morning	Sacramento (afternoon)
February 26	Sacramento			
March 13				Sacramento (afternoon)
March 19		Sacramento		
March 26	Sacramento			
April 9			Redding (morning)	Redding (afternoon)
April 29				TDB (afternoon)
April 30	TBD			
May 28	TBD			
June 25	TBD			