



Scott Farr has been in the Idaho outfitting business since 1963. He served on the Idaho Outfitters and Guides Licensing Board for 11 years. Since selling his outfitting business several years ago he has managed the Middle Fork Lodge located in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness (Idaho). Several months ago I approached him about sharing his thoughts and opinions from a outfitters perspective on wolf reintroduction. Following are his thoughts and opinions. I am grateful for him taking the time to sit down and share them with us.

Kyle C. Krause - Hunting & Ethics Editor

AN OUTFITTER'S PERSPECTIVE

On Wolf Reintroduction

By Scott Farr

The economic impact of wolf recovery to Idaho has had significant implications to the small rural economies reliant on those businesses affected most—outfitters and ranchers—a point of view shared by many in Idaho and why I felt compelled to address the issue in *Fair Chase*. While this is my personal perspective, not particularly endorsed by our outfitter association, I have been an Idaho outfitter for most of my 47 years in the business, with the exception of eight years in British Columbia. I do believe my views

are very similar to the majority of hunting outfitters in Idaho—as well as those of outfitters in Montana and Wyoming—that are affected by wolf reintroduction. During my career in Idaho, I have experienced variations in big game populations primarily due to habitat fluctuations and our fish and game department's reaction to it. In most cases, downturns were adequately addressed and recoveries were eventually experienced. This is definitely not the case with the effects of wolf reintroduction.

From the initial phases of wolf reintroduction, many who were involved have been, at the very least, disingenuous. We were told the recovery goal was 100 wolves or 10 breeding pairs in each of the three recovery areas—Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. We were lead to believe that once these population goals were met, wolf management would be turned over to the states, and wolves would be managed similar to other species under their jurisdiction. Our outfitter association eventually accepted wolf populations at the agreed-upon number of 150 (a buffer to insure recovery). Idaho currently has documented 835 wolves in 94 packs and 49 breeding pairs. We participated in every bureaucratic step in the process to ensure that our concerns of overpopulation and subsequent impacts would be addressed. We were told repeatedly by federal and state bureaucrats that involvement and cooperation was key to an acceptable outcome. During each process we fought to be recognized as stakeholders with our livelihoods very much in jeopardy. The possible impacts to the 150 family hunting businesses licensed in Idaho and the small communities supported by these businesses were never adequately recognized or addressed.

Today our fears have become reality. Our wildlife resources are suffering from inadequate planning because our managing agencies have either denied or ignored the extreme impacts an overpopulation of gray wolves is having on our ungulate populations. Even with the apparent big game population declines and the level of anxiety expressed by outfitters and private sportsmen, action by both state and federal wildlife managers has been inadequate to offset the magnitude of the impacts. I personally cannot agree with the numbers cited in the rhetoric concerning current wolf populations and the subsequent effect on ungulate populations. Much of this information is generated by computer modeling and inadequate data. The wolf numbers are at a point where accurate population and associated impact estimates are well beyond the capabilities of our underfunded fish & game department that, in turn, is suffering huge losses in revenue relative to big game licenses and tag sales generated by the public's lack of confidence in hunting success. The same scenario is affecting the outfitting industry that depends on healthy and diverse game populations. The overpopulation of wolves has created a predator pit that not only includes the affected ungulate populations but everyone who is associated with, and relies on, healthy game

populations. Idaho's hunting heritage is jeopardized by inactions due to the concern for political correctness and an overreaching judicial system.

We saw a glimmer of hope last year when a wolf season was instituted in Idaho and Montana. Although those that are knowledgeable and realistic about wolf control realize the current wolf population cannot be reduced to biologically acceptable numbers with the rifle alone, the fact that an attempt was made was encouraging. Reasonable success was experienced in an attempt to reach the hunting quotas established by the managing agencies. Additional wolf seasons were planned for the fall of 2010 until a federal judge upheld objections by environmental groups on technical issues relative to the Environmental Species Act (ESA). If this ban on wolf management continues, irreparable harm to the wildlife in those areas affected by wolf reintroduction will be the result. The additional mortality

Without combining today's science with common sense and historic facts pertaining to wolf impacts, their reintroduction will prove to be a disaster.

created by overpopulation of wolves in those areas that were previously suffering from various adverse impacts may already be irreparable. In these areas, recovery would be long-term even if adequate wolf controls were enacted today and somehow the wolf population was reduced to ineffectual numbers. On the other hand, there are many areas of the state that should be experiencing record elk, moose and deer densities in prime habitat enhanced by wildfire over the past decade. It is the belief of many experienced and respected outfitters, sportsmen and biologists that the controlling factor preventing abundant ungulate populations is the impact of an overpopulation of wolves. Many areas of Idaho not harboring wolves are experiencing record elk populations, while those areas of similar habitat containing wolves are experiencing continually decreasing elk and moose populations. The cow-calf ratios within those areas containing wolves are far below the dynamics necessary to sustain established population goals. The predominant factor related to wolf impacts is their tendency to prefer the young of the year, therefore preventing necessary herd recruitment. Due to lack of funding, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG)

cannot adequately monitor the herd composition within given areas of the state, and it is the opinion of many outfitters and sportsmen that the data used is insufficient to depict the actual situation. I agree with many that Idaho has been inadequate in accurately reporting the consequences of an uncontrolled overpopulation of wolves, therefore retarding actions necessary to counteract an irresponsible and incomplete wolf reintroduction plan. Gray wolf reintroduction should not have been implemented without a comprehensive plan that included maintaining wolf numbers in concert with established big game population goals.

The economic impact to the outfitting families of Idaho has been devastating. Coupled with the adverse impacts to the ranching communities, wolf recovery has resulted in significant negative impacts to the small rural economies reliant on those businesses. Idaho outfitters are licensed to specific geographic areas and cannot shift their hunting operations to areas less impacted by wolves. Consequently, their only recourse to continue to provide quality hunts and attract repeat business is to reduce the number of clients commensurate to their big game resource. In 1990, Idaho outfitters served 4,902 hunting clients; in 2009, the number was 1,161. IDFG surveyed past non-resident license

holders as to why they were not returning to Idaho and the number one response was "wolf impacts to big game species." It is very disheartening for the citizens of Idaho to observe a wildlife resource that is held in reverence and has required continual sacrifice to maintain now being devastated by irresponsible research and planning. It is inevitable that wolf impacts will continue to escalate until the facts are accepted relative to their capability to destroy prey bases and negatively affect our western way of life. Without combining today's science with common sense and historic facts pertaining to wolf impacts, their reintroduction will prove to be a disaster. Appropriate management will likely not be popular with the general public as it will require a significant wolf harvest annually. Scientific research bears out the fact that due to the prolific nature of the wolf, near 50 percent mortality annually is necessary to stabilize a wolf population. Wolf reintroduction will continue to wreak havoc as long as it is driven by misconceptions and irrational emotion. An unchecked wolf population will eventually result in undeniable, widespread, catastrophic losses to wildlife populations that will be impossible to ignore. ■