

Idaho County wants to join wolf fight

- **August 18th, 2010**

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By Kathy Hedberg of the Tribune

County commissioners meet with county attorney to evaluate possible action following judge's latest ruling

GRANGEVILLE - Idaho County commissioners are pondering jumping into the legal battle over whether wolves should be hunted in Idaho.

Commissioners Skip Brandt, Jim Rehder and James Rockwell met with Idaho County Attorney Kirk MacGregor Tuesday morning to discuss taking action challenging a federal judge's decision earlier this month that returned wolves in Idaho and Montana to federal protection.

The county commissioners voiced support for the Idaho Department of Fish and Game Commission's pledge to pursue all legal options to regain full management authority over wolves.

U.S. District Judge Donald Molloy of Missoula, Mont., "shouldn't be managing wildlife," Rockwell said. "I want to see Molloy's credentials specific to wolves. He doesn't have the expertise" to make a ruling that contradicts the science regarding wolf populations in Idaho and their effect on other wildlife.

Commission Chairman Brandt agreed. "He's legislating from the bench, which shouldn't be permitted. We need to support strong action by the state."

The commissioners pointed out Idaho County's elk population has been affected by wolves as much as any other county in Idaho. Rehder said one local rancher claims to have recently lost three bull calves worth \$10,000 each from wolf predation. That claim is still under investigation by the Idaho Fish and Game Department.

The commissioners discussed petitioning the court to become a party in a lawsuit challenging the Endangered Species Act, which protects wolves from being hunted. Other options included filing a separate lawsuit on behalf of Idaho County or drafting a disaster declaration and sending it to Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter.

"We recognize we have an extraordinarily serious problem," Rehder said. "How do we counter a poor decision by a federal judge?"

Rockwell, who said Molloy's decision has cost the taxpayers of Idaho untold dollars by undoing a previous decision to delist the wolves, said: "Can we file an action (saying) to the judge, 'You're not a wildlife biologist. Sit down and shut up?' "

Hedberg may be contacted at khedberg@camasnet.com or (208) 983-2326.