



## Meeting the Idaho Wildlife Diversity Challenge

Idaho Fish and Game has put together public workgroups that are meeting around the state in March and April to discuss the wildlife conservation and management challenges identified during the Idaho Wildlife Summit in August 2012.

The groups are made up of hunters, anglers and other individuals who attended the Summit and who said they wanted to help Fish and Game find ways to improve wildlife conservation in Idaho. But anyone who is interested may participate.

The first of many challenges will be to identify strategies to boost funding for Fish and Game's Wildlife Diversity Program. The program needs additional funding to meet the expectations of Idahoans that Fish and Game effectively manage all of Idaho's fish and wildlife, including game species and nongame species.

The role of the Wildlife Diversity Program is to maintain natural, self-sustaining populations of native "nongame" wildlife species to benefit Idaho residents and visitors.

Fish and Game has statutory responsibility for about 10,000 species – fish, wildlife and plants. Of these, about 550 are vertebrate animals, 80 percent of which are classified as "nongame wildlife."

Maintaining the state's species diversity is part of Fish and Game's legal mandate to protect and manage all of the state's fish and wildlife species, and conserving all species means all species benefit, whether hunted, fished, trapped or not.

The program receives no funding from the sale of hunting or fishing licenses or from state taxes. It operates on a budget funded through the sale of wildlife license plates, voluntary state income tax check-offs and other donations. This income is used as matching funds to leverage federal funds through

state wildlife grants and challenge cost shares.

But revenue from these sources has been declining for the past six years, and the \$2 million Wildlife Diversity annual budget has dropped by 20 percent in the past three years.

Wildlife Diversity Program functions include education, conservation and recreation-related activities. Funding is used to develop educational publications, such as the Idaho Wildlife Viewing Guide, and conduct research on nongame fish and wildlife species. Better information about those species helps biologists manage wildlife and could help keep some species from becoming rare or endangered.

"What's good for the sage sparrow could be good for the sage grouse," said Rex Sallabanks, manager of the Idaho Wildlife Diversity Program. "What's good for the northern alligator lizard in a coniferous forest could benefit elk. When we restore a wetland for an amphibian or reptile, we're improving habitat there for waterfowl and sandhill cranes, and so it is across the board in terms of benefits from individual



Wildlife Summit participants share their ideas.

IDFG photo

species actions for nongame."

As head of Fish and Game's Wildlife Diversity program, Sallabanks focuses on Idaho's species identified to be most at risk – 229 species to be exact; 26 of those are native game and nongame fishes.

Nongame wildlife is not normally hunted, fished or trapped, but is found in every corner of Idaho. Legislation established the state's first income tax check-off on the 1981 income tax form, which still continues as an important source of program income today. In 1992, the Idaho Legislature passed the wildlife license plate bill that allowed a portion of the wildlife license plate proceeds

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to benefit the Wildlife Diversity Program. The bluebird plate became available in 1993. The elk plate was added in 1998 and the cutthroat trout plate in 2003.

The number of Idaho residents who participate in wildlife related activities, such as bird and wildlife watching, wildlife photography, bird feeding and conservation education, continues to rise. While this constituency continues to grow, the problem of how to fund the Wildlife Diversity Program and meet ever-increasing demands continues.

Nearly 500 people attended the Wildlife Summit statewide, with more than 3,000 additional people participating via an online video stream. The purpose of the event was to bring together wildlife enthusiasts, including hunters, anglers, birders and wildlife viewers to find common ground for moving forward in building Idaho’s remarkable wildlife legacy.

Summit participants had much in common with one another. Eighty-two percent purchased a hunting, fishing or trapping license within the past two years. Ninety percent watched or photographed wildlife within the past two years. Ninety-one percent say that abundant wildlife is an important reason for living in Idaho.

Fish and Game and the Idaho Fish and Game Commission are eager to build on the momentum of the Wildlife Summit with the meetings of regional workgroups.

Just as with the Wildlife Summit, the regional workgroup participants represent a diversity of wildlife interests and viewpoints.



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# Thinking Big: Conserving All Species

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission directed Fish and Game to look for ways to broaden overall funding to benefit all species, through various conservation measures, designed to improve hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing.

This could potentially include other outdoor recreation benefits for people that go beyond Fish and Game.

“Many other state agencies oversee aspects of natural resources important to wildlife and people, including conservation of habitats, providing recreational areas and ensuring water quality,” Fish and Game Director Virgil Moore said. “I believe there is real merit in discussions about working together on funding programs broader than just the Department of Fish and Game.”

Stabilizing funding for the Wildlife Diversity Program is the first of a three-prong post-Summit strategy.

The second prong involves Fish and Game’s primary funding source, license dollars paid by hunters and anglers. Before proposing those fees be increased, Moore wants to find new ways to entice hunters and anglers to buy licenses more consistently.

An example would be the proposed

three-year hunting and fishing license, recently approved by the Legislature and signed into law by Gov. Otter. Consistent license purchases by more hunters and anglers could offset a need to increase fees in the near-term, Moore said.

“We’re going to be taking a very close look at our spending and our revenue and our spending relative to meeting the



Black-capped chickadees are popular with bird watchers. IDFG photo

service needs that hunters and anglers have asked for in this state,” he said.

The third prong of the post-Summit strategy would be to look for other ways to improve overall conservation – Thinking Big.

That would include other ways to improve conservation for all species, measures that would improve hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing and broaden overall funding to benefit all species.

“Every species in the state does matter, and I believe that based on the Summit, our people in Idaho get that,” Moore said. “We all understand that despite our differences about how we manage, that we care enough about our wildlife to get beyond those differences – to do more for our wildlife – all those individual species we’ve got out there.”





# Regional Brainstorming Generates Enthusiasm, Funding Ideas

After several meetings in Fish and Game regions across the state, people generally seemed excited and they feel there is a need to do this, but lots of uncertainty on how to proceed.

Some people want Fish and Game to broaden its scope, but others are afraid it will dilute the agency’s focus on hunting and fishing.

In some regions, more people showed up for the Summit working group meetings than attended the original regional Wildlife Summit.

In the Salmon Region, 23 people attended the first meeting – about the same number that attended the Salmon Region Wildlife Summit event.

At the March 14 meeting, the group brainstormed ideas for increased funding of the Wildlife Diversity Program and came up with 20 themes to be fleshed out at a later meeting.

The work group is a diverse mix of people that simply enjoy wildlife, hunters, anglers, birders, natural resource agency staff, conservation group staff, a former Fish and Game commissioner and a retired Fish and Game regional supervisor.

Interest and engagement in the Wildlife Diversity Program funding issue are high among the participants. Attitudes have largely supported this endeavor. Many work group members have expressed surprise and concern at the current modest level of funding – and dire projections – for the Wildlife Diversity Program given its level of support and



The Buffalo Jump Kiosk near Challis is set up to view Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep that live along the Salmon River. *IDFG photo*

## Idaho Fish and Game Policy

Idaho wildlife management policy is set by seven volunteer commissioners. The Idaho Fish and Game Commission’s policy decisions are based on research and recommendations by the professional staff of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and with input from the governor’s office, the state Legislature, hunters, anglers and the public.

importance among work group members.

Dominant topics included the need for more conservation education and outreach, particularly focused on youth; the need to maximize effectiveness of the current funding mechanisms, tax check-off and wildlife license plates; and critical need for any proposed funding mechanism to have support of all stakeholders and Idaho residents.

This last topic addresses concerns raised by some of the work group’s hunter constituents, who want to see a user pays/user benefits approach. They don’t want license and tag revenues dedicated to Wildlife Diversity, and they want their interests maintained within Idaho Fish and Game.

Examples of broad-based dedicated funding for wildlife conservation used in several other states include:

- General sales tax.
- Real estate transfer tax.
- Dedicated lottery funds.
- Specialty license plates and tax check-off initiatives, already used by Idaho.

The best mechanism for any state depends on the funding need, constitutional and lawful options, and legislative and public support.

Regional working group meetings continue through April. The groups’ brainstorming ideas are suggestions for consideration not proposals.





## Fish On!



Steelhead fishing in the fall is popular with families and children of all ages.

*IDFG photo*

## Common Ground in Outdoor Recreation Brings Economic Boost

More than half the people of Idaho participate in recreational hunting, angling and wildlife watching.

Yet most wildlife conservation efforts are paid for by just over a quarter of the population.

More people are participating in recreational hunting, fishing and wildlife watching than ever.

In 2011, more than 90 million U.S. residents – 38 percent of the population 16 and older – enjoyed recreational activities related to fish and wildlife.

More than 37 million people spent time fishing and/or hunting and nearly 72 million people engaged in wildlife-watching activities, such as closely observing, photographing or feeding wildlife.

Expenditures related to wildlife-related recreation totaled \$145 billion nationally. That's about 1 percent of the nation's gross domestic product.

Nationwide, hunters and anglers spent \$90 billion, and wildlife watchers spent \$55 billion in 2011.

In the western mountain states 15 percent fished, and 6 percent hunted. And 28 percent participated in wildlife watching around the home and 13 percent outside the home.

In Idaho, of the 1,172,000 people 16 and older:

- 638,000 or 54 percent participated in wildlife related recreation – hunting, fishing or watching wildlife.
- 331,000 or 28 percent hunted and/or fished in Idaho.
- 464,000 or 40 percent wildlife watching.

Together hunters, anglers and wildlife watchers spent more than \$1.6 billion in Idaho. Of that, hunters and anglers spent \$1.2 billion in Idaho, and wildlife watchers spent \$444 million.

These activities have a large effect on the state's economy.

Fishing in Idaho, for example, generated \$548,351,483 in statewide retail sales in 2011 in addition to \$14,962,572 for fishing licenses and permits.

(Source: The 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Associated Recreation.)



Common goldeneyes' mating display.

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