

## **Fifty Years of Game Management (1938-1988) in Idaho**

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### **-In the Beginning-**

The management of big game began in earnest around 1900. Seasons were shortened and bag limits established: No more than four each of deer, antelope, mountain sheep and goat; three-month season on elk; bag limit two; and buffalo were removed from the game animal list as probably none had survived by then. Licenses for residents and non-residents were required in 1903. Women were required to purchase hunting licenses in 1921. Eleven big game preserves were legislatively created by 1925 along with sanctuaries designated by the Idaho State Fish & Game Department (Dept.). Combined, the two classifications involved three-million acres mostly on National Forest lands. Most of the preserves were established expressly to protect transplanted elk from Yellowstone Park. In 1924 it was noted “we have three distinct species of deer in our State—commonly known as whitetail, blacktail and willow deer. Willow deer are somewhat smaller than whitetail and found in the northern portions of the State.” Winter losses of big game were attributed to the abundance of predators. Idaho was the only state in the U.S. hunting mountain goat in 1926. It was hunted as a trophy with no requirement to salvage meat. By the late 1930's the deer population was estimated to be 125,000, elk 25,000, mountain goat 4,000, mountain sheep 2,000, antelope 10,500 and moose 1,000. Let the saga unfold.

### **-In The late 1930's-**

There were two pivotal benchmark Acts that set the stage for the evolution of game management in Idaho. The first was the passage of the Federal Pittman-Roberson Act in 1937. The second was the State Referendum of 1938 creating the five-member Fish & Game Commission and Merit System for hiring Fish & Game personnel that would hopefully mitigate political intrusion in wildlife management. In 1938 there were 73 employees in the Dept. (11 headquarters personnel, 38 game wardens, 20 fish hatchery personnel and four technicians); the very first with biological training, hired to implement projects with Pittman-Robertson funds. The old-line cadre of game wardens was quite resistive to the onset of modern game management. This would be apparent to the biologists well into the mid 1900's. The Dept. basically had a three-dimensional program: fish rearing and distribution, law enforcement, and pheasant rearing and spring planting of pheasants. The Idaho population was 500,000. The Dept. budget was less than \$300,000. Fifty years later the population had increased to one million, the Dept. had 380 employees and a budget of 25 million dollars. In the 50 years following 1938, here's a condensed chronological progression of wildlife management in Idaho:

### **-Beaver-**

Historically, before 1939 beaver had been a source of substantial income to the Dept. through the sale of pelts. As of 1939 it was deemed to be far more valuable alive in streams for wildlife habitat enhancement. A vigorous Trapping and Translocation Project, one of the first under Pittman-Robertson was undertaken. From 1939 through 1942, 3,269 beaver were translocated into high elevation streams mostly from complaint areas associated with agricultural activities. They were transported by truck, pack-string and parachuted into remote mountain streams. The parachutes were attached to a box hinged to open on impact. From 1948-52 another 2,413 beaver had been transplanted and by the mid-1950's the program began tapering off. A Caretaker Program to manage beaver was initiated in 1945 and trappers were hired statewide to carry on a reduced live-trapping and transplanting program. They also pelted 12,880 beaver that were sold on the Seattle fur exchange. The Department's share was \$182,215. The Caretaker program would continue several years and was replaced with the first open-season in recent history in 1957-58. There were 24,000 beaver taken. The Caretaker Program was only averaging 8,000 and this was inadequate to offset

complaints from agricultural areas. Aerial colony trend routes were instituted for the first time to evaluate the effects of open seasons. In the late 1950's and early 1960's the value of pelts declined substantially and the interest in beaver trapping dropped accordingly. The responsibility to handle complaint beaver, usually in agricultural areas, fell to the Conservation Officers.

#### -Salt Distribution-

In the 1923-24 biennium considerable "salting" of big game ranges was reported. Concern involving elk winter range over utilization saw the acceleration of the salt-lick program in the late 1930's. Pitman-Robertson and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) personnel supported the program. This activity was supposed to encourage the early departure of elk to spring and summer ranges. "It is a notable fact that animals dying from scurvy or tick-infected areas have been eliminated by the use of salt, which keeps the animals in the best of physical condition; a phenomenal increase in numbers has also been noted since the distribution of salt." Distribution of salt blocks (leaching into the soil to create licks) was accomplished via truck, pack-string and aircraft. The old workhorse, the Ford tri-motor, was the aircraft of choice. The pack-string was purchased expressly to place salt in the Selway drainage. Thirty-two tons were distributed in 1938 and peaked in 1946 with 235 tons. This practice finally tailed off in 1960 after studies indicated it was not accomplishing the intent. "It had been a subject of much conjecture and all too little light."

#### -Game Bird Propagation-

Game bird propagation and distribution in the late 1930's was a big deal. The Jerome Game Bird Farm came on line in 1937. There were 16,000 pheasants released along with 618 wild birds live-trapped at the Lewiston Orchards. The birds were released in early summer hoping they would raise a brood for the fall hunting season. The Dept. was experimenting with Chinese, Mongolian and mutant pheasants. Chinese (ring-necks) would ultimately become the bird of choice. The Lapwai Farm reared 4500 pheasants for the northern counties and raised Bobwhite quail as well. Thanks to a private citizen from Boise, valley quail were introduced into Southwest Idaho in the 1870's. And here's a real stretch—Hungarian partridge live-trapped in Northern Idaho, along with pen-reared chukars from the Jerome Farm, were being released in Eastern Idaho to compensate for lost grouse-hunting opportunity. That included both forest grouse and sage grouse. Ultimately Huns would be transplanted statewide and become a valuable addition to upland bird hunting. By 1941 Northern Idaho had seven acres of pheasant holding pens at Coeur d'Alene for brood rearing. In 1946 the first two bird biologists were hired and even then, 38,000 pen-reared birds were released in 1947, along with another 600 from the Lewiston Orchards. Chukar plants, which had been rather modest, were significantly increased in the early fifties to see if this exotic bird was going to make it, which it did, and hunting resumed in 1956. Japanese green pheasants were tried in Northern Idaho in 1967 and discontinued in 1974 when it became apparent they could not acclimatize to that habitat. The holding pens at Coeur d'Alene were dismantled in 1955 as it became more evident that fall planting before the gun returned more pen-reared birds to the hunter's bag. Game bird farm production was stabilized at about 10,000 birds annually in the 1950's and increased to 16,000 in the 1960's and 1970's. The Lapwai Bird Farm was discontinued in 1963. The public had been involved in the day-old-pheasant-chick program for several years and the day-old-chukar program was started in 1979. By 1977 pheasant production was cut by 50% and most plants of pheasants were limited to Wildlife Management Areas.

#### -Predator Control-

During the 1930's and 40's the management of terrestrial wildlife and winged species was ultra conservative. Old mindsets were hard to overcome. One of the most classic examples was the Predatory Animal Control Program. Crows, ravens, magpies, kingfishers, pelicans, cormorants, herons, gulls, great horned owls, golden eagles, wolves, coyotes, bobcats, lynx and cougar were unprotected and killed

indiscriminately year around. Actually wolves were eliminated before 1939 but remained classified as predators. Winter loss of big game was still attributed to the abundance of predators on winter range. Relating to upland bird predation, crow and magpie roost rookeries were dynamited and the birds were pen-trapped and bounties were paid. In 1940, 55,675 magpies were bountied and 143,250 in 1941. As a teenager then I raided many a magpie nests in the Lower Payette at two-cents a head. The magpie bounty was paid through 1950 with adult magpies bringing ten-cents a head. Basically, eagles were shot on sight on antelope and goat ranges. Cougar were bountied year around at \$15 a head in 1938 and increased to \$75 in 1947. A "Cougar Derby" was held in 1946 with a \$100 award to the individual who killed the most cats. The bounty was reduced to \$50 in 1953 and to \$25 in 1955. The bounty on cougars was finally terminated in 1960, and the cat was later classified as a game animal in 1972 with a season limit of one. A four-month season was established, except sixteen Management Units were closed. Prior to 1971 when lions were unprotected the average yearly take was about 125 animals. In 1971, the year before the lion was to be reclassified, the word was out and hunters took 300. During State Warden James Beck's administration (1940-47) both coyotes and bobcats were bountied at five-dollars per animal. The combination of Dept. funds, United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) predator control and by hunters paid from all other funds, resulted in the killing of 22,529 coyotes and 1,053 bobcats. Coyote and bobcat bounties stopped in 1947. Kingfisher, cormorant and pelican were removed from the predator list in 1971. A more modern approach to predator control emerged in 1950. Site-specific control was initiated on coyotes where antelope were being transplanted in 1950 through 1952. In 1952 a study of Dept. operations by the prestigious Wildlife Management Institute recommended all bounties on predators be discontinued. However, the Dept. pressed on. Two predator trappers were hired in the 1956-57 winter to trap coyotes and bobcats in Northern Idaho. By 1957-58 State trappers and game officers were showing land owners how to trap coyotes and bobcats, again for site-specific control. The State trapper program was discontinued March 31, 1960. By the 1960-61 biennium the Department's participation in predatory-animal control consisted of contributions to the USFWS averaging \$25,000 through 1970 and increasing to \$35,000 in 1971-72. Concerned sportsmen, ranchers and livestock organizations visited the Commission frequently regarding predator control. Annual contributions would continue to increase and the Dept. could request predator control if needed for wildlife management. A note from 1975-76 biennial report stated, "It is somewhat of an irony that the most valuable furs come not from fur bearers, but from animals legally defined as 'unclassified' (fox, raccoon and badger) or as predators (lynx, bobcat and coyote)." Bobcat and lynx were ultimately classed as furbearers in 1977 along with the raccoon. The wolf was finally removed from predator list that same year. Coincidentally, the first confirmed wolf sighting in thirty years occurred then on Kelly Fork.

#### -Winter Feeding-

The first mention of winter feeding appears to be around 1939. State Game Warden Morris stated the limiting factor in the production of big game in Idaho is the lack of abundant winter forage. "It's apparent that a method providing for a larger removal (of game) must be devised to prevent the eventual destruction of the range." "Hay has been placed at strategic points in the event that snow conditions make it necessary to resort to this type feeding." In the two winters between 1940 and the spring of 1942, James Beck (Morris' successor) had this to say about feeding hay to deer: "Small-scale feeding has been tried on the Payette, Soldier Mountain and Arrow Rock winter ranges with . . . unsatisfactory results . . . diet of deer herds must be browse if they are to survive hard winters." The Dept. experienced a winter loss of 1800 deer on the South Fork Payette in the winter of 1931-32. During the winter of 1942-43, 2000 deer and 200 elk winterkilled on the South Fork Payette. Winter feeding was conducted in the late winter and early spring of 1946 with severe losses. This involved the South Fork Payette, Middle and South Forks Boise, Soldier Mountain, Warm Springs Creek near Ketchum and Bear Lake County. "It's certain that continued feeding year-after-year would be more detrimental to the herds than to hold the game numbers at the capacity of their winter forage." The Dept. distributed 511 tons of hay and 1770 tons of cubes for emergency feeding of

big game in the severe winter of 1948-49. Fifteen-thousand deer and 1750 elk were fed with a heavy winter loss; total cost was \$20,000. The Dept. fed again on the South Fork Payette in 1950-51 winter (566 deer and 99 elk died). The discourse over the merits, methods and timing of winter feeding continued unrelentingly involving Dept. personnel, Dept. Commissioners, Governors, Legislators, and the various interested publics. In the late 1970's and early 1980's the Dept. provided supplemental winter-feeding programs for big game in some of the harsher wintering areas but nothing like the 1983-84 winter when 16,500 deer, 600 elk and 500 antelope were on emergency feeding for five months, costing \$750,000.

#### -Black Bear-

In 1914 the State Game Warden commented on the status of the potential value of the bear as a game animal: "There are a great many people in this State who believe bear should be protected, at least that the killing of bear should only be allowed during the time fur is prime. It is certain that bear should receive some consideration from a game standpoint. As it is a valuable game animal, and under present conditions it will only be a few years until they will become extinct." The grizzly was practically extinct and would not be protected until 1946. At that time bear were hunted year-around with no bag limit. Black bear survived and the population was estimated to be 4,000 in 1932. The estimated harvest was 118 in 1942, and the bear was finally classified as a game animal in 1943 with a bag limit of one bear. In the 1940's and 50's bear were hunted year around with the exception of the five northernmost counties. Here the season ran from September through November. By 1968 seventeen Management Units in Regions 2 and 3 were reduced to a nine-month season. Thirteen more Management Units were included in the nine-month season in 1971. The annual harvest averaged 3300 bear in 1965-1970. The first bear tag was required beginning in 1974. Increasing interest in bear hunting by rifle and dog hunters prompted the Dept. to launch the first black-bear-ecology study on the Weiser River drainage in the early 1970's. This study would be the forerunner of similar studies on the Coeur d'Alene and Priest River drainages and at Lowell. In 1975 black bear were found to be the principal predator on elk-calf-mortality studies in the Lochsa-Selway Divide country. In June 1976 seventy-five bear were captured and relocated. Coincidentally with the decline of elk in 1976 bear regulations were changed to allow two-bear per hunter in Game Management Units 10, 12, and 16, and extended to nineteen more Game Management Units in 1977. The two-bear limit continued through 1986. By then limited-entry hunting was occurring in certain areas of the Weiser River Drainage. Statewide, sows with cubs were protected, and hunting with dogs became more restrictive and required a hound-dog permit. Bear regulations were further tweaked to require mandatory report of kill and presentation of the skull, closed hunting in proximity to dumps and established requirements for baiting bear. It had been a long haul for bear to gain recognition as a game animal. Even then, hunters would not be required to salvage the meat until 1994.

#### -Big Game Perspective-

Wild ungulate management was slowly evolving in the 1930's and early 1940's. It was becoming more commonly accepted that the limiting factor concerning big game population levels was over-utilized winter range and not solely winter predation. The Middle Fork Salmon deer herd was exceeding its "carrying capacity" of 7,000 head. The estimated deer population was 10 to 12 thousand. The first two-deer hunt in the history of the Dept. since the early times (sometime around 1912) was in 1940 in the Middle Fork Salmon. Because of the difficulty of hunter access it was discontinued in 1945 due to minimal harvest. Nineteen forty-one was the first mention of non-resident big game hunters using aircraft to access the Middle Fork. But they did little to reduce the deer population. Obviously they were buck hunters. Controlled hunts were first used on the Pocatello elk herd and Minidoka deer herd in the late 1940's. Trapping and translocation of big game animals continued in the mid 1940's and 50's. Seven-hundred deer, 164 elk, and 48 whitetail deer were relocated throughout Southwestern, South-Central, and Eastern Idaho. The end of WWII saw a decided upswing in hunters and big game harvest. The 1942 deer harvest was 14,000. The 1946 harvest of deer (27,000) was the largest the State had ever experienced. The elk harvest

in 1942 was 2,800 animals. The 1945 elk harvest increased to 9,800. License sales rocketed from 163,000 to over 200,000 in 1946. Seasons were adjusted to limit the take to around 20,000 deer to be safe for "herd maintenance." Whitetails were thought to be holding their own in spite of reduced habitat attributed primarily to agricultural activities. Illegal spotlighting was considered to be the greatest obstacle to whitetail expansion. The first recorded moose hunt since the Dept. was created occurred in 1946; harvest was 26. The estimated moose population was 2,200 animals. The moose harvest for the next five years would average a conservative twenty-five animals. The first either-sex moose hunt occurred in 1950. By the 1950-51 biennium the Cassia deer herd averaged 14% of the State-wide harvest. The Cassia was the first ever designated Game Management Unit in the State. The largest elk herds were in the Clearwater drainage. Both the Lochsa and Selway herds had passed their peak. A biologist assigned to a Selway elk winter-range study in 1950 recommended controlled burning and a two-elk limit. Neither recommendation was adopted. The brush fields, following the 1910, 1919, and 1934 fires, were being replaced by timber stands or growing out of the reach of the elk. It was estimated the elk populations in the Spokane and Clearwater drainages were at high levels between 1935 and 1965. Increased access caused by timber harvest activities (road construction and massive clear cuts), coupled with lenient hunting seasons and bag limits, increased hunter numbers and plant succession on winter ranges were major factors causing the decline since that time. Controlled burns, for a multiplicity of reasons, never really got off the ground. The ten-year average (1953-1962) for deer, elk and bear harvest was 66,000, 14,700 and 3,000, respectively. It was stated, "There were not enough resident deer hunters to contain herds."

#### -Range Rehabilitation-

Range rehabilitation experimental work began in earnest in 1950. In the fall approximately 1,000 acres in the Middle Fork Salmon were planted with bitterbrush and balsam-root seeds. Survival of both species was poor. The same results occurred with chokecherry and serviceberry. Even willow and southernwood cuttings were tried with little success. During the 1950-52 biennium the Dept. experimented with some sixty browse species in the Middle Fork Salmon, South Fork Payette and Boise River Drainages. By 1954 bitterbrush was the preferred species. Bitterbrush was seeded on 150 acres on South Fork Boise. Two-hundred more acres were seeded on Boise River in 1958. Pittman-Robertson funds were utilized for the fifteen consecutive years in the wildlife habitat improvement program. Six-million seven-hundred-thousand dollars of Pittman-Robertson funds had been spent through 1966. Over one-and-a-half million trees and shrubs were planted in wind breaks. By 1964 the tree/shrub planting job was de-emphasized in favor of range rehabilitation work. By 1974 over 16,000 bitterbrush plants were planted on USFS lands.

#### -Wildlife Management Areas-

From its inception through the 1940's, the Dept. had a persisting penchant to create Big Game preserves and Bird Sanctuaries. It was noted there were either Preserves or Sanctuaries, or both, in virtually every county in the State in the 1940's. These designations involved thousands of acres of both public and private lands. By the early 1960's most had been abolished by the Fish & Game Commission. Meanwhile several key purchases of big game winter range were made which, in concert with purchases of previous years, formed the nucleus of the Department's Wildlife Management Areas. By 1974 the Dept. had 170,000 acres under Wildlife Management. And by 1987 the Dept. had acquired 24 Wildlife Management Areas and 209 Access Areas. As of 1949 the State Board of Examiners approval was required on major purchases by the Dept. It should be noted County Commissions resented many of the land purchases and the loss of the tax base even though there were payments in lieu of taxes. In addition, a Cooperative Wildlife management Program was instituted between the Dept., BLM, Intermountain Research station and private lands involving 31,547 acres in Shoshone, Burley and Boise BLM Districts in Dept. Region 4. That acreage involved 269 isolated tracts (14 to 920 acres in size). Another 3500 acres of Bureau of Reclamation lands in North Minidoka County were also managed for wildlife.

## -Antelope-

The early 1900's through 1930 antelope populations waxed and waned. Hunting had been closed for several years. Remnant bands were alluded to in 1922. The estimated population by 1930 ranged between 1,000 and 2,000. Four-thousand were reported by 1932 and had jumped to 11,500 by 1934 and held to around 10,500 in 1939. The annual harvest was averaging just under 1,500 in 1940-42. The first aerial surveys were flown in the Pashimeroi in 1940 (5,000 animals counted; 400 permits issued and the Owyhee herd was at 3,500 in 1941; with 325 permits). Hunting was closed in 1946 even though the State-wide population was holding over 10,000. Translocation of antelope began in 1946 as 152 from the Challis Area were moved to Holbrook and southeast of Twin Falls. Another 130 were transplanted from the Big Lost to Owyhee and Oneida Counties in 1948. There were very conservative harvests in 1948-49; less than 500 annually. In the meantime translocation efforts had accelerated with the relocation of 1,000 head. By 1950 the population had expanded to 13,400 and the harvest was just under 2,000. The Pashimeroi Valley Antelope Study initiated in the mid-1950's was to try and determine the factors affecting antelope production and the means to maintain herds. Doe-fawn ratios suggested nearly half of the fawns born in the spring of 1959 were dead by September. As the study continued, summer range conditions were thought to be an increasingly important factor in fawn survival. In addition, intensive exploratory observations on golden eagles were made during June 1960. It was estimated that 12 and possibly 18 eagles were in the Upper Pashimeroi/Upper Little Lost River Study Area. About 70% of the refuse items at two nest sites and one feeding station were rabbit. No remains of antelope were found. As noted previously, golden eagles had been shot on sight on antelope and goat ranges for years. Subsequent investigative work on antelope ecology in the 1960's and 1970' contributed to the early refinement of antelope management. Seasons were set to avoid the rut, fencing criteria to permit animal movement advocated, and the preservation of migration corridors encouraged. And, of course, the preservation of large tracts of sagebrush habitat in cooperation with the BLM was pursued. Annual harvest exceeded 3,000 for the first time in 1989.

## -Mountain Goats and Big Horn Sheep-

Mountain goat and big horn sheep management evolved slowly. The estimated goat population was 4,000 head and big horns 2,000 in 1939. A \$10.00 goat tag was required in 1943. General hunting for mountain goats had prevailed through 1947. The season was closed in 1948 and 1949. The first comprehensive study of the life history of mountain goats was initiated in 1955. Ironically, it wasn't until 1951 that hunters were required to salvage goat meat. Seasons reopened to general hunting again in 1950-1966. The average yearly harvest was eighty animals. General goat hunting ended in 1967. Translocation of mountain goats picked up in the 1960's with goats released in the Seven Devils, Echo Bay, Green Monarchs, Johns Creek, Palisades Canyon and Black Canyon in Unit 67. There was no Rocky Mountain Sheep Season from 1939 through 1945. A general hunt in 1946 harvested 13 sheep. The season was closed again during 1948 and was reopened to general hunting 1953 through 1969 with an average yearly harvest of forty sheep. An extensive study of mountain sheep ecology began in 1954. The study began under the direction of Idaho Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, which had been established at the University of Idaho in 1948. General hunting on sheep ended in 1970. Incidentally, a most significant regulation change concerning big horn harvest opportunity occurred in 1984. The mandatory  $\frac{3}{4}$ -curl requirement was supplemented by the choice of taking a ram over 4-years of age. That, essentially, made any broomed ram eligible. Beginning in 1975 through 1984 Rocky Mt. sheep were transplanted in five Game Management Units. Big horn surveys using helicopters occurred for the first time in 1958. California big horn had been extirpated in Owyhee County by 1910. Nineteen were released in East Fork Owyhee Canyon in 1963 with nine more in 1965 and ten more in 1966. Twelve were released in Little Jacks Creek in 1967. The first controlled hunt was in 1969 in the East Fort Owyhee. Another 65 California big horns were transplanted in 1980 through 1984. The biggest concern over recovering both species on traditional ranges was and is the transmission of diseases from contact with domestic sheep. The Dept. continues to work with the land management agencies and permittees relative to this problem.

## -Big Game Management-

In 1953 the first game harvest questionnaire was mailed to approximately 5% of the license buyers. This was to obtain better information concerning State-wide harvest on deer, elk, bear, upland birds and waterfowl. Major check stations provided additional valuable management information. Big game report cards were initiated in 1957 to more rapidly facilitate analysis of State-wide harvest data. The cards showed the relative importance of the harvest on each day of the season, the ratio of males to females, origin of the hunters, relative impact of residents and non-residents and year-to-year trends in harvest. For the purpose of further refining game management techniques, the State was divided into 78 Big Game Management Units (Units) in 1959. Trapping, tagging, marking and releasing big game animals was accelerated to determine big game movements. Deer were belled to ascertain year-around movements. As of 1956 the Dept. was transitioning to general hunts for deer and elk. There were only five controlled hunts for deer and elk at that time. The Dept. was entering an era of flourishing game herds. By 1957 all deer hunting was general hunts. Multiple deer tags became available in 1958. Three tags were to be had in 1959, 4 tags in 1960 and 5 tags in 1962. The deer harvest in 1956 (71,885) was a record. Owyhee County alone accounted for 9,960 animals. The season had been closed there in 1946 to increase the herd. The elk harvest also was a record; just short of 16,000. At this time non-residents were taking about 12% of the elk. It should be noted that the Clearwater game range investigation was begun in 1954 to determine big game distribution in relation to the proposed Big Eddy and Penny Cliffs Dams on the Clearwater River. Helicopters were used as a census tool on a broad scale for the first time in the field of wildlife management. An estimated 26,000 wintering elk were found in the Project Area. Speaking of dams, a monumental decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in the late 1960's revoked the license of the Pacific Northwest Power Company to build the High Mt. Sheep Dam on the Snake River just above the mouth of the Salmon River. This was a tremendous acknowledgement of the value of fish, wildlife and outdoor recreation. In the mid and late 1950's there were even access improvement projects to spread hunter distribution and increase deer and elk harvest. Forty miles of abandoned trail and 54 miles of new trail were opened in Chamberlain Basin for elk hunters. In cooperation with the BLM the Dept. constructed hunter access roads in Owyhee County across the top of Juniper Mountain to Bull Basin; another from Triangle to Indian Meadows; and a complete loop around Cinnabar Mountain. What a contrast to later concerns regarding hunter access. Concurrently in 1957 the Cassia deer herd investigation was started. Helicopters were used for winter censuses. This study was a forerunner of several projects Statewide to more intensively manage deer in areas of high populations and poor wintering conditions.

## -Game Birds-

It was a quantum leap in bird management for the Dept. to adjust to the cyclic nature of bird populations and not automatically close the season when bird numbers dropped. This inclination was particularly evident involving Huns and grouse species. By the 1950's as a better grasp of bird population dynamics emerged, the Department became more confident in maintaining seasons. Nineteen-sixty through 1973 produced the highest populations of most game birds in the history of the State. Moderate climatic conditions associated with good habitat produced the birds. Winter sex-ratio counts and spring-crowing counts combined with brood counts confirmed a substantial pheasant population. Pheasants were on a big upswing with limited hen hunting beginning in 1960. Allowing hen hunting was predicated on research that showed the annual turnover rate on hen pheasants was about 65% whether hunted or not. Hen hunting continued for six consecutive years. At that time the annual pheasant harvest was averaging 500,000 birds. The largest annual pheasant harvest occurred in 1964 (757,000). Historically pheasants provided about 50% of the annual upland-game-bird harvest. Hen hunting resumed on a limited basis in 1970 through 1975. However the 1974 harvest of 326,200 pheasants was indicative of the continuing loss of pheasant habitat. There was a brief recovery period during 1979-81 but it's been basically downhill ever since. The Legislature approved the first upland bird and waterfowl stamp programs in 1987. The money from the sale

of these stamps was expressly marked for bird-habitat improvement. But even with the habitat improvement program the Dept. could not stem the tide. More hens were shot in 1964 than roosters in 1988. In terms of numbers, harvested doves had consistently maintained their position as the number-three game bird over the past ten years. The 203,300 taken in 1963 was a record high. In an effort to focus hunting pressure on some of the lightly hunted species, chukar, Hun and quail seasons were moved to the third Saturday in September from the late October opening. The chukar harvest in 1968 was the largest on record (176,900). Idaho had one of the longest, if not the longest, season in the United States – August 9 through January 25. Hungarian partridge harvest was also near record levels and the quail harvest exceeded any previous year. The 1972 forest-grouse harvest was the highest on record (85,000). To its credit, the Department had established seasons and bag limits to take advantage of these healthy populations. In just two years these robust upland game bird populations would wane. A series of harsh winters and cold, wet springs exacted a toll both on brood stock and recruitment.

#### -Sage Grouse-

Sage grouse increased in 1939 and 1940 although it was thought for some time their numbers “had been depleted beyond recovery.” There was a short season in 1943, then closed in 1944. First booming-ground counts started in spring of 1946. Feather development rates established on pen-reared birds in the late 1950’s aided in identifying recruitment. The aging of 4,200 wings revealed that Southeastern Idaho had produced 3.8 young per adult female in 1962. Three young per hen was considered good. This information combined with the censusing of males on specific strutting grounds saw more liberal seasons and bag limits. By 1967 there was a doubling of the long-term sage-grouse harvest (51,700 birds). The harvest peaked out in 1969 at 81,700. The following 10-year average was 68,890, and the all-time high was in 1979 (92,600). Harvest began falling off in 1982 as sage grouse habitat continued to decline. Biologists had already plotted year-around distribution and movement patterns in an effort to protect sage grouse habitat. Range fires, sage-brush-eradication projects and expansion into desert areas with the advent of sprinkler irrigation continued to impact sage grouse habitat. Dept. biologists were cautious involving sharp-tail grouse management. The first season, with a two bird-limit, was in 1958.

#### -Turkeys-

Following a failed effort in the 1920’s, the release of wild turkeys in Idaho resumed in 1961 with the release of seventeen birds near Whitebird. In 1962, eleven more were released on a tributary of Rapid River and eleven turkeys were released on Skookumchuck Creek. By 1967 ninety-three turkeys had been released in eleven locations. The first turkey hunt in the history of the State took place during the fall of 1967. One-hundred thirty-five hunters purchased tags, 104 went hunting and 17 turkeys were taken. A general two-day hunt in 1968 resulted in nine turkeys harvested. Subsequently turkey populations fluctuated greatly. It was suspected then that Idaho’s habitat was only marginal for wild turkeys, particularly Merriams. In 1974 a short spring gobbler season was held for the first time in addition to the fall season. By 1986 five-hundred ninety-eight turkeys from other states and Idaho flocks had been released at 36 sites. By then turkeys were well on their way to becoming a Statewide resource. So much for marginal habitat!

#### -Cooperative Efforts-

One of the most significant developments in wildlife management in years occurred in 1964 when the Dept. began joint field inspections with the BLM on all brush removal programs by the BLM. This cooperative effort to consider wildlife needs on public lands was a significant step forward in protecting the shrinking habitat of sagebrush-dependent species. By 1973 it was noted annual losses or alterations of habitat continued to pose the greatest threat to maintaining high-level wildlife populations. The Dept. placed great



importance on liaison with government agencies and private organizations regarding land management practices. This involved providing wildlife ecological information and recommendations to the USFS and BLM on timber sales, grazing programs, land treatment projects, water developments, road construction, land use plans and environmental statements. Coincidentally the Idaho Department of Water Resources was encouraging the conversion of several thousand acres of sagebrush habitats to agricultural lands in Southeastern Idaho. In fact 380,000 acres of public land was converted to farm land under the 1877 Desert Land Entry Act in 30 years (1947-1977). Overall 800,000 acres have been added to the agricultural base since the 1950's.

#### -Big Game Decline-

There was a significant decline in deer and elk populations State-wide in the early 1970's which saw radical changes in hunting opportunity. Archery permits were required for the first time in 1975 by all archers taking part in special archery hunts or separate archery seasons; 6257 archers harvested 252 deer in 1975; 3100 archers took 78 elk. Quotas limiting non-resident deer and elk hunters began in 1972. There were fewer resident deer and elk hunters in 1975 than any year since 1957. Resident and non-resident license fees had just increased as well. Deer and elk seasons were separated in fourteen Management units in 1976 to reduce hunting pressure on elk. Twenty-two Management Units were opened for antlered deer, and 39 Units were open for either-sex deer hunting for less than two weeks, followed by antlered-only hunting. Statewide deer harvest was 25,400 deer in 1976. The last time less deer were taken was in 1950. Fifty-seven Units were under bulls-only hunting and the remaining eleven Units were under bulls-only hunting for a portion of the season. The most significant change in 1977 was the issuance of special elk tags good only for hunting the eight northern-most Units in the State (12,000 tags for residents and 1200 for non-residents). This limited-entry hunting was an effort to preserve either-sex elk hunting. There were 4,100 elk harvested in 1976. The last time less elk were harvested was 34 years ago in 1942. It took six years for elk populations to recover appreciably. Deer had rebounded by 1977. But bulls and buck-only hunting was now well established.

#### -Planning-

During the mid and late 1970's the Dept. began amassing and assembling data to develop a long-range comprehensive wildlife-management plan, and detailed regional species management plans. This was a major concerted effort by the Dept. to define and display its goals and objectives for wildlife. This provided governmental agencies, the State legislators, wildlife organizations, and citizen sportsmen opportunity to react to the status of wildlife populations and existing game management programs. By the close of 1984 long-range plans for all big game species, furbearers, waterfowl, upland game birds and non-game had been approved by the Commission. This was probably the best on-the-job training session any Commission had ever received. Also at the urging of the Dept. the State Legislature passed the State Income Tax Check-off Legislation to fund and jump-start the non-game program. This was a philosophical breakthrough for many Idahoans concerned with the welfare of all wildlife species.

The fifty years from 1938 to 1988 saw a gradual maturing of the Dept. philosophy from ultra-conservatism to a more liberal approach to wildlife management. This was a result of hiring field personnel with biological backgrounds; increasing the data base on wildlife ecology; understanding and trying to preserve wildlife habitats; and educating and gaining public support for modern game management. In retrospect those years involved a tremendous learning curve in the field of wildlife management in Idaho.

The above brief history was summarized by Martel Morache and presented to the Idaho Chapter of The Wildlife Society at Moscow, Idaho, on March 4, 2004. All material is from early biennial reports, commission minutes, and other Idaho Fish & Game Department reports. Morache was hired as a conservation officer in 1956, serving for nine years at Boise, Glenns Ferry, Cascade, and Pocatello. He was promoted to regional educator for the Magic Valley region in 1965, and came into the Boise office as regional conservation educator, after becoming involved in wilderness and wild and scenic river coordination for the agency. He served as ecological coordinator in the department's planning group prior to becoming the first state nongame wildlife manager, producing the first nongame wildlife plan for the agency. Morache retired on July 1, 1985, having served in the Idaho Fish & Game Department for three decades.