

Otter, Legislature prioritize war on wolves

Devin Rokyta/Moscow-Pullman Daily News

You have to wonder when Idaho will finally get its fill of killing wolves.

The most likely answer is never, mostly because the state will probably be stopped short of its ultimate goal and back off its eradication efforts when the species' population dips down to about 150 or 10 breeding pairs - anything below that, officials fear, may encourage the federal government to step back in.

To put that population number in perspective, just five short years ago the predator's numbers in Idaho were believed to be around 1,000. Many groups estimate the current population to be in the neighborhood of 500.

You have to give Idaho some credit for that feat. While the Legislature and Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter are incapable of adequately funding a proper education system or attracting business and shedding Idaho of the distinction of having the nation's highest number of minimum-wage workers per capita, they certainly know how to slaughter wolves, a shy and elusive animal that spends the majority of its time in remote habitat.

It's all about getting your priorities straight.

And since picking off wolves through the air, hiring trackers to hunt and eliminate them deep in the wilderness and trapping weren't quite effective enough for their liking, one of the Legislature's final actions before adjourning this past week was to pass a bill creating a \$400,000 fund and establishing a five-member board whose job is to authorize the killing of wolves that come into conflict with wildlife or livestock. The board, to be appointed by Otter, the same man who said in 2007 he wanted to be the first to kill an Idaho wolf after federal protections were taken away, will include representatives of the agricultural, livestock and hunting communities - and no one from an environmental or conservation group.

"Idaho wants to manage our wolves, and we want to manage them to a reasonable number so that the species don't get endangered again and the feds don't come in and take it over again," Otter said after the bill passed last week.

Wolves will be endangered in Idaho as long as Boise has any say in the species' future, because state officials, Otter included, only know one wolf management method - and that's eradication.