

2005 MONTANA LEGISLATURE
House Bill No. 573
(Introduced by T. Dowell)

PRIMARY ISSUES

ABSENCE of Rationale for this Bill:

- There is no precedent for double fencing either in Canada or anywhere in the USA
- HB 573 does not address a disease or genetic issue according to MDOL (E.S, 2/11/05)
- MFWP has not requested that HB 573 be adopted nor have they stated that double fencing is warranted based on their administration of game farms (MFWP, T. Feldner, 2/11/05).
- Current fencing standards were established in 1999 and are comprehensive. Required is an 8-ft. minimum high fencing and high tensile knotted wire.
- MFWP costs potentially saved would be about \$2,000/year (MFWP, T. Feldner, 2/11/05). In perspective, the cost amounts to roughly three one thousands of one percent of MFWP's annual budget (\$2,120/\$60,000,000).
- In NW Montana, the only fencing problems have been w/ grandfather operations not w/ fences that adhere to the 1999 standards (MFWP, Brian Summers, 2/11/05).

SECONDARY ISSUES:

- Would encourage ranchers not to report animal escapes.
- Potentially impair cooperation between the alternative livestock industry and MFWP
- May reduce public hunting opportunity thru less landowner cooperation.
- Diminish wildlife habitat by closing off more land by double fencing.
- Would unfairly assign extra costs to the already taxed alternative livestock industry.
- Would not provide fair treatment to the alternative livestock ranchers. As an example, the cost of MFWP bear relocation, hazing, and education programs due to backyard bird feeders attracting bears is not recaptured. This is a large problem in NW Montana, costs the organization thousands annually, and yet those costs are not recaptured.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- That HB573 be unanimously rejected as being ill-founded and a biased attempt to penalized the alternative livestock industry.
- Recommend that the sponsor of HB 573 focus on issues of much greater importance including the issue of wolf introduction, noxious weed control, bull trout, and timber resource management. As pertains to bull trout, the species appears to be captivating MFWP to where we are compromising other fisheries resources and sportfish harvest opportunities. Greater knapweed control in NW Montana is needed along w/ improvement of timber harvesting opportunities.