EXHIBIT 15
DATE 2/15/05
HB 573

# HISTORY & FACTS
# ELK RANCHING IN MONTANA

The right to own and raise elk and deer in Montana has existed ever since Montana became a state. One of the first private elk ranches was established in 1896 by the Custer Cattle Company of Hardin, Montana who owned 60 head of elk. Similarly, another ranch in the Kalispell area established an elk herd in 1898. Other ranches in the Butte and Anaconda area also raised elk or deer in these early years.

In the 1920's the Fish and Game of Montana issued permits to individuals allowing them to capture wild game animals, including elk and deer. In 1933, Montana amended its brand statutes to allow an individual to obtain a brand for elk and deer, and in 1935 the first game farm statute was adopted which required that you obtain a license from the state to be able to keep privately owned game animals on your farm or ranch.

In the 1930's and 40's the National Park Service sold surplus elk taken from Yellowstone National Park and Glacier National Park. In fact, [illegible] park service. Cort Duran (a Canadian animal trainer who bought a ranch at Martinsdale, Montana) purchased approximately 100 head of elk from Glacier Park. Cort Duran trained several of the elk to perform stunts, including packing them in a pack string, pulling sleighs and wagons, and actually backing them out of a chute into a reservoir. His animal show traveled the United States and even performed in Madison Square Gardens in New York. Another ranch in the Paradise Valley bought 12 head of elk from Yellowstone National Park in the 1940's.

**Contrary to what elk ranching critics want you to believe, it has been unlawful to take elk or deer from wild populations for over 65 years.** They must obtain elk or deer from other licensed ranches and pass stringent health tests before transporting elk in Montana. Today, **Montana is one of the most regulated states in the USA, Canada or New Zealand.**

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At the present time the jurisdiction over elk ranches is divided between Fish Wildlife & Parks and the Dept. of Livestock. FWP is in charge of licensing and perimeter fence requirements only. DoL has jurisdiction over registered tags, ear tattoos or brands and also all health testing and transportation of animals moving within Montana and the importation of any animals coming from out of state. All elk are required to be tested for TB, Brucellosis and red deer hybrid upon any movement into Montana or within the state. **Tim Feldner (game farm coordinator for FWP) stated on Sept. 1, 2000 "there are no alternative livestock operations with a disease problem."**

Unable to use elk from wild populations, research centers in Montana and elsewhere in the U.S. have used animals donated by Montana elk ranchers for research projects. The results have been very helpful in obtaining data to be used by wildlife agencies.

## FACTS ABOUT INITIATIVE 143

The backers of I-143 would like you to believe that this was brought to the voters by a large group of sportsmen to eliminate elk ranching in Montana. But the truth is that it was started by a group of individuals with only philosophical differences who spread misinformation such as - Canada losing their TB free status and numerous people contacting the disease by handling elk. Maria Koller, D.V.M., Senior Program Specialist, Animal Health & Production Division in Canada sent a statement which said none of the above were true. Yet the voters in Montana were led to believe the fallacies. The elk are bought from other ranches or born and raised on private land and they certainly aren't free or wild.

Mad-cow disease was also used as a scare tactic. Beth Williams (a professor of veterinary science at the University of Wyoming and a leading expert on CWD) stated **"It's very misleading to the public and it's being done in a sensationalistic way and playing on people's fears. While both diseases are brain infections, they are as different as measles in humans and distemper in dogs."**

Forty one counties in Montana voted against I-143 and fifteen urban counties supported I-143. The initiative passed by only 1%. By the actions of this small group, it is only driving a larger wedge between urban and rural Montana. There are over 400 farm, ranch and business families who depend on private elk ranching for a large portion of their income.

Elk ranchers pay over $24.00 per animal per year in taxes to defray the expenses to implement the game farm program. The supporters of I-143 would like you to believe that the program is funded by large sums of money from FWP but many times this is only a duplication of services.

Elk ranching is a viable industry and contributes to the economy and tax base supporting schools and universities. We hope this clarifies some of the misinformation circulated prior to the election of Nov. 7th, 2000. Thank you for your support in the future. Additional information can be obtained by writing President Becky Messaros of Montana Alternative Livestock Producers, 2191 Millegan Rd., Cascade, MT 59421. Ph. 406-866-3318