

House Bill 573
February 15, 2005
Presented by Jim Kropp
House Agriculture Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, for the record I am Jim Kropp, Chief of Law Enforcement for Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP).

I am here today to provide informational testimony concerning the affect HB 573 would have on licensed alternative livestock ranches and on FWP. HB573 requires that by March 1, 2007 an alternative livestock licensee must double fence his facility or be liable for any costs incurred by the Department in the killing or recapture of escaped alternative livestock. There are currently 66 licensed alternative livestock ranches in Montana that hold approximately 2,600 animals, of which most are elk. The fences that enclose these animals vary in design based on the standards that were in place when the fences were constructed. Fences constructed before 1992 are required to be 7 ½ feet in height and constructed of woven wire. Fences constructed between 1992 and 1999 are required to be 8 feet in height with at least the first 6 feet constructed of woven mesh wire and supplemental strands of barbed or smooth wire spaced at 6 inch intervals to attain the required 8 foot height. Fences constructed since 1999 are required to be a minimum of 8 feet and constructed entirely of high tensile, knotted joint woven wire. All new fences constructed to comply with HB573 would need to be constructed using the 1999 standard. Estimated cost of fence construction for this type of fence is approximately \$10,000 per linear mile of fence. Currently, alternative livestock ranches enclose between 10,000 and 11,000 acres in total.

Whether due to human error, acts of nature, or acts of the animals themselves, escapes from the alternative livestock ranches do occur. Since 1995, FWP has documented the escape of 237 animals in 28 different incidents from alternative livestock ranches. Thirty-four of those animals were not recaptured by the licensee. At least 10 of those 34 animals have not been located or accounted for by FWP. By law, animals not recovered within 5 days of escape, or within 48 hours for males during breeding season, become the property of the state. In those situations, FWP has taken actions to locate and dispatch the animals to eliminate potential contact with free ranging wildlife. In all cases, the recapture or killing of those animals has been funded through license dollars appropriated for the regulation of alternative livestock facilities. Two of those actions, one in 1999 and one in 2003, resulted in expenditures of approximately \$10,000.

In addition to escapes from alternative livestock ranches, there have been 22 separate occasions since 1995 when wild game animals, generally deer, have entered alternative livestock facilities. In those incidents, FWP personnel have dispatched the animals within the alternative livestock ranch fences, again resulting in expenditures to FWP.