

Senate Bill 461
March 29, 2005
Presented by Chris Smith
House Agriculture Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, for the record I am Chris Smith, Chief of Staff of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP).

As amended, SB 461 directs FWP to place a radio collar on packs of wolves near livestock or human population centers in areas where depredations are chronic or likely. As a legal matter, until wolves are removed from the list of endangered species, the authority to capture or collar wolves is limited.

Wolves have become well established in Montana. The state agencies involved in wolf management, along with Montana's citizens, have agreed on a plan to deal with the impacts of wolf recovery. FWP, along with the Department of Livestock (DOL) and the U. S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services (Wildlife Services) will be as proactive as possible in identifying potential problem areas, assisting livestock producers avoid depredation and acting swiftly and effectively when wolves prey on domestic livestock. The plan calls for increased use of radio collars for monitoring purposes in the areas where there is the greatest potential for conflict. FWP is already moving in this direction with our new field program. We are also initiating a broad-based discussion on what type of compensation program should be in place once wolves are delisted.

The role radio collars will play in our overall management program was thoroughly discussed during development of the state plan. This technology will greatly assist in overall population monitoring, identifying potential conflict areas, determining who the affected landowners are and facilitating removal of depredating animals in some circumstances, similar to how we address bear damage to private property.

FWP has made it clear that our commitment to take over more wolf management responsibility is linked to the availability of federal funding for this work, and as amended, SB 461 provides clear emphasis on that point.

Dealing with wolves will be a challenge for all Montanans. FWP, DOL and Wildlife Services have committed to do all we can to minimize the impacts on livestock producers and that includes stepping up collaring efforts in problem areas.