

Statement in Opposition to House Bill 286

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In 2001 House Bill 492 was passed by the Montana legislature and signed into law by Governor Martz. This bill added prairie dogs to Montana's list of "non-game species in need of management." This legislation was the direct result of the previous 4 years of work by Montana's Prairie Dog Working Group and was approved by the Montana legislature due to compromise between the many participants involved. Montana's Prairie Dog Working Group continues to meet, and includes a wide spectrum of interests, including state and federal agencies, stockgrowers, conservationists, landowners, and hunters.

The Montana Prairie Dog Working Group has reached consensus on only one topic over the years: changing Montana's laws to give Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks the authority to regulate prairie dog shooting on public lands.

House Bill 286 threatens to undo all of this work and successful compromise by removing the ability of our state wildlife agency to manage prairie dogs on public lands. It would tell Montanans that their efforts to work together to solve wildlife problems don't matter to our legislators. And it would undermine the future of state working groups by discouraging people from participating if their participation "doesn't really matter."

Montana's Prairie Dog Working Group is a successful attempt to resolve conflicts over prairie dog management issues. House Bill 286, on the other hand, would increase controversy and conflict. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service removed the black-tailed prairie dog from the candidate list for Endangered Species Act protection in part because of additional protections, such as the 2001 Montana law that House Bill 286 seeks to revoke.

The best way for the state to maintain its prairie dog management authority is to continue to use its management authority and actually manage prairie dogs. By removing even the ability of our state wildlife agency to manage prairie dogs, House Bill 286 would destroy the value of the state Prairie Dog Working Group and leave those groups supporting prairie dog conservation with little choice but to look to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for management authority. Predator Conservation Alliance, for one, would prefer to continue to work with Montana and the state's Prairie Dog Working Group.

Thank you for considering our comments.

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