

EXHIBIT 1
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SR 410

Senate Bill 410
March 22, 2005
Presented by Larry Peterman
House Fish, Wildlife & Parks Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, for the record I am Larry Peterman, Chief of Field Operations for Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). I am here to testify in support of SB 410.

SB 410 expands the power of cities and towns to control, remove, and restrict game animals under plans approved by FWP, and is intended to make available, the necessary tools for cities and towns to address urban wildlife populations and the resulting conflicts. This issue is not only of concern to cities and towns, but also is one of importance to FWP.

Human-wildlife conflicts within the city limits of many Montana towns have seen a dramatic increase over the last ten years. Public safety concerns, property damage and concerns for the welfare of wildlife have developed because of expanding populations of big game animals, predators, and game birds.

Human tolerance for the damage wildlife cause has shown a sharp decline. As a result, there are increasingly higher demands on FWP and local government resources for responding to and solving these problems.

In 2003, the issue was elevated to the state legislature and HB 249 was passed. HB 249 gave cities and towns, with FWP approval, the authority to adopt and implement a plan to control, remove and restrict game animals within its boundaries for public health and safety purposes. The new law did not require the city to formulate a plan, nor did it remove responsibility from FWP. The legislation provided an opportunity for FWP to work with city and town governments in a united effort to address the urban wildlife conflict concerns of local citizens.

To assist cities and towns with implementing HB 249, FWP needed to develop a strategy for working with local governments on these types of issues and determine the role of FWP. To aid this effort the Urban Wildlife Working Group was established to begin addressing the issue of urban wildlife. This group included representatives from the cities of Helena, Billings, and Missoula; the League of Cities and Towns; concerned members of the public; and FWP staff.

The work group identified two statutory issues, which if corrected, would give FWP and municipalities additional tools to address urban wildlife problems. The first issue identified was the feeding of urban wildlife. Currently, statute prohibits the feeding of wildlife only if the feeding causes a threat to human health or safety. Feeding deer in town is one of the principal activities, which leads to problems of too many deer in many neighborhoods. In many cases, deer have increased to the point that they cause considerable property damage to lawns, trees and shrubs, and their presence tends to pose a human safety risk when bears and lions follow them into town.

The second issue involves the statute that prohibits the hunting of deer within city limits. While in most cases, hunting within city limits is not a viable or acceptable option for controlling urban deer populations, there are several rural communities, which could utilize hunting as a viable control method and have harvest as part of their deer control plan. The cities of Colstrip and Fort Peck are two examples.

The City of Colstrip has had a successful deer management plan, which included archery hunting. However, since they became incorporated, it is no longer legal to hunt deer as part of their plan. SB 410 will correct this problem and give cities and towns additional tools to help them address urban wildlife issues.

FWP is committed to working with cities and towns to prevent or reduce wildlife conflicts. We believe the provisions in SB 410 will assist cities and towns with addressing urban wildlife issues and urge your support.