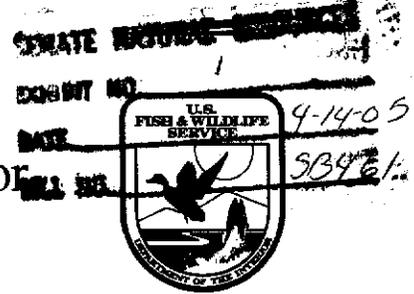




United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



In Reply Refer To:
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APR 11 2005

FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

APR - 7 2005

Mr. M. Jeff Hagener
Director
Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Dear Director Hagener:

Thank you for your letter regarding Montana Senate Bill No. 461 and the impact of the provision requiring Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) to provide telemetry receivers to any landowner who requests one in areas where wolf depredations are chronic or likely. Bill 461 also stipulates "The Department shall expend only the federal funds for wolf management purposes to fulfill the requirements of this section."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has used radio telemetry to help manage wolves and offered radio receivers to landowners on a case-by-case, but tightly controlled, basis for several years. When properly managed by professionals, this approach to monitoring wolf activity can help manage wolves and minimize conflicts with local livestock producers who are having chronic problems that cannot be addressed in other ways. However, as we read Bill 461, it does not allow MFWP to use its professional discretion and management expertise on a case-by-case basis.

We are concerned about the potential financial impacts of this requirement on MFWP's ability to fulfill other essential duties related to wolf recovery and management. MFWP estimated that Bill 461 could cost approximately \$385,000 in fiscal year 2006 and nearly \$50,000 per year in subsequent years. Meeting the mandatory and potentially unlimited demand for radio telemetry receivers could divert both fiscal and human resources away from responsibilities MFWP agreed to fulfill under terms of the cooperative agreement between our agencies. The amount of Federal funding available for wolf management in Montana is not sufficient to fund Bill 461 and still fund the overall State wolf management program.

As we both agree, there are numerous advantages of State wolf management, and both the Service and MFWP have made significant investment in transferring this program to the State of Montana. However, we are concerned that the result of Bill 461 could be a major setback to the progress that has been made and could require the Service to resume a more active role in managing wolves in Montana.

If I can be of further assistance in this matter, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Acting Director

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