

Testimony on HB 514, March 24, 2005
Montana Senate Fish and Game Committee

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Mr. Chairman, The National Wildlife Federation thanks you for the opportunity to recommend passage of HB 514.

About 35 years ago, I was an undergraduate wildlife major at the University of Montana. At that time, the Craighead brothers were conducting their pioneering studies of grizzlies in Yellowstone. When the Yellowstone dumps were suddenly closed, grizzly bear mortality increased dramatically and population numbers reached an all time low of perhaps as few as 200 individuals in the Park. At the same time, extremely low numbers of grizzly bears existed elsewhere in Montana and these low numbers led to the listing of grizzly bears as a threatened species in 1975.

This decline demonstrated how vulnerable grizzly bears are to excessive mortality. Grizzly bears have one of the lowest rates of sustainable mortality among North American game animals, somewhere between 3 and 6% depending on the area. Following listing under the Endangered Species Act, the state and federal governmental agencies, in cooperation with private conservation groups including the National Wildlife Federation, focused efforts on ways of reducing mortality. In response, grizzly bears rebounded to the point where now they are on the verge of being delisted in the Yellowstone area. Similar conditions probably exist in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (Glacier Park, the Bob Marshall, and adjacent areas). The key is controlling mortality. The source of mortality most easily controlled is illegal or mistaken killing. This kind of mortality is what economists call elastic which means that the amount of it that occurs depends on the price. If people pay a high price, they will do it less.

The value of a grizzly bear is high to Montana and Montanans. One measure is the amount people are willing to pay to hunt a grizzly. In Alaska, where I worked as a grizzly bear researcher for 21 years, the cost of a grizzly bear hunt for non-resident hunters is more than \$10,000. Most non-resident hunters pay much more than this both in Alaska and British Columbia. Bears are also valued by non-hunters. A study conducted in Alaska showed that people were willing to pay more to view grizzly bears than any other species, including wolves, moose, whales, and wild sheep.¹ There is huge demand in Alaska for trips to view bears that cost \$500/person for a one day trip.

The increase in cost of illegally killing grizzly bears may also deter some criminals from killing bears for their gall bladders, claws, and other parts which can fetch a high price on the international and domestic market.

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The cost of removing an animal so highly valued by hunters and viewers should be high enough to deter people from doing it. The cost to an individual for illegally killing grizzly bear in Montana should be at least as high as for killing an antlered elk because grizzly bears are much more rare. The increase in restitution to the state proposed by HB 514 will not yield a lot more dollars paid by violators. The value of this bill is that I believe it will prevent some bears from being illegally killed and this will yield a significant benefit to the Montana and its citizens.

If any of you are interested in the Alaskan study I mentioned, I'll leave some copies with the committee. Thank you for considering these comments.

ⁱ Reference: Miller, S.M., S.D. Miller, and D.W. McCollum. 1998. Attitudes toward and relative value of Alaska brown and black bears to resident voters, resident hunters, and nonresident hunters. *Ursus* 10:357-376.

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