

Date: 17 March 2011  
Subject: SB144 (APPLIES TO SB144 AS WELL)  
From: Becky Weed

The premise of SB144 is that brucellosis is a dangerous disease. I agree that brucellosis is a significant disease for both public health and livestock commerce reasons. However, it does not follow that SB144 is therefore a sensible bill.

I ask you to step back and look at the dangerous game that you are engaged in. The more you build on the brucellosis hype, even to the point of discrediting the testing procedures that our cattle industry itself appropriately relies on to keep its markets strong, the more you damage your own credibility and that of the ranchers you claim to represent. Even as APHIS, other vets, wildlife biologists, and some of this state's most prominent ranchers are seeking to focus on the science of cattle vaccine protocols and other management strategies, and reduce the decibel level of unnecessary stigma of past history, this bill takes us back. I am deeply conscious of the emotional and financial toll of that history, and one of my early duties as a BOL member was to help negotiate the indemnity payments and procedures with the last Montana family to have been forced to depopulate a whole herd, the Malcolms. Partially due to that experience, and partially due to my fundamental belief that habitually pitting ranchers and wildlife against each other is insane, I, along with many others in the GYA and beyond, worked to make sure that old APHIS rules were modernized to avoid a repeat of illogical procedures. That has been successful.

So let's be straight, when Senator Brennan carries the flag for the 2011 version of bison paranoia, oddly accompanying it with a "Home on the Range" serenade, we are all dancing around a broader, more ill-defined concerns about bison in Montana. We can and must face up to those concerns; they are real, important, and diverse. For some people, it's about competition with cattle for precious grass. For others, it's about tense relations between tribes and neighboring landowners. For others, there are public safety and/or fence maintenance issues. For all of us, the ever-present backdrop of personal and public financial strains are worthy of attention. This bill is not the way to confront those concerns, for it merely handicaps us in agriculture with our own stubbornness and old reflexes. For starters, I suggest you table SB144 and the Spotted Dog/bison bill in deference to a modified SB212 which leaves the door open to rigorous, sober, constructive negotiation of the large and complex issue of a long-term State plan for bison conservation *and* healthy livestock. Then I suggest you stay tuned and provide input for the Citizens' working Group that is now underway to seek solutions to the chronic impasse that bison and cattlemen and have created, and suffered under, for decades.

If bison become a threat to the beef industry, it will be because of what we as Montana citizens do to ourselves. We can do better than than this bill.

Sincerely,  
Becky Weed  
Thirteen Mile Farm  
13000 Springhill Road  
Belgrade, MT 59714  
(406) 388-4945, 581-8543  
becky@lambandwool.com

*Remember that JOB #1 is to produce and market excellent beef while caring for a natural landscape.*

*NOTE: I APOLOGIZE FOR THE DYING PRINTER CARTRIDGE; I WILL EMAIL TO ALL COMMITTEE MEMBERS.*

*BW*