



Greater Yellowstone Coalition

People protecting the lands, waters, and wildlife of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, now and for future generations.

EXHIBIT 5
DATE 4/5/2011
SB 348

March 30, 2011

Dear Chairman Washburn and members of the House Fish, Wildlife and Parks Committee

Tomorrow your committee will consider SB 348, sponsored by Senator Barrett, addressing funding for wolf management in Montana. We have several concerns with the bill as currently amended which we raise for your consideration and debate tomorrow.

1. The bill directs MFWP to allocate \$3,000 for every wolf estimated in Montana. This will create a powerful incentive to manage for a minimum number of wolves and will wreak havoc on the agency's budget for the management of other species. At our current wolf population (566 wolves), MFWP would be required to spend almost \$1.7 million on wolf management alone. Even at a population of 400 wolves, MFWP would be required to spend \$1.2 million on wolf management. The fiscal note states this funding level would require either an increase in license fees or a general fund appropriation. For perspective, the current budget for Montana's wolf program is approximately \$500,000 annually. (See attachment from the 2010 Montana wolf management annual report).
2. SB 348 limits management activity to lethal control of wolves. SB 348 locks Montana into an expensive and intensive wolf management program by directing that this funding be spent on radio collaring wolves and for lethal control of wolves that attack livestock. In reality, wolf management is about much more than conflicts with agriculture. Funds are needed to maintain FWP's on-the-ground wolf specialists who handle conflicts, monitor the wolf population, understand the predator-prey dynamics of a given landscape and determine the necessary actions to manage wolves in balance with other wildlife.

If SB 348 moves forward, we suggest adding language to Section 2 allowing the use of these funds for proactive measures that might prevent conflicts between livestock and wolves, including tools such as fladry, range riders, improved husbandry practices, etc. MFWP wolf specialists spend a significant portion of their time working with landowners to address wolf conflicts in these ways. If we are really going to allocate \$3,000 per wolf to wolf management, we should at least ensure we are funding the entire tool box to be the most effective.

Finally, we are concerned that the limitation on these funds to no more than 25% for administrative purposes will negatively impact MFWP's ability to adequately staff the wolf program.

We believe MFWP can adequately fund the wolf program through its regular departmental budget process, which will draw on a combination of license fees and federal dollars. As a result, we would prefer the bill be tabled; at minimum we believe it should be amended as discussed above.

Sincerely,

Barb Cestero, Montana Director

Another charge was brought against an individual in the Plains area for illegally snaring wolves. Two wolves were killed. The case went to court in 2010 and the individual was fined. The incidents took place during a period when the wolf was delisted.

FUNDING

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Historically, MFWP's core wolf program has been funded through 2 separate federal sources. Approximately half was obtained through a direct annual Congressional line-item appropriation and half was obtained directly from USFWS as a part of the agency base budget. These sources were identified in the state-federal wolf cooperative agreement which outlines the scope of MFWP's work and how the money can be spent. Funds are transferred on a federal fiscal year cycle which is offset from the state fiscal year cycle by six months. Federal funds could be spent anywhere in Montana for the wolf management and conservation activities specified in the cooperative agreement. Federal budget constraints have sometimes resulted in Congressional recessions (across the board percentage cuts typically of 2-3%) and slightly lower funding levels ultimately made available.

A cooperative agreement covering the five-year period through June 30, 2010 expired. MFWP and USFWS will begin work in 2011 to develop a new cooperative agreement that outlines responsibilities and funding for the next 5-year period that began July 1, 2010. The dynamic legal nature of the listing status of wolves in the NRM DPS has been a complicating factor. The new cooperative agreement will be flexible enough to accommodate future changes. Ultimately, a cooperative agreement is a necessary part of MFWP being able to access federal funding, whether wolves are listed and MFWP is the lead agency as the designated agent of USFWS or whether wolves are delisted and managed as resident wildlife during the 5-year post-delisting monitoring period required by USFWS. Until a new agreement is finalized, USFWS and MFWP consider the existing agreement still in effect until replaced or rescinded. That agreement is consistent with a "listed" legal framework. In July 2010, a funding agreement (about \$508,938, which accounts for overhead) was finalized for state fiscal year 2011 so that federal dollars continue to fund MFWP's wolf program in the interim.

MFWP has utilized a small amount of its federal wolf funding on recovery coordination. However, the vast majority has been spent for on-the-ground implementation of Montana's wolf program. This funding has paid for wolf monitoring, radio collaring, data management, depredation response, research, and public outreach – all of which both directly and indirectly support the work of USDA WS and MLLRMB. The field-based program also directly supports the work and decisions made by MFWP and the MFWP Commission for wolf management (e.g. harvest) and demonstrates to the USFWS that Montana is maintaining a recovered population.

Other MFWP staff make significant contributions to the program above and beyond the work done by staff whose primary responsibilities are wolf-related. Examples include administration, biologist support, law enforcement, public outreach, and legal support. Exact figures have not been quantified.