

Senate Bill 143
January 18, 2011
Presented by Art Noonan
Senate Agriculture, Livestock, and Irrigation Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I am Art Noonan, Deputy Director of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). I am here to provide support for Senate Bill 143.

Senate Bill 143 recognizes that grizzly bears in the Greater Yellowstone and Northern Continental Divide Ecosystems have reached recovery levels; that the importance of the responsive, cooperative management between state, federal, Tribal, and private entities is extremely important; that cooperative management will be necessary to get bears delisted and to maintain that delisting; and that successful conflict management is critical in maintaining public support for conservation of the grizzly bear, whether they are listed or not.

FWP currently employs highly regarded bear conflict specialists in FWP Regions 1, 2, 3, and 4. Their work consists of a combination of proactive education and outreach about how to avoid conflicts with grizzly bears, and reactive responses if a bear gets into trouble. Proactive approaches include education and outreach about attractants including garbage, pet food, bird feeders, BBQs, fruit trees, etc, as well as helping to provide materials to prevent conflict such as bear-proof garbage cans and electric fencing. One of the newer and growing problems is free-ranging chickens in rural, forested home sites. Proactive measures also include redistributing winter-killed livestock carcasses to prevent bears from coming down into active livestock operations to feed on those carcasses.

Reactive measures include trapping nuisance bears and either relocating them to a new location, doing a "hard" on-site release where the bear is harassed with bean bags, chased by dogs, and shot at with cracker shells as it is released; or euthanizing the bear. The course of action is determined by the type and circumstances of the conflict, any previous history the bear has, and other circumstances associated with the case.

FWP already is working very hard to meet the intent of this bill – to have the state as the lead management authority for grizzly bears, to manage the grizzly bear to avoid conflicts with humans and livestock, and to use preemptive management to prevent conflicts. As a precautionary note, FWP is concerned that Section 2(b) is unnecessary, and could be used by litigants who oppose grizzly bear delisting to argue that Montana will no longer have adequate regulatory mechanisms in place for delisting as required by the Endangered Species Act.

Due to increasing distribution and numbers of grizzly bears, along with an increase of people in the human-wildland interface (e.g., ranchettes, rural subdivisions), grizzly bear conflicts have been continually increasing – to the point where existing staff are overloaded and unable to adequately and safely address the intent of this bill. Additional FTE are needed to fully implement the bill, as noted in the fiscal note.