

MWF Testimony on SB 237

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee,

My name is Ben Lamb, and I am the Conservation Director for State and National Issues for the Montana Wildlife Federation. MWF is Montana's oldest and largest Hunter/Angler Conservation Organization, with over 7,500 members and 23 affiliated Rod and Gun Clubs throughout the State. Today, we stand in opposition to SB 237.

Our opposition is rooted in the fact that focusing attention on prevalence reduction in wildlife, while laudable, is next to impossible for several reasons.

- 1.) Brucellosis reservoirs in YNP and WY mean that there will constantly be new cases of Brucellosis. As such, Montana's elk population, while receding, is seeing an increase in brucellosis for these same elk.
- 2.) Focusing on mitigation instead of reduction/eradication is a much better option. It is easier to handle livestock than to handle elk. Delayed turnout dates, eliminating co-mingling of elk and livestock through strategic hazing, and encouraging increased access for hunters are other methods needed to decrease the risk to livestock producers. Interestingly, the House subcommittee for FWP's budget slashed the hazing budget of FWP by 50%.
- 3.) The specter of Test and Slaughter comes forward with this bill. Wyoming just completed a 5 year T&S program on their feedgrounds with little to no effect for a huge investment. Test and Slaughter do not work.
- 4.) With huge decreases in herd size for the Northern Yellowstone Elk Herd, the Gallatin/Madison herd, and trends leading wildlife managers to see further reductions in herds surrounding the Park, it is clear that adding a program that further removes elk from the landscape will only result in more and more lost opportunity for hunters, negatively effecting the local economies that thrive on hunter dollars during the off-summer tourist season.
- 5.) New regulations from APHIS have lessened the burden on Livestock producers when they do suffer from finding brucellosis in their herd. No longer is whole herd depopulation in effect, and wildlife hits no longer constitute a loss of brucellosis free status.
- 6.) Current vaccines do not do much in regards to reducing infection rates among wildlife, specifically elk. To put much focus on throwing good money down a bad well. The time, cost and scope of such an effort would quickly mount in to the millions of dollars. Dollars that FWP does not have, and dollars that sportsmen and sportswomen are reluctant to pay

While MWF supports using general fund dollars to help pay and defer the onerous costs livestock producers face when they have brucellosis in their herds, it is punitive to make hunters and anglers pay for these costs as described on Page 2, lines 8 and 9.

Hunters and anglers already are doing their part in terms of depredation hunts, increased antlerless harvest (which are having deleterious effects on elk populations throughout southwestern Montana). Making sportsmen and sportswomen pay for testing is one more

straw on the camel's back. This bill will decrease an already unstable relationship between hunters and livestock producers, rather than bring two groups together who could be working on this issue in a more constructive manner.

We also have a concern related to Page 2, lines 22 and 23. Only including one segment of the population is another recipe to set landowners and sportsmen on edge. We would request that this language be amended to include the opportunity for all Montanan's to comment.

Yellowstone National Park is currently undergoing NEPA to institute a program to remotely vaccinate bison in the Park to try to reduce infection rates in Bison. While we are skeptical of this project, MWF did endorse the project in hopes that it will reduce infection rates inside the park.

Finally, FWP is already engaged in a study that is very controversial among hunters to study brucellosis prevalence rates in elk. The work is already being done. This bill will, again, only further the divide between hunters and livestock producers, and is destined to fail based on the reality on the ground.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment, and thank you for your service,

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