



SENATE FISH AND GAME
EXHIBIT NO. 16
DATE 1/20/11
BILL NO. SB 144

Sen. John Brendan, chairman
Fish Wildlife Parks Committee
Montana Senate

Jan. 20, 2011

Dear Senators,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today and thank you for serving the people of Montana here in the Legislature.

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers is a national organization of outdoorsmen and -women who cherish our nation's hunting and fishing traditions. We work to pass on those traditions through hard work and education. Our Montana chapter represents hundreds of Montana residents and we have many other members across the country that hunt and fish in Montana as non-resident visitors. Hunting and fishing isn't just what we do, it's who we are.

We are communicating with you today to address Senate Bill 144, which seeks to limit the ability of Montana to restore bison in Montana. Montana has a proud history of restoring our big game species – from elk to pronghorn to bighorn sheep. There is no scientific reason we cannot enjoy similar success with bison.

It's important to note that, at statehood, Montana had been largely stripped of its large wildlife. Over 100 years, the people of Montana have painstakingly restored our big game to the point we are now the envy of the nation. Over that time, we developed a very sound process for managing wildlife through the FWP Commission, rather than allow wildlife to be tossed about like a political football. SB 144 ignores that precedent and is a step on a slippery slope back to the bad old days.

Montana hunters want to preserve and expand their hunting opportunities in the future. Hunting is under attack from many fronts – including misguided politics. SB 144 and others like it would handcuff Montana hunters in both the short term and the long term and muzzle them from taking part in this important wildlife decision.

Bison are in demand from Montana hunters. Thousands of hunters join the lottery to take part in our bison hunts outside Yellowstone Park. The states of South Dakota, Arizona and Utah all have wild, free-ranging bison herds. In recent years, our Montana members

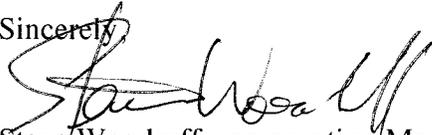
have traveled to Utah to hunt bison. After taking part in these fair-chase hunts, we are forced to ask, why not Montana?

Wildlife contributes a billion dollars annually to Montana's economy. Bison hunters travel, hire outfitters and meat cutters, stay in motels. Montana is in no position to slam the door on potential economic opportunity, without at least taking a hard look at both the costs and the benefits.

Certainly, bison do not belong everywhere in today's Montana. But it's equally unreasonable to say there is no room for them at all. We would not presume to say where or when or how many bison, but we at least should examine the option carefully. At least we deserve the opportunity to study the idea and have an honest, open conversation about it.

But that will not happen if SB144 becomes law. That is why we urge you to vote against it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Steve Woodruff". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Steve Woodruff, representing Montana chapter
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers