

Senate Bill 348
February 16, 2011
Presented by Art Noonan
Senate Natural Resources Committee

Ms. Chairman and committee members, I am Art Noonan, Deputy Director of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). I am here in opposition of Senate Bill 348.

SB348 would mandate \$6,000 per estimated wolf in Montana to radio-monitoring and control actions. While final numbers are still being tallied for the currently unfinished 2010 annual report, the tentative 2010 statewide minimum estimate of wolves is 576. As the 2010 annual report is finalized, that number may change. With this tentative minimum number, the total annual allocation under proposed SB348 would be no less than \$3,456,000.

From the standpoint of monitoring wolves to assess population status and develop population management prescriptions, the current level of monitoring by FWP is sufficient and beyond the level of monitoring currently directed at many other species. As the delisting of wolves did not result from insufficient monitoring of Montana wolves but rather Wyoming's inclusion in the delisting order, the current level of monitoring was and is also sufficient to accommodate the delisting criteria relative to numbers of wolves and breeding pairs in Montana. From this standpoint, the current level of expenditures is sufficient with the proposed additional dollars not resulting in a corresponding increase in management awareness or capacity. Further, the prescribed annual dollar amount could not be effectively and efficiently spent in efforts available to FWP within any one year.

From the standpoint of management response to wolf depredations of livestock, FWP currently works with USDA APHIS Wildlife Services to address lethal removal of wolves. FWP's specific role is to prescribe response and control actions which Wildlife Services then implements. In that capacity, the current allocation of resources by FWP has not represented a logistical bottleneck to depredation response. To date lethal removal of wolves relative to confirmed livestock losses have been significant. In 2009 145 wolves were lethally removed relative to 309 confirmed livestock losses and in 2010 draft numbers indicate 156 wolves were removed relative to 169 confirmed livestock losses.

Given the significant amount of monitoring dollars proposed to be necessarily re-distributed to wolves from monitoring of other species, it is necessary and prudent to identify program sources for these dollars. In all likelihood, existing survey and inventory efforts directed to the consistent monitoring of deer, elk, antelope and other hunted species would be significantly reduced. This would immediately result in a reduction in understanding of those species' population levels and a consequent reduced ability to routinely and appropriately review and adjust prescribed harvest levels. In effect, wildlife monitoring efforts would be significantly reduced to accommodate the proposed increased wolf monitoring.

Wolf monitoring is currently one of our most intensive monitoring efforts. Monitoring for some other species, to include moose, sheep and goat, are already at a bare minimum and would be at risk to continue, thus ending hunting seasons on those species.

As the wolf has come to Montana via federal reintroduction efforts and that state management of wolves to include hunter harvest and population control is currently unavailable given relisting, it seems contrary to demand that Montana hunters alone carry this increased cost at the direct loss of other programs that impact not only those hunters but Montana at large. This bill does not punish FWP, but punishes Montana's resident hunters who have voluntarily paid for wildlife conservation for the past 100 years.

Given the adequacy of current management and value of other existing programs as they are currently funded by hunters, FWP urges a Do Not Pass for SB348.