

EXHIBIT 12  
DATE 2-14-13  
HB 395

HB Bill 395  
February 14, 2013  
Presented by Quentin Kujala  
House Agricultural Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I am Quentin Kujala from the Wildlife Division of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP). I am here in opposition to House Bill 395.

The Montana Wolf Management Plan and Final EIS adopted by the Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks called for creation of a program to reduce the risk of losses of livestock to wolves and to reimburse livestock producers for losses. After its adoption, a working group of more than 30 Montana citizens, state and federal agency personnel, and tribal representatives developed a comprehensive proposal for the "Montana Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program". That program was codified with the passage of HB 364 by the 2007 Legislature.

Since its inception in 2007, the Livestock Loss Board (LLB) has consisted of representatives recommended by both the Board of Livestock and the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission. This collaborative board has worked effectively since its inception to establish and implement the Livestock Loss program for wolves. It is a good example of the two agencies – DoL and FWP - working collaboratively on issues that overlap our two agencies. We have heard of no issues associated with current board diversity and we are at a loss as to why the Legislature would discourage such an effective and collaborative relationship between two agencies involved in such an important endeavor, such as this bill does.

It should be noted that this Board was originally titled the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Board. Even though the name was shortened last session, the charge of Livestock Loss Board (formerly the LLRMB) remained the same. That charge is not just to approve compensation payments for livestock losses due to wolves, but also to:

- Coordinate and share information with state, federal, and tribal officials, livestock producers, nongovernmental organizations, and the general public in an effort to reduce livestock losses caused by wolves; and
- Establish an annual budget for the prevention, mitigation, and reimbursement of livestock losses caused by wolves.

These tasks, especially the information sharing, prevention, and mitigation of losses are much broader than just approving payments for losses, and are best done by a diverse Board that represents a diversity of interests, especially when funding for the Board comes from the General Fund. The Board structure that currently exists best meets this need. The structure envisioned by this bill does not.

House Bill 323, which was passed by this committee earlier this month, proposes to add grizzly bears to the purview of the Livestock Loss Board, and HB 322 proposes to add an additional \$400,000 of general fund dollars specifically for the purpose of preventing livestock depredation due to wolves and grizzly bears. Potential passage of both of these bills, and the allocation of

DATE

TIME

BY

general fund dollars for compensation and prevention, highlights an even greater need for a Board that has expertise representing both livestock and wildlife interests.

FWP's support for HB 323, which adds grizzly bears to the LLB, was based on the current structure of the LLB – in large part because of the preventative tasks of the Board and HB 323.

If the function of the Livestock Loss Board is only to approve compensation payments, then the makeup of the LLB would be less critical, and could probably be reduced to a three member Board. If the purpose of the board is much broader to include preventative measures, as described by current statute and HB 322, then a broader representation is necessary. Since the purpose of the LLB isn't being diminished to just compensation, and in fact may be broadening if House Bills 322 and 323 pass, then the structure and diversity of the Board should not be diminished. In short, the current board is working and is well suited for potential expanded duties. It is not clear why a change is needed and in fact any such change may be detrimental.

For these reasons, we recommend a Do Not Pass on HB 395.