

Montana State Beekeepers Association

House Bill 144

Mr. Chairman and Committee Members, my name is Bill Mitchell and I represent the Montana State Beekeepers Association. We support this bill.

I am a 4<sup>th</sup> generation beekeeper from Missoula. My father and grandfather had bees in Missoula and before that my family had bees in Idaho.

We have noticed a general trend in recent years to have bear problems were no bears were in previous years, both east and west of the divide. This leads us to believe there are more bears around and they are expanding their range. With some additional bear hunting, we would hope to see less damage from bears.

We fence all of our locations with electric fencing that we feel might be in areas were bears could encounter the bees. They are very effective, but none are 100%. Sometimes despite our best effort, bear damage does occur. Bees are livestock and are taxed as such. This gives us the same protection as other livestock growers. We are allowed to destroy such bears as long as we first notify the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFWP) or Wildlife Services and have landowner permission. However, all bears must be turned into DFWP where they are usually destroyed. Our hopes would be that some of these bears could be taken by sportsmen using hounds and they they would be fully utilized.

Thank you.