



Montana Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife
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House Bill 144 Hounds for Bear
Bill Mitchell

Mr. Chairman, Committee Members, my name is Bill Mitchell. I represent the Montana Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife and we support this bill.

We feel allowing the harvest of bears with the use of hounds can be a valuable part of the Montana management plan. We think there is a need to increase the harvest of bears, particularly in areas where elk numbers are low. Studies have shown black bears can be a major predator of young elk calves.

A hunter can be very selective about which animal is harvested. Bears are extremely difficult to judge at a distance. It is hard to tell how big they really are. If a hunter is able to approach the bear in a tree, it is much easier to tell. It should also eliminate the unintended harvesting of sows with cubs. It is illegal to shoot sows with cubs; however cubs might not always be visible. With hounds, a hunter will either see the cubs or be able to tell if a sow is lactating.

Contrary to what some people might think, hunting with dogs is not easy. It takes a lot of time and energy to properly train hounds to run a targeted animal. If someone feels the use of dogs is not fair chase, it is probably because they have never tried it. When you turn your dogs loose on a track, you are committed to go wherever that animal wants to go. It may be miles away before you even turn them loose, you just do not know where the trail might lead, but you must follow until the dogs tree the animal or lose the scent, which very often happens.

If there is a true catch and release hunting experience, hunting with dogs is it. You are able to look the animal over at fairly close range and determine if it is what you are looking for. If you decide not to take it you can take some pictures and walk away.

We are sure there are some legitimate concerns about the unintentional chasing of Grizzly bears. However, we feel this can be minimized by education. An online test is already required before a sportsman can buy a bear license. A similar course in track identification could be mandatory for anyone wishing to pursue bears with dogs. A separate hound hunter's bear license could be sold to offset the additional costs. Idaho has both Grizzly bears and a hound hunting season and I could not find any instances of problems.

There is already a mandatory reporting requirement within 5 days of harvesting a black bear. This should allow the department ample time to prevent any possible overharvest.