

# Montana Sportsmen ALLIANCE

Voice of Reason on Montana Fish and Wildlife Issues

To the House Fish & Game Committee:

**RE: SB-397 Establishing provisional hunting seasons for certain large predators**

**POSITION: Montana Sportsmen's Alliance hereby goes on record ADAMANTLY  
OPPOSING this bill based on the following reasons:**

- Running hounds in Grizzly country, which is most of western Montana, will result in Grizzly bear, dog encounters. Grizzly bears don't tree and the result will lead to dead dogs, and mad houndsman. Dogs can't tell the difference in bear types.
- New bear regulations instituted in 2010 have led to record bear harvests in Region 2. A total of 694 bears were taken in the 2010 and 2011 seasons in that region.
- Based on estimates at the end of 2011, there were a min. of 650 wolves in Montana. From Jan. 1, 2012 to Feb. 28, 2013, 377 Wolves were harvested by hunters/trappers/USFWS/FWP/landowners & incidental kill. Assuming an actual population of 1000 wolves (a 35% increase from the minimum 650), then we harvested 37.7% of the wolf population in the last 14 months.
- In 2011 hunters took 121 wolves, while in 2012 hunters/trappers took 225, a 36% increase. In 2013, hunters will be able to buy up to 3 tags and use electronic calls.
- Current wolf population estimates show a min. of 625 wolves in Montana as of Dec. 31, 2012. This does not include the 95 wolves that were harvested between Jan. 1, 2013 and Feb. 28, 2013. Our current min. wolf population is actually 530.
- New MT lion season structures have been put in place, with an emphasis on reducing lion populations. So far this season 544 lions have been harvested.
- Declines in elk populations have been caused by a wide variety of factors including; excessive hunter harvest due to over the counter cow tags/excessive number of cow permits; 3 week extended seasons; winter of 2010; habitat loss; drought conditions; and predation.
- The Bitterroot elk population was higher in 2012 than in 1995 and cow/calf ratios have been increasing since 2010.
- This bill is very likely to have a negative impact on delisting the grizzly.
- Our approved wolf management plan has different requirements than Idaho's.

Once again we would like to state our **OPPOSITION** for SB-397

Montana Sportsmen Alliance Leadership Group

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### Black Bear Harvest Trends in Region Two, 1985 - 2011

Year	Annual Harvest Classification				Total	% Females In Harvest	% Males in Harvest	Seasonal Harvest		Median Age of Harvested Black Bear <sup>b</sup>	
	Unk.	Male	Female	Total				Spring	Fall	Male	Female
1985	2	163	106	271		39	60	117	154	4.0	4.0
1986	3	159	128	290		44	55	159	131	3.0	5.0
1987	0	156	87	243		36	64	100	143	4.0	4.0
1988	0	150	98	248		40	60	131	117	4.0	4.0
1989	1	146	83	230		38	63	80	150	3.0	4.0
1990	0	160	95	255		37	63	112	143	3.0	5.0
1991	1	151	72	224		32	67	97	127	3.0	5.0
1992	1	157	99	257		39	61	105	152	3.0	4.0
1993	0	144	85	229		37	63	99	130	3.0	4.0
1994 <sup>c</sup>	1	146	76	223		34	65	72	151	3.0	4.5
1995	0	155	88	243		36	64	70	173	3.0	3.0
1996	0	122	72	194		37	63	72	122	3.0	4.5
1997	1	144	76	221		34	65	57	164	3.0	3.0
1998	0	188	77	265		29	71	89	196	3.0	4.0
1999	0	148	78	226		35	65	80	146	3.0	4.5
2000	0	165	73	238		31	69	100	138	4.0	4.0
2001	1	122	76	199		38	61	88	111	3.0	5.0
2002	0	163	82	245		33	67	74	171	3.0	4.0
2003	0	170	86	256		34	66	100	156	3.0	4.0
2004	1	192	112	305		37	63	104	201	4.0	5.0
2005	0	162	85	247		34	66	120	127	3.0	4.0
2006	0	141	67	208		32	68	85	123	4.0	4.0
2007	0	201	81	282		29	71	98	192	3.0	3.0
2008	0	159	72	231		31	69	84	157	3.0	4.0
2009	0	170	74	244		30	70	73	171	3.0	4.0
2010 <sup>d</sup>	0	217	119	336		35	65	136	200	4.0	4.0
2011	0	221	137	358		38	62	158	200	<sup>a</sup>	<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Data unavailable.

<sup>b</sup> Age estimated by analysis of tooth cementum layers. Teeth were not available for every bear harvested.

<sup>c</sup> Beginning in '94, spring season shortened to 15 April - 15 May for BMUs 108, 280 & 290.

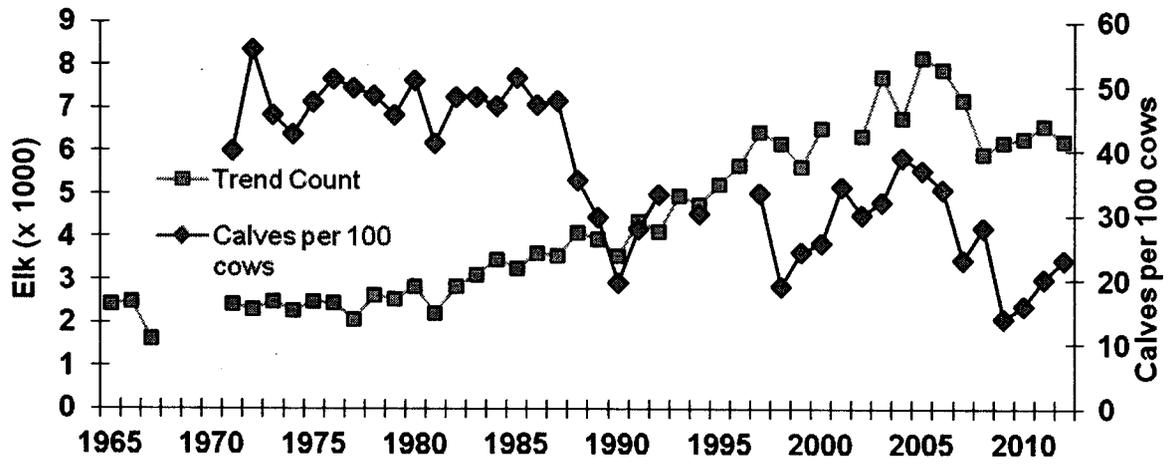
<sup>d</sup> Beginning in '10, spring season extended to 31 May for BMUs 200, 280 & 290. BMU 200 established in 2010, previously portion of BMU 108.

**Region 2:** Elk population trend in Region 2 is generally as displayed in Figure 2, with bull harvest trends matching population count trends. Both counts and bull harvest trends were down in recent years in HDs: 202, 203, 204, 211, 216, 240, 250, 261, 270, and 285 (Examples, Figs. 47 and 48). By management design, high antlerless harvests during 2004-2007 were intended to reduce elk populations in some Bitterroot hunting districts (e.g. HDs 204, 240, 250, 261, 270) and were successful. Both counts and harvest trends were relatively stable recently in HD 213 and in HDs 290/291/292/298 counts were stable to slightly up and bull harvests were relatively stable. Both count and harvest trends were up in HD 215. Exceptions occurred in HDs 201, 210, and 283 where counts were up recently and bull harvest trends were down. In HD 212, count trend was up and bull harvest relatively stable. Portions of both HDs 201 and 283 have seen increased residential development and restricted hunter access and also increased road closures affecting access for some hunters. These developments have led to increased "refuge areas", likely contributing to decreased harvests and increased elk population growth in these areas (Figs. 49 and 50).

Generally, the elk populations in Region 2 where counts have recently declined (Fig. 2, Figs. 47 and 48) had high antlerless harvest during 2004-2007 and recent high total predation pressure indexes (Fig. 36) and high wolf numbers (Fig. 38). Declines have continued beyond the initial declines resulting from temporarily increased antlerless harvests in 2004-2007. Much lower than historically traditional calf survival has also coincided with recent population declines in the Bitterroot and Blackfoot-Clearwater areas. Population decline may have slowed or stopped with recent large reductions in antlerless harvest.

Almost all Region 2 hunting districts show evidence of declining white-tailed deer buck harvests since 2006. Similar to Region 1, antlerless harvest level may have contributed to initial declines in some, such as HDs 200, 201, 202, 203, 240, and 250 (Fig. 51). However, declines in buck harvest have continued or remained at historically low levels after reduction in antlerless harvest. Also, declines have occurred in hunting districts with relatively low antlerless harvest (Fig. 52). There is little data available to assess the role of recruitment in the overall decline of white-tailed deer buck harvest. Declining numbers of deer hunters may play some role (Fig. 14), but there also is evidence that white-tailed deer populations have declined.

Bitterroot Elk Pop Trends vs Calf Recruitment 1965-2012



Spring elk counts by fixed-wing aircraft per survey unit in the Bitterroot Watershed, 1998-2012, continued.

HD	Survey Area	Year												6-yr ave	Best Previous					
		98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09		10	11	12	Year	No.	
N 25	Porcupine-Fire	152	0	58	44	0	0	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.4	92	189
	Fire-Planet	0	0	5	37	29	67	18	122	112	37	25	26	0	0	0	0	17.6	05	122
	Waugh-Warm Springs	90	70	24	30	155	212	148	184	14	33	0	14	0	32	32	32	15.8	03	212
	Warm Springs-Dickson	58	93	63	83	113	50	62	96	21	82	0	69	33	18	26	26	40.4	02	113
	Dickson-West Fork	38	44	103	86	92	98	118	179	46	28	24	139	114	132	132	132	70.2	08	179
	Piquett & Vicinity	17	37	0	55	18	3	37	29	35	17	12	11	1	12	12	12	15.2	87	57
	Pine-Rombo	44	94	57	82	82	119	103	50	36	42	2	12	3	8	8	8	19	03	119
	Rombo-Slate	41	40	23	72	51	37	17	58	60	17	4	0	3	0	0	0	18.8	97	98
	Slate-Overwhitch	42	74	54	67	101	84	178	110	123	20	32	41	77	18	18	18	58.6	05	178
	Overwhitch-Hughes	142	153	167	197	180	188	200	136	121	133	131	148	72	145	145	145	121	05	200
	Hughes-Johnson	30	28	47	24	28	42	0	11	4	42	8	0	82	0	0	0	27.2	87	93
	Subtotal	854	633	601	880	882	824	1055	720	579	324	322	384	402	373	402	402	40.2	05	1055
	Beaver-Chicken	44	43	91	64	135	103	145	84	150	111	100	43	14	0	0	0	83.6	07	150
	Chicken-Coal	88	71	33	71	112	72	149	154	175	143	3	63	0	140	140	140	76.8	07	175
Coal-Blue Joint	38	43	34	87	71	62	92	66	91	16	112	9	93	5	5	5	64.2	05	92	
Blue Joint-Basin	43	82	63	63	124	137	120	134	124	33	48	140	80	103	103	103	85	04	137	
Waichtowar-L. West Fk	50	7	44	33	37	47	14	16	27	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	5.8	95	180	
L. West Fk-Trapper	155	188	116	83	131	170	223	192	107	96	93	116	172	133	133	133	117	05	223	
Trapper-Chaffin	62	78	0	36	20	17	42	34	30	15	15	0	0	0	0	0	12	98	83	
Chaffin-Tin Cup	143	130	233	259	191	182	74	62	90	123	51	9	24	58	58	58	59.4	02	259	
Subtotal	623	652	814	696	821	790	859	742	794	539	422	380	383	439	439	439	50.4	05	859	
Total	1277	1285	1215	1576	1703	1614	1914	1482	1373	863	744	754	785	812	812	812	90.6	05	1914	

Table 1. Wolf:1000 Elk Ratios for selected Hunting Districts / EMUs with significant wolf numbers.

Year	HD 121	HD 201	HD 202	HD 240	HD 250	HD 261	HD 270	HDs 282/285	
1992		1.1							
1993		1.3							
1994		1.6							
1995									
1996									
1997									
1998				0.8					
1999		9.8		8.5					
2000									
2001	1.1		3.3				0.6		
2002	3.0	4.5	10.5	13.1	1.9			0.8	
2003	0.4		5.7	7.1	1.4			2.1	
2004		3.0			2.2				
2005			12.4	10.2	3.4				
2006			8.6	8.5	4.5	0.9	1.2		
2007		5.1	20.4	19.4	6.1	5.7	0.7		
2008	1.3	5.2	15.5	7.8	13.2		2.1	12.3	
2009	2.2	9.8	41.2	10.2	19.4	3.3	3.2		
2010	2.9			13.0	23.6	3.8	4.0	11.6	
2011		5.2	45.1	16.7	21.4	3.9	3.5	24.1	
	HD 310	HD 311	HDs 313/316	HD 314	HD 317	Gravelly-Snowcrest HDs	HDs 319/341	HD 360	HD 362
1995			1.3						
1996									
1997									
1998	0.7		3.6						
1999			3.7						
2000			5.0						1.3
2001	10.3		5.7	1.2		1.0	1.4		0.9
2002		1.4	7.2	1.6	5.2				1.7
2003	7.3		11.5		2.0			1.8	1.4
2004	1.3		11.2	3.9	6.2	1.6		1.2	
2005	2.7	3.4	6.3	1.3	1.9	1.5	1.0		1.9
2006	7.6	2.3		1.3	3.0	0.3	1.9	0.4	1.3
2007	8.3	4.6	16.0		12.0	1.7	5.9	1.9	
2008	10.3	7.3	8.9	0.8	13.1	2.9	13.9		
2009		8.5	5.6	1.5	11.1		11.9	2.0	4.8
2010	21.7	8.6	6.3		6.3		8.7	3.7	3.6
2011	21.2	9.1	10.6	5.6	5.3	0.7	12.9		2.2

ELK FLIGHT REPORT HUNTING DISTRICTS 360 AND 362

DATES: 02/15/13

PILOT: Steve Ard, Tracker Aviation, Belgrade MT

OBSERVER: Julie Cunningham, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

AIRCRAFT: Piper Supercub

DURATION: 4 hours x \$163.20/hour = \$652.80

OBJECTIVE: Document numbers of elk and distribution in the Madison Valley.

CONDITIONS: Generally, I would choose to run this flight later in the year (March) to obtain optimal counts. However, last year showed early spring conditions which were not conducive to a March count. This year shows a similar warm and dry pattern, so I began frequent fieldwork through late January to date to determine optimal flight time as judged by elk herding into large groups on the open flats. When ground work 2/14/13 finally revealed elk groups in the hundreds and more, I scheduled this flight. The flight occurred under good weather conditions: light winds plus sunshine equated to easy flying and high visibility. Elk were out feeding and moving. Snow cover was patchy.

COUNTS: We observed 6,213 total elk in 28 groups, although 1,710 were between the river and the highway. As in all past years, these 1,710 will be considered Gravelly elk, consistent with 1,600+ being counted on Wall Creek by Kevin Hughes and Braden Burkholder earlier in February, making the **total Madison count 4,503**. Other observations included 2 moose: 1 in Jack Creek and 1 in Corral Creek.

Minimum group size observed was 1; maximum group size observed was 2,022. We observed **194 branch-antlered bulls**, but acknowledge classification was incomplete in the groups >200. For such large groups, to obtain a complete classification from a fixed wing aircraft could result in significant disturbance to the group by flying low over the herd. However, through several days of fieldwork, I classified 2,447 elk in both HD 360 and 362. These classifications occur in the open flats, not in the hills, but are designed to capture calf:cow ratios as well as enumerate roughly the number of branch-antlered bulls and spikes present in the mixed groups of the flats. Classifications revealed calf:cow ratios of **20 calves per 100 cows with 12 bulls per 100 cows**. The calf:cow ratio is consistent with the last 8-year average, and is lower than the 2011 ratio of 25 calves per 100 cows.

We generally partition counts by groups documented Short to Shell Creek (HD 360N), Shell to Indian Creek (HD 360S), and HD 362. These totals do not include elk between the river and highway. Note that this table contains adjustments in 2012 and 2008 when large groups of elk were counted barely north of Indian Creek which were attributable to HD 362.

Year	Short-Shell (360N)	Shell-Indian (360S)	Indian-Quake (362)	TOTAL
2003	1606	596	2334	4536
2004	1401	2241	927	4571
2005	922	887	2886	4695
2006	1108	862	3586	5556
2007	1272	389	3845	5506
2008	1581	820	3747	6148
2009	629	590	2989	4208
2010	529	343	3362	4198
2011	475	642	3223	4340
2012	874	390	2171	3435
2013	955	182	3366	4503