



Protecting Wildlife for our children's future



SENATE FISH AND GAME
EXHIBIT NO. 7
DATE 1-31-13
BILL NO. SB 143

TESTIMONY OF KIT FISCHER

ON SENATE BILL 143

MONTANA SENATE FISH AND GAME COMMITTEE

JANUARY 31, 2013

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, I am Kit Fischer, the sportsmen's outreach coordinator for the National Wildlife Federation, based in Missoula. Thank you for this opportunity to speak in opposition of Senate Bill 143.

Two short years ago, the Montana Legislature passed, with strong bipartisan support as well as support from the landowner and hunting communities, Senate Bill 212, which protected private property rights as well as directed the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks to develop a comprehensive bison-management plan.

Work on that plan and its accompanying analysis of environmental and economic impacts of bison restoration is well under way. FWP is demonstrating that it takes this responsibility seriously and will produce documents that are thorough, balanced, fact-based and useful. The department also is doing a superb job involving the public, as directed by the 2011 Legislature. More than 22,000 people have participated in scoping meetings and opportunities for public comments.

Now comes Senate Bill 143, which would bypass, entirely, the Legislature's call for a thorough and useful management plan for bison. Senate Bill 143 declares war on wild bison.

The 2011 Legislature, in Senate Bill 212, declared bison a "species in need of management." The bill before you today effectively declares bison "vermin in need of extermination."

Senate Bill 143 is a blunt and violent instrument. It calls for wanton, wasteful and unnecessary slaughter of bison – even those proved through testing to be free of brucellosis. Senate Bill 143 reserves for bison the harshest, most intolerant treatment directed at any species of wildlife. This bill calls on Montana to violate all of its standards and practices for sound wildlife management,

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and it seeks to make unethical hunting practices the law of our land. This bill calls for year-round shooting of bison, including pregnant cows and calves – and even makes legal the wanton waste of meat. Senate Bill 143 will make Montana the focus of national media attention that will be as unflattering as it is unending. This bill will put Montana on the defensive in courts of law and the court of public opinion.

Bison management is controversial. But a public opinion survey conducted in 2012 by Public Opinion Strategies found nearly 70 percent of Montanans support restoration of bison at some level. A 2011 poll by Moore Information found well over two-thirds of Montanans see bison as a wildlife species that can be successfully managed. Senate Bill 143 disregards these public sentiments altogether.

Other speakers today may detail the fuller list of specific problems with this bill. In the interest of brevity, however, I will conclude by saying Senate Bill 143 proposes a radical, extreme and unnecessary change of direction in wildlife management. It reverses the reasoned, bipartisan course the Legislature adopted when it said, just two years ago, “Let’s get ALL the facts, get all the information about bison issues in front of us so the state of Montana, with full public participation, can manage this species responsibly and successfully.”