

House Bill 73
February 5, 2013
Presented by Jeff Hagener
Senate Fish and Game Committee

Mr. Chairperson and committee members, I am Jeff Hagener, Director of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP). I am here in support of House Bill 73.

House Bill 73 has been brought forward at the request of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP), and contains a number of provisions that will help better manage wolves in Montana. Most importantly, it would enable the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission to authorize hunters to take multiple wolves. Based on Commission action already passed when they set the current season, it would immediately allow hunters to take up to three wolves this season vs. the one currently allowed by statute, assuming it passes and is signed as quickly as possible. That number could be adjusted in future years based on the population size and hunter success.

This bill also would reduce the price of a nonresident license from \$350 to \$50. It would allow the use of electronic calls which are currently prohibited, and it would not require hunters to wear hunter orange outside the regular big game season. Collectively, these tools will increase management flexibility and hunter effectiveness, while still complying with Montana's wolf management plan. As amended, it would also require only a 24-hour wait for a license to be valid after August 31 (vs. current 5 days), and would prohibit the closure of areas to hunting adjacent to national parks.

Over the course of this Legislative session, there are likely to be numerous bills directed at more aggressive management of wolves. While Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks appreciates the frustration about wolves, we urge caution against overly aggressive statutory language that could jeopardize Montana's ability to manage wolves at all. A measured approach to management, as allowed by the provisions in HB 73 provides necessary tools for the FWP Commission to adjust seasons and bag limits as necessary to manage the wolf population, without deviating from the State's Wolf Management Plan and wolf management administrative rules.

We have worked very hard to get to a point where wolves could be removed from the federal Endangered Species Act list. They have been delisted three times, only to be relisted as a result of court action the first two times. It literally took an act of Congress to finally get them off the list, and management under the authority of MFWP. We are in our third hunting season, and have demonstrated that wolves in Montana will be responsibly managed, and they will be managed aggressively when necessary. House Bill 73 provides additional tools for management of wolves, while demonstrating commitment to Montana's plan and the criteria necessary to keep them off the federal Endangered Species list.

We recommend immediate passage of HB 73 as written. Quick passage of this bill will enable implementation yet this hunting season.