

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

SENATE FISH AND GAME
EXHIBIT NO. 9
DATE 3-26-13
BILL NO. SB397

BRIAN SCHWEITZER
GOVERNOR



JOHN BOHLINGER
LT. GOVERNOR

May 29, 2010

Scott Boulanger
Circle KBL Outfitters and Guides
P.O. Box 733
Darby, MT 59829

Dear Scott,

Thank you for your letter. I appreciate the time you've taken to share your concerns about wolf and lion management in Montana.

I shared your message with Art Noonan, Deputy Director of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and asked him to review your concerns. Deputy Director Noonan provided the enclosed detailed memorandum in response to my request.

I hope the information provided by Deputy Director Noonan is useful. The Department and I share many of your concerns and a number of actions, as you know, have been implemented.

Please let me know if there is anything else I can assist with in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "B. Schweitzer".

BRIAN SCHWEITZER
Governor

C: Art Noonan



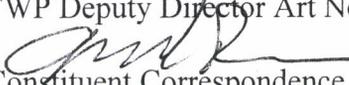
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

MEMO

DATE: May 25, 2010

TO: Governor Brian Schweitzer

FROM: FWP Deputy Director Art Noonan

RE: 
Constituent Correspondence (#16392.1)
Scott Boulanger, Owner
Circle KBL Outfitters and Guides
POB 733
Darby, MT, 59829

This is background from Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) in response to a letter from Mr. Scott Boulanger. FWP enjoys a productive working relationship with Mr. Boulanger, who is a member of the Bitterroot Elk Working Group, serving in an advisory role to FWP. Results of FWP's recent aerial elk surveys in the Bitterroot Watershed have prompted Mr. Boulanger to advocate for an emergency closure of Hunting District 250 (the West Fork of the Bitterroot) to the hunting of elk and deer in 2010.

While there are inaccuracies in Mr. Boulanger's presentation of supporting data, his logic and opinions are based in fact. Annual aerial surveys have provided advance warning that the Bitterroot population of more than 6,000 elk is on the verge of a steep decline. That portion of the Bitterroot hardest hit is the West Fork (Hunting District 250). Elk survival has declined to a level that is not replacing adult elk mortality. FWP and the FWP Commission have severely curtailed female elk harvest across the six Bitterroot hunting districts, and virtually eliminated female harvest in the West Fork, in an attempt to maximize the adult breeding stock in the population. However, the continued loss of calves is beyond the control of elk hunters, and requires increased harvest of black bear, lion and wolf to relieve predation pressure on calves. If this situation is allowed to continue unchecked, existing breeding stock will be replaced with about half the normal numbers of surviving calves, which in turn will produce only about half the normal number of newborn calves, which in turn will continue surviving at half the normal rate, and the downward spiral of an elk population—unthinkable until only very recently—would be realized. We emphasize that the prediction of an elk population crash in the Bitterroot is strongly supported by FWP data, obtained in its annual aerial surveys, and that the abrupt change in ratios of calves per hundred cows observed in those surveys gives FWP and the public early warning of a result that might be avoided with prompt and decisive action.

Mr. Boulanger also expressed concern about mule deer in the West Fork, particularly low numbers of bucks per hundred does in FWP surveys. While there may be similarities between the elk and deer situations in the West Fork, fawn survival is high and the deer population is not at immediate risk. Mule deer populations generally are on a declining trend across west-central Montana, and FWP is addressing this at a regional scale.

In Fall 2009, FWP developed hunting season proposals for 2010 in anticipation of the results of its spring surveys. With input and supporting testimony from the Bitterroot Elk Working Group, and with Mr. Boulanger's participation, FWP proposed eliminating the harvest of antlerless elk in Hunting District 250, to include eliminating antlerless harvest by archers, youth, and permit-to-hunt-from-a-vehicle. This proposal represents the most severe elk hunting restriction of a general hunting district in west-central Montana. FWP also proposed severely limiting the harvest of antlerless elk throughout the Bitterroot, and proposed lengthening the spring hunting season for black bear in Hunting District 250 and Hunting District 270. The FWP Commission approved these proposals in February 2010 and we await the upcoming hunting season as the first opportunity to implement these measures.

In April, the FWP Commission adopted as tentative FWP's proposal to increase lion harvest across Region Two, and by 50% in the Bitterroot. Similarly, FWP has presented proposals to the FWP Commission for its consideration in May, which would allow as much as a 160% increase in wolf harvest in the Bitterroot for 2010. These two proposals complete FWP's comprehensive package of harvest management proposals for conserving elk breeding stock and reducing predation on elk calves.

In his letter, Mr. Boulanger acknowledged action taken by FWP and the FWP Commission to offer only 125 permits for the harvest of mule deer bucks in Hunting District 250 in 2010. In 2009 and prior hunting seasons, unlimited permits were offered to hunt mule deer bucks, and 800 hunters typically participated annually. Mr. Boulanger advocates that mule deer hunting be closed entirely.

Results of the annual elk and deer surveys conducted by FWP confirmed the assumptions that FWP made in proposing hunting seasons for 2010, and provided no new cause for alarm or immediate actions beyond those already taken or proposed. Mr. Boulanger's letter was a topic of thoughtful discussion by the Bitterroot Elk Working Group during its meeting of May 4, 2010, with Mr. Boulanger participating. At its conclusion, the Working Group voted unanimously to further discuss and develop a future proposal for the 2011—not 2010—hunting season to conserve the Bitterroot elk population. In addition, receipt of Mr. Boulanger's letter was acknowledged by the Region Two Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) at its meeting of May 11, and the CAC expressed its interest in further considering Mr. Boulanger's concerns at a future meeting.

FWP's position departs from Mr. Boulanger's only in that FWP believes that the severe restrictions—and elimination, in some places—of antlerless elk and deer hunting opportunities are already sufficient to protect the reproductive segment of deer and elk populations from overharvest by hunters.