

March 16, 2021

To: Members of the Montana Legislature and Governor Gianforte

From: Concerned Professional Wildlife Biologists and Managers in Montana¹

We are Montana residents and professional wildlife biologists and managers with a total of 1,561 years of experience in wildlife management and wildlife habitat management. Among us are 16 retired employees of Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks with 469 years with the agency, and 3 former Commissioners from the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission.

We stand in opposition to the bills listed below being considered by the Montana Legislature in 2021. We find these bills to be based on misinformation about wildlife, misinformation about the effects of predators on prey species, and a lack of understanding about the complexity of natural environments in Montana. Detailed wildlife policy should be science-based and set by the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission with the input of the public not by the legislature. These bills will harm the image of hunters and hunting in Montana. For decades Montana has been a leader in science-based wildlife management in the US. These bills are not based on science and are harmful to wildlife and the hunting heritage of Montana.

We strongly oppose the following bills:

HB 224 and HB 225 – Allows neck snaring of wolves and extends the season for wolf trapping – Neck snares set for wolves will result in the capture of many non-target wildlife. The extension of the wolf trapping and snaring season will overlap with the times that grizzly and black bears are out of their dens resulting in bears being caught in wolf snares and traps. Data collected from radio-collared grizzly bears from 2015 through 2020 in Northwest Montana demonstrate that at least 35% of grizzly bears den later than December 1.

SB 267 – Allows paying a bounty to people to kill wolves – Paying people to kill Montana wildlife will harm the image of hunters and hunting in Montana. This is completely unnecessary since each year more than 35% of Montana's wolf population is killed by wolf hunters and trappers.

SB 337 - Revising laws on relocation of grizzly bears. Will prevent FWP from relocating any grizzly bears captured outside recovery zones. - This bill is contrary to 40 years of policy and cooperative grizzly management in Montana, it is contrary to the Interagency Grizzly Bear Guidelines, which Montana FWP has been a party to, and it will result in the unnecessary death of many grizzly bears. We are especially appalled that this bill is being promoted by the leadership of MT FWP. This bill will prevent grizzly bears from being delisted in Montana.

HB 468 – Allows hound hunting of black bears and a recreational chase season for hound hunters. – Hound hunting black bears can result in cub abandonment, chronic stress, heat exhaustion in warm weather, and abandonment of home ranges. Grizzly bears can be found throughout western Montana and hounds will chase grizzly bears who will fight and kill hounds. This will result in hound hunters shooting grizzly bears to defend their dogs or themselves when chased grizzly bears are encountered. Hound hunting of bears has been banned since 1921 in Montana. Hound hunting of bears is opposed by most hunters and is not considered fair chase hunting by most of the public.

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SB 314 – Revises laws related to wolf harvest to allow bait to trap wolves, allows spotlighting of wolves on private lands, allows harvest of an unlimited number of wolves by a license holder. – Use of bait near wolf traps will increase the non-target capture of many valuable wildlife species like lynx, wolverine, and fisher, among others. Spotlighting wildlife is contrary to fair-chase hunting and will harm the image of hunters and hunting in Montana. Farmers and ranchers don't want to get up in the night to find out who is spotlighting and shooting on their property. Unlimited killing of wolves is contrary to sound wildlife management policy and is unnecessary since 35% of the Montana wolf population is killed each year already by wolf hunters and trappers.

SB 306 – Revises the Fish and Wildlife Commission to require 4 of 7 members to be “engaged in agricultural production”. – The Fish and Game commission is the primary policy setting organization for wildlife and fishery management in Montana. The majority of hunters and anglers in Montana are not engaged in agricultural production. This law will mean that the majority of the Commission will be people who are not representative of the hunters and anglers of Montana. This is unnecessary and will be harmful to wildlife and fisheries management in Montana.

As wildlife biologists and wildlife management professionals, we stand opposed to these bills as being harmful to wildlife, harmful to the image of hunters, contrary to science, and wrong for Montana.

Sincerely,

Chris Servheen, Ph.D.

35 years US Fish and Wildlife Service as Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator (retired). Missoula, MT.

Richard Mace, Ph.D.

31 years Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks as Research Biologist (grizzly and black bears) (retired). Primarily responsible for grizzly bear population ecology research in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem. Kalispell, MT.

Harvey Nyberg, M.S.

26 years Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, last job as Regional Supervisor (retired). Lewistown, MT.

Gayle Joslin, M.S.

32 years Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks as Wildlife Management Biologist and Research Biologist (retired). Helena, MT.

Keith Aune, M.S.

41 years: 31 years Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks as Wildlife Research Biologist, Laboratory Supervisor, Chief of Wildlife Research (retired); and 10 years as a wildlife biologist at the Wildlife Conservation Society (retired). Bozeman, MT.

Bruce Sterling, M.S.
38 years Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks as Management Biologist (retired). Thompson Falls, MT.

Jim Vashro, M.S.
39 years Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks as fishery biologist and regional fisheries manager (retired). Kalispell, MT.

Mike Madel, B.S.,
40 years: 34 years Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks as Grizzly Bear Management Biologist and Project Leader of Rocky Mountain Front Grizzly Bear Management Program (retired); 6 years UM Border Grizzly Project, US Forest Service, and Fish Wildlife, and Parks as bear habitat and Research Biologist in the Missions and the Cabinet Mountains (retired). Choteau MT.

Diane Boyd, Ph.D.
23 years: 8 years Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks as wolf upland bird biologist (retired), 15 years University of Montana as large carnivore researcher (retired). Kalispell, MT.

Ron Marcoux, M.S.
40 years: 22 years Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks as Biologist and Deputy Director (retired); 18 years with Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation in land conservation and administration (retired). Helena, MT.

Kristi DuBois, M.S.
34 years: 28 years Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks as a wildlife biologist (both game and nongame) (retired); and 6 years US Fish and Wildlife Service as a wildlife biologist (retired). Missoula, MT.

Tim Thier, M.S.
32 years: 27 years Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks as Wildlife Biologist (retired); 5 years US Fish and Wildlife Service as Wildlife Biologist (retired). Trego, MT.

Heidi B. Youmans, M.S.
27 years Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks as Area Management Biologist, Upland Game Bureau Chief, Non-Game Bureau Chief (retired). Helena, MT.

Bob Wiesner, B.S.
37 years Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks as Wildlife Conflict Specialist and Cougar Research Contractor (retired). Missoula, MT.

Wendy Kamm, B.S.
30 years Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks as Game Warden (retired). Fort Benton, MT.

Graham Taylor, M.S.
42 years Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks as Area Wildlife Biologist and Regional Wildlife Manager (retired). Great Falls, MT.

Jerry Brown, M.S.
37 years Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks as Management Biologist (retired). Libby, MT.

Gary Wolfe, Ph.D.

42 years: 4 years as a Commissioner on the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission, 12 years Vermejo Park Ranch Wildlife Biologist/Manager and big game Hunting Outfitter and Guide; 15 years Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Wildlife Biologist/Field Director, Director of Field Operations, Chief Operating Officer, President & CEO (retired); 11 years Vital Ground Foundation, Wildlife Biologist/Executive Director (retired); 60 years a deer and elk hunter. Missoula, MT.

Dan Vermillion, J.D.

13 years as a Commissioner on the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission. Livingston, MT.

Tim Aldrich, B.S.

4 years as a Commissioner on the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission. Missoula, MT.

Greg Munther, M.S.

32 years US Forest Service as Biologist and District Ranger (retired). Missoula, MT.

Chuck Schwartz, Ph.D.

36 years: 20 years, Alaska Fish and Game as Research Biologist (retired); and 16 years USGS as Leader, Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team (retired). Bozeman, MT.

Sterling Miller, Ph.D.

21 years Alaska Fish and Game as Wildlife Management Biologist (retired). Affiliate Professor, University of Montana. Lolo, MT.

Dan Carney, M.S.

31 years Blackfeet Tribe as Senior Wildlife Biologist (retired). East Glacier, MT.

William H. Geer, M.S.

40 years: 16 years as a fisheries research biologist, chief of fisheries and director of Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (retired); 24 years as a biologist with the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (retired). Lolo, MT.

Douglas H. Chadwick, M.S.

43 years: 3 years wildlife technician with NPS, 40 years independent wildlife biologist collaborating with various university and agency researchers. Whitefish, MT.

Tom Puchlerz, M.S.

38 years US Forest Service as Wildlife Biologist, District Ranger, and Forest Supervisor (retired). Stevensville, MT.

Kate Kendall, M.S.

36 years National Park Service and US Geological Survey as research ecologist (retired). Columbia Falls, MT.

Gary Moses B.S.

35 years; 28 years National Park Service in Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks as Supervisory Ranger (retired); Glacier Bear Management Committee Chair; 7 years as Counter Assault Bear Spray Ambassador (retired). Kalispell, MT.

Glenn Elison, M.S.

25 years US Fish and Wildlife Service as Assistant Regional Director for Refuges and Wildlife (retired). Lewistown, MT.

Joe Fontaine B.S.

28 years: 6 years U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Wildlife Biologist, 18 years U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as Deputy Wolf Recovery Coordinator (retired), 4 years as Deputy Project Leader National Wildlife Refuge Complex (retired). Helena, MT.

Dave Wesley, Ph.D.

25 years: 20 years Ducks Unlimited as Director of Field Operations (retired); 5 years Mississippi State University as Associate Professor (retired). Missoula, MT.

Mike Getman, M.S.

35 years US Fish and Wildlife Service as Wildlife Biologist (retired). Lewistown, MT.

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25 years National Park Service as Wildlife Biologist (retired). Livingston, MT.

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38 years US Forest Service as Wildlife Biologist (retired). Stevensville, MT.

Mary Maj, M.S.

32 years US Forest Service as District and Regional Wildlife Biologist, Resource Staff Officer, and District Ranger (retired). Bozeman, MT.

Dale Becker, M.S.

39 years: 7 years as a private wildlife consultant; 32 years Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes as Tribal Wildlife Program Manager. Polson, MT.

Edward Bangs, MS.

36 years US Fish and Wildlife Service as Wildlife Biologist on Kenai NWR and Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery Coordinator (retired). Helena, MT.

Jim Claar: M.S.

32 years: 21 years US Forest Service as Wildlife Biologist (retired), and 11 years Bureau of Indian Affairs as Wildlife Program Manager (retired). Missoula, MT.

Jack Stanford, Ph.D.

36 years Flathead Bay Biological Station as Director (retired). Bigfork, MT.

Amanda DelVecchia, Ph.D.

4 years University of Montana and Flathead Lake Biological Station. Bigfork, MT.

Kerry R. Forsman, Ph.D.

37 years University of Montana as Professor of Biology and Wildlife Biology (retired). Missoula MT.

Dan Pletscher, Ph.D.

29 years University of Montana as Professor and Director of the Wildlife Biology Program (retired). Missoula, MT.

Jay Gore, M.S.

30 years: 10 years US Forest Service as Wildlife Biologist (retired); 13 years US Fish and Wildlife Service as Wildlife Biologist (retired); 7 years Corps of Engineers as Wildlife Biologist (retired). Missoula MT.

Shannon Clairmont, B.S.

18 years Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes as Wildlife Biologist. Ronan, MT.

Mike Phillips, M.S.

35 years: US Fish and Wildlife Service Red Wolf Restoration Leader (retired); National Park Service Grey Wolf Restoration Leader (retired); Turner Endangered Species Fund Executive Director; Montana State Legislator 2006-2020. Bozeman, MT.

Lewis Young, M.S.

48 years: 31 years US Forest Service as Wildlife Biologist and Wildlife Program Manager (retired); 17 years as consultant with National Park Service, Bureau of Land management, and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (retired). Eureka, MT.

Art Soukkala, M.S.

30 years Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes as a Wildlife Biologist working on Wildlife Conflicts and Restoring Wildlife Populations and Habitat. Charlo, MT.

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24 years Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes as a Wildlife Biologist. Polson, MT.