

A Lively Legislative Session

At no time do Montanans express their feelings about fish, wildlife, and state parks management more strongly than when the legislature convenes in Helena every other year. The 62nd legislative session was no exception.

Here is a list of the major categories of legislation affecting this department, various bill proposals, and eventual outcomes:

Bison: Several bills that failed to become law would have made it harder for the state to move bison and create areas with wild bison. The governor did sign a bill that requires FWP to develop a management plan before translocating any bison to a new site.

Wolves: Eleven bills involved wolves or predator control. One failed bill would have directed FWP to use hunting license revenue to help fund the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services for killing wolves that prey on livestock. Another that did not become law would have made it legal to kill any wolf, for any reason, on private land—putting wolves back on the endangered species list. Two bills signed by the governor direct FWP to obligate \$900,000 each year for wolf management, require the department to use all wolf license revenue for wolf monitoring and control, and retain the department's existing regional wolf specialist positions.

Land acquisition and use: Several bills would have prevented FWP and other state agencies from acquiring more wildlife management areas, fishing access sites, and other public lands. One that did become law, as an attachment to the state budget bill, prevents FWP from acquiring any new fishing access sites larger than 5 acres for the next biennium. One bill the governor vetoed would have required that 50 percent of all Habitat Montana money go only to maintaining existing wildlife management areas,

rather than the current 20 percent.

State parks funding: This bill, signed by the governor, increases the voluntary motor vehicle registration fee for state parks from \$4 to \$6. It also allows Montanans who don't use state parks the option of permanently opting out of the fee.

Missouri Breaks archery: Several bills that didn't pass were meant to undo Missouri Breaks archery regulations established in 2008 and prevent similar decisions in the future. The 2008 regulations restricted the

legislature authority to set permit quotas in the Elkhorn Mountains.

Several other bills you may have read about that did not become laws:

- One would have allowed spears to be legal hunting weapons.
- Another would have prohibited game wardens from citing anyone who illegally killed a wolf.
- Several so-called federal “nullification laws,” such as one declaring the Endangered Species Act unconstitutional and



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number of archery elk licenses in the famous Missouri Breaks region. The FWP Commission announced after the session it would revisit that decision and put more emphasis on explaining future decisions.

Trapper education: One bill would have required new trappers to take an education course. This was the third session that legislation like this was proposed and the third time it failed.

Stream access: A bill aimed at significantly weakening Montana's popular stream access law attracted more than 300 angry anglers in opposition. The bill did not pass.

FWP Commission authority: Several bills that failed were aimed at reshaping the commission's authority. For instance, one would have required a detailed study of economic impact and other factors before the commission could make some decisions. Another bill would have given the leg-

islature authority to set permit quotas in the Elkhorn Mountains. Several other bills you may have read about that did not become laws: One would have allowed spears to be legal hunting weapons. Another would have prohibited game wardens from citing anyone who illegally killed a wolf. Several so-called federal “nullification laws,” such as one declaring the Endangered Species Act unconstitutional and

invalid in Montana, would have cost the state hundreds of millions of dollars in highway and other federal funding. (That ESA-nullification bill would have also criminalized state employees who study the effects of proposed development on grizzly bears and other threatened or endangered species.) One thing FWP heard loud and clear during the past session was that we must do a better job of explaining to the public what this agency does and how that work benefits them. It's a reminder of why this department's public information activities continue to be important. Complete and accurate information is essential for sound and wise legislation. It's also the foundation of this department's efforts to manage and conserve Montana's fish, wildlife, and parks.

—Joe Maurier, Montana FWP Director