



Protecting Montana's wildlife,  
land, waters and hunting & fishing  
heritage for future generations.

March 30, 2021

Gov. Greg Gianforte  
Montana State Capitol  
1301 E. Sixth Ave.  
Helena, MT 59601

RE: Request for veto of anti-predator bills

Dear Gov. Gianforte,

The Montana Wildlife Federation is our state's oldest and largest state-based wildlife conservation and sporting organization. We were founded in 1936 when hunters joined landowners to restore wildlife in our great state, and for 85 years we've worked on the difficult issues around abundant wildlife, healthy habitat and public access to enjoy our public-trust wildlife resources. That work has included proper management of predator wildlife species including bears, wolves and mountain lions. In fact, MWF worked with Sen. Tester's office in 2011 to help write the wolf delisting rider that restored state management, including ethical, fair-chase hunting and trapping.

Montana has long been a national leader in fish and wildlife management, and deeply respected throughout the West. That shows in the abundance of wildlife species we enjoy, the work with landowners in the agricultural community for sound solutions to issues, and the fact that everybody in Montana can afford to hunt. That leadership includes management of predator species, and Montana has long struck a balance between conserving these valued native wildlife species, and managing them to regulate their numbers and protect livestock from depredations. It's a careful middle ground that has served our state well.

To be clear, MWF as the leading sporting organization supports ethical, fair-chase hunting and trapping of predator species. However, there are ethical and practical lines we will not cross for a host of reasons. Our ethical lines are meant to maintain fair chase for all wildlife, protect other wildlife species from incidental capture and injury, and uphold values and practices that sustains the public's respect for hunters and hunting.

That line is clearly being crossed this legislative session through a suite of bills that amount to an all-out fervor against predator species. These are not based on science and facts, have no sound

management need, and are damaging to Montana's reputation as a leader in wildlife conservation. We are writing to ask you to veto these bills to protect Montana's fair and ethical hunting heritage that we all cherish.

Those seven bills, with brief descriptions, include:

**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, including mountain lions, black bears and potentially grizzly bears in select areas. 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.

**SB 267** – Allows paying a bounty to people to kill wolves. This reflects a 19<sup>th</sup> Century attitude toward wolves and violates the public trust concept to not commercialize wildlife. Paying people to kill Montana wildlife will harm the image of hunters and hunting in Montana. We have more than 17,000 wolf hunters in Montana and an annual harvest of more than 300 every year. There is no need for this measure.

**SB 314** – Revises laws related to wolf harvest that amounts to an all-out war against wolves in an effort to drive their numbers down to a bare minimum number. It includes baiting around traps, spotlighting at night, and the take of multiple wolves with one license. This bill sets a terrible precedent not only ethically, but also practically in allowing multiple wolves with a single license. We have elk populations over the objective in some areas, yet always require a hunter to have one license for every elk they kill. Baiting will result in the loss of non-target species and is counter to fair chase. And spotlighting is also not within the bounds of fair chase hunting, and will give hunters a poor public image.

**SB 98** – States that people can kill grizzly bears threatening livestock. People always have a right to self-defense, and Montana law already allows the taking of a grizzly caught in the act of attacking livestock. However, the language in this bill is vague, and the definition of threatening is open to interpretation. This bill will certainly raise alarms with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in providing adequate regularly mechanisms to conserve and manage grizzly bears. It will result in never delisting grizzly bears from federal Endangered Species Act protections in Montana.

**SB 337** - Revising laws on relocation of grizzly bears. This bill will prevent Montana FWP bear management specialists from relocating any grizzly bears captured outside recovery zones. This runs counter to 40 years of grizzly management in Montana that has helped us soundly manage the species while it remains under federal protection. This bill 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.

**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.

Thank you for your consideration to veto these bad bills. Our board of directors includes numerous professional wildlife scientists. We would be happy to meet with you to further discuss these bills and why they are so damaging to our state. Montanans remain committed to sound, scientific management of our wildlife, and in maintaining our reputation as a true leader in wildlife conservation. Vetoing these bills will help us maintain those core Montana values and continue to work for solid solutions to complex wildlife issues, while also maintaining our sporting traditions for all species.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Puchlerz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "T" and a long, trailing flourish at the end.

Tom Puchlerz  
President