

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

STEVE BULLOCK
GOVERNOR



MIKE COONEY
LT. GOVERNOR

May 11, 2017

The Honorable Corey Stapleton
Secretary of State
State Capitol
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Secretary Stapleton:

In accordance with the power vested in me as Governor by the Constitution and the laws of the State of Montana, I hereby veto House Bill 367, "AN ACT CREATING THE VOLUNTARY WOLF MANAGEMENT CHECKOFF; PROVIDING FOR USE OF THE FUNDS COLLECTED; PROVIDING A STATUTORY APPROPRIATION; AMENDING SECTIONS 17-7-502 AND 87-2-903, MCA; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE."

HB 367 would create a voluntary donation program, allowing a person to donate \$1 or more above the price of their license and dedicate the donated funds to wolf management. The funds collected through the donation program would be used to contract with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services to assist livestock producers with wolf management.

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) supported the basic concept of the bill but raised concerns that as drafted the bill placed \$20 million federal Pittman-Robertson funds the state receives each year at risk.

Pittman-Robertson funds are dedicated to management and restoration of wildlife. The funds are strictly regulated by the Federal Government. Specifically, federal rules provide that any act that strips a fish and wildlife agency of control over licensure revenue could result in a state being declared ineligible for federal funding.

HB 367 provides that any funds collected pursuant to the bill "are in addition to and not a substitute for any funds being paid" being paid by FWP to the USDA Wildlife Services. FWP is under a contract with the USDA in which the agency pays \$110,000 of licensure dollars to USDA Wildlife Services for wolf management. HB 367, appears to lock FWP into the terms of that contract indefinitely, thus stripping control from FWP to decide how licensure dollars are spent going forward.

FWP raised this concern with the bill sponsor and in committee hearings and testified that with a simple fix they could support the bill. Unfortunately, their efforts were rejected. I also proposed an amendatory veto that would have remedied this problem, but that amendment was rejected.

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Given the USDA's strict enforcement of the rules governing Pittman-Robertson funding, I can not sign this bill and potentially put \$40 million dollars for the biennium at risk. The stakes are too high to take such a chance. I hope the bill's sponsor will consider working with FWP and bring back a bill in 2019 that addresses these concerns.

For these reasons, I veto HB 367.

Sincerely,



STEVE BULLOCK
Governor

cc: Legislative Services Division
Scott Sales, President of the Senate
Austin Knudsen, Speaker of the House