

**This Draft was discussed at a Commissioner Meeting on January 18, 2012. Commissioners are seeking public comment on this draft for a period of two weeks. The next public meeting for discussion and possible decision will be held in the Commissioners Conference Room (3rd Floor), 215 S. 4th Street, Hamilton, Montana, on Thursday, February 9, 2012 at 9:00 a.m. Certain changes were made as a result of the January 18th meeting.**

**I. Policy Statement –**

It shall be the policy of Ravalli County to coordinate with state and local agencies to establish policies and practices for management of large predators within the county for the purposes of ensuring public health and safety and protecting the tax base of the county.

**II. Title and Authority –**

(A) Article IX, section 7 of the Montana Constitution states that, “The opportunity to harvest wild fish and wild game animals is an heritage that shall forever be preserved to the individual citizen...” and;

(B) Article XI, section 4 defines the general powers of local governments which have not established “self-government powers” status. Ravalli County is categorized as a “general powers” county.

(C) Section 7 of article XI further defines general powers stating that “Unless prohibited by law or charter, a local government may cooperate in the exercise of any function, power, or responsibility with ... the state or United States.”

Therefore, the Ravalli County Board of County Commissioners asserts that the process of coordinating with state or federal wildlife management agencies to protect public health and safety, protect the tax base of the county, and protect the right to harvest game as guaranteed by the state constitution is not only authorized, but is a duty of the office of County Commissioner.

**III. Public Health and Safety –**

(A) Concerns have been raised by members of the public that the ever increasing numbers of wolves and, potentially, grizzly bears may present a real danger to persons while on private or public lands. While the BCC is not aware of an instance of a wolf attack on a person within Montana, the concern is that increased numbers of individuals, numbers of packs, and increasing range due to declining prey animal levels may result in more numerous interactions with these large predators.

Additionally the county has received half a dozen reports of injury or predation upon pets, hunting hounds, and horses. The total number is not the primary concern rather, that an individual may exercise poor judgment while witnessing an attack on an animal family friend and attempt to intervene resulting in harm or death to that pet or livestock owner.

- (B) As mentioned, the potential for predation upon pets and working livestock is well documented and should be given appropriate weight when considering management policies.
- (C) Large predators, particularly wolves, may act as a vector for parasites responsible for hydatid cyst diseases. This process has been established in other parts of the world but we are unaware of definitive science concerning a local increased risk of transmission to humans by an infection cycle which includes large predators. Given the lack of data and that the potential for increased infection can't reasonably be ruled out, allowing ever increasing populations and range of wolves seems unwise and should be given due consideration.

#### IV. **Custom and Culture/ Historic Use –**

- (A) Hunting is an avocation, a life-skill, and a tool for self-sufficiency. Hunting has been a part of the Bitterroot's history for as long as people have inhabited this area. Indeed, native American tribes are known to have used this area specifically as hunting grounds. Thousands of Ravalli County residents have grown up hunting in the Bitterroot and thousands more moved to the Bitterroot expressly for that purpose. Many current residents have hunted these "home" ranges for a lifetime. That right is guaranteed by the state constitution and shall be protected as a policy of the county.
- (B) One of the Bitterroot's greatest resources is its physical beauty. While many citizens welcome the sightings of large predators, many have wisely changed habits or practices while enjoying outdoor activities. Whether carrying a sidearm or ceasing to bring along pets, a modification of previous activities has been required to accommodate large predators. Many hunters who are able to afford a limited number of days off of work per year are forced to hunt in other areas losing the use of local public lands. Others, who may not be able to afford to travel, lose the use of these lands altogether. For Ravalli County citizens, without large ungulate herds and the use of public and private lands, they lose their home as they know it.
- (C) The fact that hunting is a way of life in the Bitterroot for thousands of people is undeniable. Most often children are taught this skill, avocation, and

way of life by their parents or grandparents. Most hunters report this time with family to be of the highest quality and value. The inability to hunt elk or mule deer deprives this group of some of the most valuable experiences of their lives which was previously enjoyed in the Bitterroot for over a century. These groups of people value this time and experience as highly as many value their religious worship. Policy and management decisions should reflect the weight which county residents give these experiences. While others may not share these values, the practice of these activities does not deprive anyone else of their enjoyment of public and private lands. While some citizens within Ravalli County highly prize the existence of the Wolf, there is no acceptable argument that this admiration of the wolf which simply values the sighting of this species supersedes or trumps the long heritage of hunting and family based activity within the Bitterroot.

- (D) Organic food sources are an ever increasing value to people within Ravalli County. A large ungulate can provide a small family with enough organic meat for a year.

V. **The local economy and tax base –**

- (A) Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks established that in 2007 Ravalli County enjoyed over \$11.3 million in direct revenue based on 123,000 hunter days. In 2010 the number of hunters through the south valley check station fell a total of 36% off of the five year average. The hunters pursuing elk fell 38% and the hunters pursuing mule deer suffered a 61% decline. Whereas the MT FWP report of 2007 states that deer and elk account for 90% of all hunter days, this is an estimated of \$2.5M to \$3M in lost revenue in 2010 alone. This does not include indirect or inferred revenues.
- (B) The guided hunting industry has suffered greater losses. The Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) of the University of Montana reported that the guided hunting client spends an average of \$10,695.33 while in the area. The USFS data reports that in 2004 guided hunters spent a total of 5409 days on the forest hunting and the ITRR reports that the average guided hunter spends five days on the forest per trip. In 2010 this accounts for a \$4,695,249 reduction in direct revenues from guided hunters in the south valley. This equals a loss of \$15,360,912 from 2004 to 2010. There may be a small overlap between the two scenarios mentioned above because the MFWP numbers are based on random surveys, some of which may have gone to out-of-state guided hunters. Data shows the total labor revenue per resident in Ravalli County is about \$13,750 and the south valley

area which is most affected has a population of about 6500 people. Therefore this loss of direct revenue in this area is significant and even potentially devastating.

- (C) Other industries have suffered which are not easily quantified. Meat packers and taxidermists have noted 20 to 30% decrease in business over the previous three years.
- (D) Many Bitterrooters are subsistence hunters. The inability to provide hundreds of pounds of lean, organic meat for a family results in either an increased cost to replace it or simply doing without.

**VI. Involvement of Predators in large ungulate mortality –**

- (A) While the wolf is certainly not the only cause of the precipitous drop in Ravalli County elk numbers, it is certainly a component as evidenced by the following:
  - (1) In FWP's 2010 summary of the 10j rule proposal to the US Fish and Wildlife, the agency states "Wolf Predation is a major cause of mortality preventing the elk population from reaching management objectives in HD 250". Additionally the summary states " Elk numbers and particularly calf recruitment have declined as wolf numbers increased"
  - (2) Wolves became well established in 2005 and the elk population graph is the inverse of the wolf population graph from 2005 to 2010
  - (3) Other components of elk mortality include lions and bears, habitat concerns, human hunting, and disease. The large predators are included in Ravalli County's policy to reduce the total predator load on the herd.

**VII. Local Priorities –**

- (A) Protect health and safety of humans
- (B) Protect safety of livestock and pets
- (C) Preserve ability to hunt large game and recreate outdoors safely
- (D) Maintain a viable and connected predator population

**VIII. Proposed mitigation measures, actions, and processes**

- (A) Request opinion and position of Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks to answer the following questions:

1. Minimum levels of predator population to be established; What are the criteria for determining the minimum levels of wolves, lions, bears, and grizzly bears?
2. Please describe the criteria for determining the maximum levels of predators or levels which would trigger changes in management goals and policies? If it is not possible to establish a maximum number or target, please describe the criteria which guide the department in managing wolf, lion, and bear hunting quotas.
3. Please state the necessity and purpose for managing to higher levels of population and/or increased range than currently exist within Ravalli County.
4. Please provide position or policy concerning risk, if any, of the spread of hydatid cyst disease via a process which includes the wolf as a vector.

(B) When minimum elk population levels, as established within each district, aren't maintained by reducing antlerless harvest, and/or when the calf to cow ratio falls below the statewide elk management plan standard of 25 to 100, it shall be the policy of Ravalli County that the following enhanced predator hunting policies be implemented:

#### Wolves –

1. No quota
2. Trapping permitted 11/15 through 03/15
3. Over the counter tags anytime
4. Snaring allowed
5. Electronic calls allowed
6. 5 tags per year including trapping
7. General season 8-30 through 6-30
8. No hunter orange required
9. Non-resident fee \$31.75
10. Elk/Deer tag can be used on a wolf during general season
11. No baiting for wolves. However wolves may be taken incidentally over a bear bait.

#### Lions –

1. Over the counter tags bought anytime
2. Deer/elk tags can be used for lion during general season
3. No hunter orange required
4. Harvest based on a quota of 35 per hunting district. Either sex
5. No kill fees
6. Non-resident tag \$31.75

7. Season dates of August 30<sup>th</sup>- June 30<sup>th</sup> (no hounds during general archery and rifle)

Bears –

1. No bear test required
2. No hunter orange required
3. Over the counter tags anytime
4. Hound hunting allowed April 15 - June 30
5. Two baiting sites per hunter
6. Spring season closure April 15 – June 30
7. Non-resident fees \$31.75
8. Deer/Elk tag can be used to tag a bear during general season
9. Season dates of August 30 – November 27 and April 15 – June 30

The rationale behind many of these measures is that wolf hunting in particular is often an “opportunity hunt”. That is that many hunters may come across wolves or wolf sign incidentally while hunting other species. In order to reach FWP’s large predator quotas and given the nature and process of wolf hunting, Ravalli County advocates for offering every opportunity for hunters to assist in that goal which can be done in a manner consistent with FWP management practices.