

## WORKING GROUP SELECTED TO IMPLEMENT INCENTIVE PROGRAM FOR LANDOWNERS WHO PROVIDE PUBLIC HUNTING ACCESS

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Director Pat Graham announced that a working group has been selected to help implement a portion of House Bill 195 that seeks to provide financial benefits to landowners who provide public hunting access.

HB 195 ratified a five-year program aimed at reducing controversies among hunters, landowners, and outfitters in Montana. The bill put in to law recommendations made by the Private Land/Public Wildlife Advisory Council. Its bipartisan legislative support was described as a "minor miracle" by Governor Marc Racicot.

The Incentives Working Group, the second group formed this month to help implement HB 195, will advise the FWP Commission on determining how landowners can participate in an expanded Block Management program to obtain benefits for providing public hunting access. Various sportsmen and ranchers from throughout Montana will make up the working group.

"This group will address issues that are vital to all Montanans because the issues directly relate to recognizing the landowner's role in perpetuating our wildlife heritage," said FWP Director Pat Graham.

Senator John Hertel, Lewistown, a member of the Private Land/Public Wildlife Advisory Council, will act as an advisor to the working group, Graham said.

— MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS NEWS

## DEER PROBLEM IN RATON IS BEING MONITORED

New Mexico Department of Game and Fish personnel are working with state and federal agencies to monitor a vesicular stomatitis outbreak in Raton that has prevented immediate trapping and relocation of problem deer from within the city. Two cases of the virus were confirmed in the Raton area last week.

"We are not going to shoot any deer," said Joanna Lackey, supervisor of the Department's Northeast Area. "We will proceed with plans to trap and relocate deer this coming winter using clover traps and drop nets. We will begin evaluating potential release sites now and collect equipment to bait deer into traps when it is feasible to do so, probably in December or January. If concerns about

the VS outbreak subside this summer, few deer may be captured using a net-gun and removed from the most troublesome sites."

About 100 deer have been bedding, feeding and staying within Raton town limits, a problem that is exacerbated by people setting out feed for deer, such as salt blocks, sweetened livestock grains or hay, and luring them into town. Other attractants are created by residents feeding birds at or near ground level. City commissioners, working with the Department of Game and Fish on the problem, are considering an ordinance to prohibit feeding deer within city limits.

Most of the nuisance deer are does or yearlings. They have been damaging, trees and gardens for more than two months, prompting some Raton residents to complain vehemently to the Game and Fish Department's local office.

Game biologists are attempting to educate citizens about the deer and their needs and habits, as well as the often-unsavory results of feeding deer. Biologists have also tried using scare devices and noxious-tasting agents to disperse nuisance deer, with little success. Some residents have tried a variety of methods to prevent the deer from coming into or staying in town, such as wrapping trees with burlap or wire, and building fences, including electric fences. These physical barriers have had greater success.

Department biologists are working with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's Veterinary Services Task Force (U.S. Department of Agriculture) to keep abreast of the latest conditions regarding the VS virus, which causes lesions in the mouth and nostrils and on the tongue and hooves. The virus primarily affects hoofed animals, such as cattle, horses and swine, but evidence also suggests it occurs in some wildlife species. It can also be spread to humans.

Moving the deer may not be the best answer for the deer. Some may die of stress during capture or at the release sites. Consequently, Department of Game and Fish plans are to evaluate the quality of habitat at potential release sites, and to trap and relocate the largest number of deer during the winter when fawns will be older and the heat will not be a factor. Some of the deer may be collared and eartagged to monitor their movements and survival rates, if and when they are relocated.

Since the deer problem gained media attention, many residents in Raton have contacted the Game and

Fish Department's local office and personnel to register their support for the deer. A petition is being circulated to let the City Commission and the department know that a large number of citizens believe it is possible to learn to live compatibly with the deer.

—New Mexico Wildlife News

## SURVEY SAYS MAJORITY OF WYOMINGITES APPRECIATE MOUNTAIN LIONS

Citing the role of mountain lions in nature, their value as a wild predator and their rarity, 72 percent of Wyomingites believe mountain lions are a benefit to the state, according to a survey jointly conducted by the Game and Fish Department and the University of Wyoming.

"Obviously it is important for Wyoming residents to have mountain lions around," said Dave Moody, G&F large predator coordinator. "This shows a great reverence for mountain lions."

Eleven percent of those surveyed said mountain lions were not a benefit to Wyoming and 17 percent didn't know when surveyed.

The survey also revealed that mountain lion hunting is not common knowledge in Wyoming. Only 51 percent of respondents knew that mountain lion hunting is legal, while 11 percent believed lion hunting was illegal and over 38 percent did not know. Over 52 percent did not know hunting lions with dogs is legal in Wyoming and 60 percent did not know the vast majority of mountain lion harvests in Wyoming is with the use of hounds.

When asked, "Should hunting mountain lions with dogs continue as a legal method of hunting in Wyoming?" Only 25 percent agreed. Fifty-seven percent disagreed, 13 percent were neutral and five percent did not know.

Moody, who oversees the G&F's mountain lion, bear and wolf programs, reports that Wyomingites are opposed to reducing entire mountain lion populations in order to reduce livestock killing. "Nearly 84 percent of those surveyed favor removal of individual lions when there is a depredation problem," Moody said. "But over three-quarters of the people we talked to support the right of a rancher or landowner to kill a lion that poses a threat to livestock."

Moody said the survey results will be used to help structure the G&F's Mountain Lion Management Plan.

—WYOMING GAME & FISH NEWS

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