



HB517 Establish Trapper Education

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HB517 Establish Trapper Education. Died. Tabled in Committee. Sponsored by Rep. Bridget Smith. TFMPL partnered with Wolves of the Rockies for this bill. HB517 mirrored much of what Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP) and in conjunction with the Montana Trappers Association had proposed for a trapper education program to the FWP Wildlife Commission. The Commission approval of a trapper education course occurred in 2017. However, it was then decided it had to actually go through the legislature.

HB517 gave the FWP Wildlife Commission oversight. In the bill language, too, "The course must include but is not limited to instruction in trapping ethics, best management practices, equipment, regulations, avoidance of nontarget species, benefits of target species and their role in the ecosystem, and nonlethal methods to prevent or eliminate conflict with a target species." Included was a nominal course fee to be determined by the Commission. The revenue from trapping licenses does not cover the furbearer division to begin with. The bill also provided for a FWP appointed Trapper Education Advisory Committee composed of equally represented interested stakeholders and as defined, per 2-15-102, attached to the department **in an advisory capacity only**. The vested interests and relevant knowledge, for example, of veterinarians, wildlife rehabbers, hunters, hunting instructors, dog trainers, avid outdoor recreationists, as well as trappers, could be very beneficial to a well rounded trapper education advisory committee. If trappers and FWP want more acceptance for trapping from the general public then why should interested stakeholders who can be helpful in achieving the educational objectives be excluded?

[Here is the original language of HB517.](#)

One of the only things the FWP appointed Trapping Advisory Committee (TAC) strongly agreed upon was the need for trapper education. TFMPL board president was asked by the TAC during

one of the meetings if TFMPL would support a trapper education bill and we concurred. Currently, other than for wolves and the purchase of a trapping license for a handful of other species, all it takes to trap is to set the traps. The TAC was rather insistent a trapper education bill get underway and discussed who may sponsor such a bill. Once TFMPL/WOTR found a legislator willing to sponsor a trapper education bill, FWP and the TAC were advised. Opportunities to be involved with the bill were offered to the TAC which the president of the Montana Trappers Association (MTA) and other MTA members were actually members of. Rep. Smith waited to hear from the TAC before finalizing the language. During what was supposed to be the TAC final public meeting, on 1/31-2/1 scheduled in Great Falls, with Rep. Smith's permission, and eventually FWPs, we personally made sure a copy of the language draft was available to every member of the TAC and that they were encouraged to provide their input before the language was finalized. Some trappers refused to even take the bill draft. However, from attending the TAC meetings in entirety and the FWP meeting summary reports, the TAC guiding principles for trapper education were also included in our final language for HB517. Yet, rather than honor the public trust doctrine, respond professionally and collaborate, the trappers went on to discriminate against us and oppose the bill.

Just prior to the 3/12/19 House Fish Wildlife and Parks hearing, HB517 was then amended by a FWP staff, without our participation. Basically all of our language was deleted. At the hearing, Representative Smith asked the House Committee to look at the amendments instead of the original language. TFMPL could not support the amendments to our language.

The FWP amendments are available upon request from Trap Free Montana Public Lands.

During the hearing, the MTA objected to the bill stating they had not been involved or even given the opportunity to be. This, of course, was completely false. Their other leading objection was for any non-trappers to be on a trapper education advisory committee. Trappers have called the shots for a very long time in Montana lending them to believe only they have a right to any say or suggestions for wildlife and trapping which in reality effects us all. They objected to using the trapping manual put out by the governing body of all North American wildlife agencies, The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. We have no doubt because it promotes daily trap checks which Montana trappers adamantly oppose.

Montana trappers have routinely objected to any potential improvements in trapping, such as 24 hr or daily trap checks, by telling the Wildlife Commission it would be handled in education. Yet trappers were very instrumental in killing the education bill.

Before the House Committee vote on 3/26/19, TFMPL attempted to help the bill pass by requesting the Committee drastically condense and simplify the language:

"For this bill to gather the necessary widespread and diverse support from Montanans and meet the goals ascribed we ask that the bill be amended down to just a couple of sentences in a very simplified fashion providing the Commissioners the authority and final say:

The department shall provide a trapper education course approved by the commission and that contains a trapper education advisory council equally represented by stakeholders. The trapper education advisory council is attached to the department in an advisory capacity only, as defined in 2-15-102. The latter from line 14-15 page 2 in the language of HB517. If there would be continued wrath then perhaps delete, "equally represented by stakeholders."

HB517 was tabled in a partisan vote 10:8 on 3/26 in the House Fish, Wildlife and Parks committee.

TFMPL's suggested amended language was not introduced.

To listen to the [3/12/19 hearing](#).

To listen to the 3/26/19 [hearing and tabling of the bill](#).

[For Legislative history on trapper education bills](#).