



MONTANA 2023 LEGISLATIVE SESSION TRAPPING & RELATED WILDLIFE BILLS

©Trap Free Montana Public Lands

Welcome to what's earned our state the reputation as the killing fields of Montana. Whereas, like a good friend says, if they have eyes, they die.

This legislative session, we had a supermajority. We thought for sure by passing numerous bills that were pro-trapping and against large predators that they would wipe the bloody floor with us. However, that did not happen!

Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, most bad bills passed. Yet, some did not and we had some great wins! The worst bill (HB372) that would have protected all current legal cruelties against wildlife, made killing wildlife the preferred management method, and a **right** to do so in our constitution, finally died. It was brought forth for the 3rd time by Rep. Paul Fielder and/or his wife, the former Senator, Jennifer Fielder. All Democrats opposed the bill. Thankfully, some Republicans joined in opposing or the constitutional amendment would have passed and then gone before Montana voters on the November 2024 ballot. Our Montana constitution already protects the opportunity forever more to harvest wild fish and wild game. More on HB372 is at the bottom.

Here is a rundown on the 2023 bills we were monitoring and testifying for or against. If you click on the bill number you can then see how the votes went, read the language of the bill, and use the links to watch/listen to the hearings.

Two Pro-Wolf Bills & One Public Safety Bill Unfortunately Failed!

[HB779](#), **SUPPORT** "Revising FWP commission powers to regulate wolf harvesting near national parks". Bill Sponsor Rep Marvin Weatherwax, (D) HD15. Brought forth at the request of WOTR and Trap Free Montana/TFMPL. This bill would untie the hands of the Fish and Wildlife Commission to make crucial decisions for some of the most valuable of wolves affecting businesses, tourism, wolf packs, research, and our state's reputation. Hearing House FWP 2/28/23, 3pm. Status: Rep. Tom France (D) HD94, a co-sponsor, spoke on behalf of the bill. Failed 6:13 along party lines vote. **Tabled 2/28/23**

[HB765](#) SUPPORT. Remove reimbursement for wolf hunting expenses.

Sponsored by Representative Sharon Stewart Pereogy (D) HD42. Despite our ability to finally kill the wolf bounty trapping bill [HB279](#) in 2019, it was resurrected in 2021 [SB267](#) by Senator Bob Brown, passed, and included reimbursement for expenses leading to the trapping and hunting of wolves. The bounty payments currently in Montana of \$500 or \$750 for wolves killed are made by Idaho-based misnamed "Foundation for Wildlife Management". Hearing House FWP 2/28/23. Status: Failed 6:13 along party lines vote: **Tabled 2/28/23**

[HB854](#) SUPPORT. Revise trapping laws to require warning signs.

Sponsor Rep. Robert Clark (D) HD98. We supported and worked with Rep. Clark best we could to get this much needed bill passed. **Tabled.**

ALL of Representative Paul Fielder's Bills Died - All Anti-predator!

[HB627 Revise Wolf Trapping.](#) **OPPOSE.** Wolf trapping **must** include the use of snares outside USFWS delineated grizzly recovery zones and FWP delineated lynx protection zones. Bill Sponsor Rep Paul Fielder (R) HB13. Hearing 2/23/23 House FWP Committee. Status: Passed 2/28, 10:9 with all Democrats opposing and 3 Republicans.

FAILED in the House 47:53.

[HB628 Revise Wolf Trapping.](#) **OPPOSE.** Wolf trapping season **shall** open the first Monday after Thanksgiving and close March 15th outside USFWS delineated grizzly recovery zones regardless if grizzlies are still active. This removes the floating wolf trapping opening date brought about by the F&W Commission due to threat of lawsuit which Trap Free was one of the petitioners. Bill Sponsor Rep Paul Fielder (R) HB13. Hearing 2/23/23 House FWP Committee. Status: Passed 2/28, 10:9 with all Democrats opposing and 3 Republicans.

FAILED in the House: 49:51

[HB630 Revise Black Bear Hunting Laws.](#) **OPPOSE.** Allow dogs to pursue black bears in the spring and for training purposes from the spring until June 15th outside USFWS delineated grizzly recovery zones.....to see how many bears, including grizzlies, can be harmed, orphaned, killed, and the dogs, too. Bill Sponsor Rep Paul Fielder (R) HB13. Hearing 2/23/23 House FWP Committee. Status:Passed 2/28, 11:8 with all Democrats opposing and 2 Republicans.

FAILED in the House: 47:53

The House of Representatives killed these three bills predominantly though because they threatened the delisting of grizzly bears.

Also failing: [SB85 Require management of delisted grizzly bears at sustainable levels](#). Grizzlies are not recovered, but they are gearing up to "manage" them like wolves as soon as they can. Bill Sponsor Sen. Mike Lang (R) SD17. Passed Senate. **TABLED** in House FWP committee.

BAD BILLS THAT PASSED:

[SB 84 Revise laws related to hunting and aircraft use](#), **OPPOSE**. This includes drones in the description as "aircraft". However, **wolves are not included in the bills' unlawful use of aircraft**. Bill Sponsor Sen. Bob Brown (R) SD7. **Note** Trap Free Montana and Wolves of the Rockies lawsuit against FWP and the Fish & Wildlife Commission involves the use of aircraft against wolves. **PASSED**.

[HB104 Revise aerial hunting requirements](#). **OPPOSE**. Removing residency requirement for aerial hunting of predatory animals. Sponsor Becky Beard (R) SD40. **PASSED**.

[HB131 Remove 24 hour wait requirement for wolf license](#), **OPPOSE**. Makes it all the easier to shoot a wolf and then go purchase a license, thereby enabling more poaching. Bill sponsor: Rep. Caleb Hinkle. **PASSED**.

[SB295 Revise laws to accommodate grizzly bear delisting](#). **OPPOSE**. Essentially allow livestock owners to kill or have grizzlies killed once they are delisted including on public land. Bill Sponsor Sen. Bruce Gillespie (R) SD9. Hearing 2/14/23 Senate Fish & Game. Great testimonies! Our focus was on the vagueness in the language thereby easily enabling the killing of grizzlies by individuals. Read [Definition of Threatening in Grizzly Conflicts](#). **PASSED**.

[SB324 Revise FWP information disclosure laws](#). **OPPOSE**. This bill reduces transparency which has already been decreasing and our Montana right to know. The location of killing large predators would no longer be provided other than perhaps the hunting district/region level which are vast state of Montana has only 7 of them. Bill Sponsor Senator Bob Brown (R) SD7. Hearing 2/23/23 Senate F&G Committee. 3pm mst. The hearing on this bill was complete rubbish with trappers saying they need protection. Their names and personal identification are already protected. We testified in opposition and were joined by the vice-president, Kim-WOTR that we all are actually the ones who have been

threatened, ask the many, see the police reports, and who need the protection. They just want to further secret their kills. **PASSED**.

[SB354 Reciprocity for Out of State Trappers.](#) **OPPOSE** Opens up the trapping and snaring of "certain furbearers" to nonresidents. Predatory animals and "nongame" can already be trapped by nonresidents with the purchase of a trapping license. Bill Sponsor Sen. Bob Brown (R) SD7. Hearing 2/23/23 Senate F&G Committee. 3pm mst. As they seek to increase trapping for themselves out-of-state and to draw nonresidents in to trap, TFMPL were the only opponent. Status: waiting executive action, expecting an amendment to our complaint Montana mandatory trappers education does not cover non-residents, except for wolves. This bill, as likely the others, was at the request of the Montana Trappers Association. **PASSED**.

[HB419 Allow Bonding for Injunctions That Prevent the Hunting or Harvesting of Game.](#) **OPPOSE**. Requires a minimum \$50,000 bond for the plaintiff to request an injunction to protect wildlife. Bill Sponsor: Jerediah Hinkle (R) HD 67. Hearing House Judiciary Committee 2/16/23. Trappers and their affiliated groups outnumbered us ~ 6:2 with Marc-Wolves of the Rockies and KC-Trap Free Montana/TFMPL the only opponents. The pay to play bill. In their attempts to rob us of equal access to the courts, the evidence shows this bill is promoted by secreted out of state special interests and based on inaccuracies, omissions, fabrications, and crying rights of entitlement by a well-organized group.

Be sure to read: [Trappers Push GOP Group Requiring \\$50,000 Bond](#) as reporter, Laura Lundquist, reveals further inaccuracies in testimonies and the deceptive games being played. **PASSED, but VETOED** by the Governor. Otherwise, we would have been back in court!

[HB372 Establish Right to Hunt into our Constitution.](#)

OPPOSE. Better known as the Right to Trap bill.

Background:

Montana voters overwhelming voted in 2004 for the **opportunity** to hunt and fish be preserved forever more in our Montana constitution. This amendment makes hunting, fishing, **and trapping a right and the primary method for managing wildlife**. It also protects all current legal means and methods no matter how cruel, unethical, and unfair chase, i.e. snaring, killing contests, beating, drowning, night hunting, running predators over with snowmobiles, etc. If passed, it will trump all the rest of the wildlife bills, both the few good and the bad, whether we stop them or not. As a constitutional proposal HB372 will

require 2/3 of the vote to pass for it to then go before Montana voters in November 2024. With the supermajority in the Montana legislature, the continuance of party-line voting, the proliferation of organized nonresidents deceptively flooding our legislators' emails, they could easily achieve this constitutional amendment this go around. We finally managed to stop it in 2021, but by just a few votes.

HB372 proposes the following changes to our constitution:

Section 1. Article IX, section 7, of The Constitution of the State of Montana is amended to read: "Section 7. Preservation of harvest heritage.

REPLACE: *The **opportunity** to harvest wild fish and wild game animals is a heritage that shall forever be preserved to the individual citizens of the state and does not create right to trespass on private property or diminution of other private rights.*

WITH: *The citizens of Montana have the **right** to hunt, fish, trap, and harvest wild fish and wildlife, including the right to use current means and methods, which does not create or imply any right of public trespass on private property or diminish in any way vested private property rights. The state shall give preference to hunting, fishing, and trapping by citizens as the primary but not exclusive means of the state's management of wild fish and wildlife populations for the benefit of all Montanans. This right is subject to the necessary management statutes enacted by the legislature and regulatory authority delegated by the legislature to a designated public agency or commission.*

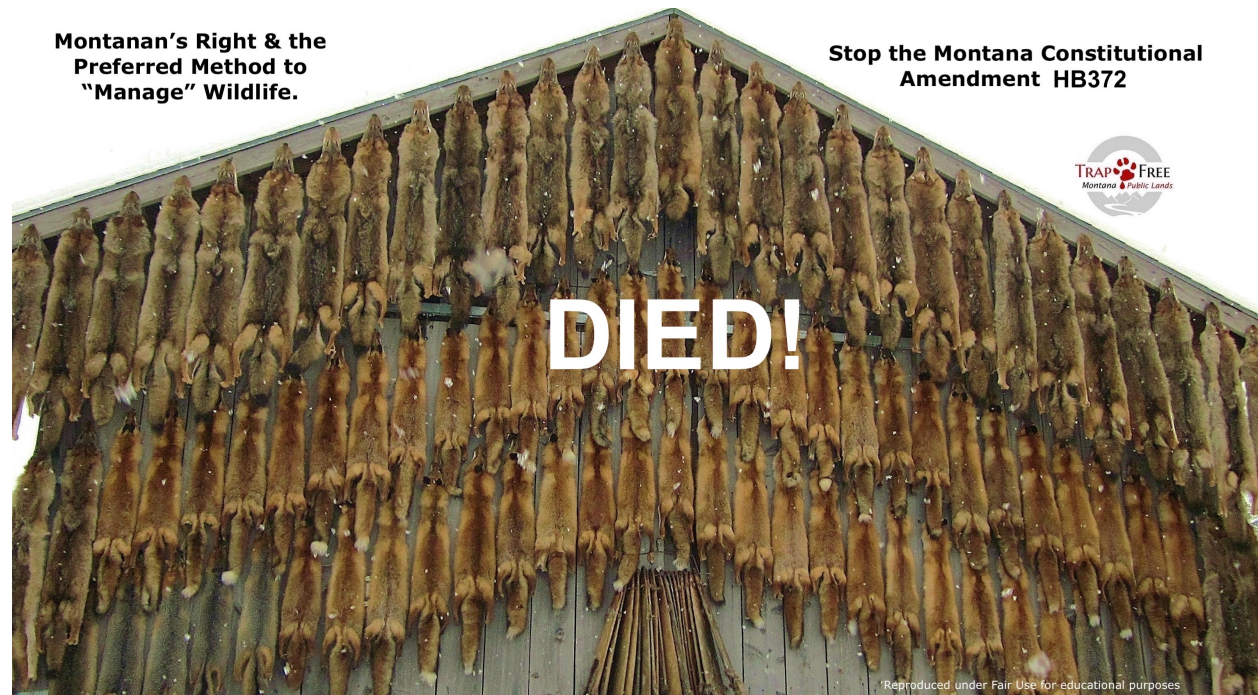
In the end, this most damaging bill of all failed to go before Montana voters on the November 2024 ballot, HB372, making the maltreatment of wildlife a protected right. Despite the tens of thousands of out of state generated and deceptive emails our Montana legislators received by a California based organization, we know that one on one with a legislator, you, our supporters, were ultimately responsible for the death of HB372!

Sending a clear message to Rep. Paul Fielder, the House did not take a vote on HB372 as amended in the Senate and requiring the highly unlikely approval of 74 of 100 representatives. The non-debatable motion to "sine die" in the House was proposed and voted in favor by the majority of Montana representatives ending the 2023 session in the House.

In the Senate only 26 of 50 had voted "aye". Previously, HB372 passed in the House with 64 Representatives approval. A handful of Republicans bravely had joined all Democrats in opposition.

Earlier in the day, the Senate had passed sine die and the 2023 Montana legislative session ended.

Regardless of the underhanded tactics, fear mongering, and exaggerations, i.e. a young boy crying at the stand as to how would they feed their family if this proposed amendment failed..... the **opportunity, not the right**, to harvest wild fish and wild game forever remains in our Montana constitution.



In closing, we thank all our TF MPL and Trap Free Montana supporters and allies, who helped us and defended our position in public comment during yet another challenging legislative session. We appreciate the Montana legislators' voting in alignment with ours on the numerous bills even in the onslaught of attack from trappers and other Republican legislators' attack on those Republicans for stepping out of line.

Friends, the fight for respectful and responsible wildlife stewardship, biodiversity, and safe use of our public lands from trapping, in Montana is far from over. We just stopped some of it, and a major one, from worsening.

TRAP FREE MONTANA PUBLIC LANDS
PO Box 275
Hamilton, MT 59840