

Legislative Update #1

January 18, 2019

As you know, the 2019 Montana legislative session kicked off last week.

The session started late this year, starting on January 7th with the swearing in of new office holders. With the late January start, the legislative session is correspondingly set to end at a much later date than normal -0- May 1st.

The first week of the session was relatively quiet, as it usually is. Most of the week was spent on providing training to new legislators. – with bills only being heard on Friday.

The makeup of the 2019 legislature is as follows

The Democrats picked up two seats in each house from the numbers of the 2017 session. The numbers are as follows:

Senate 30 Republicans 20 Democrats

House 57 Republicans 43 Democrats

Of course, Governor Bullock was not up for reelection 2018, thus, just like the 2017 session, the legislature will be republican controlled while the Governor is a Democrat.

Governor bullock will be termed out of office at the end of 2020.

The session has already started out with controversy. There was a fight among Republicans regarding how many votes would be needed to move a bill that has been killed in committee out to the floor of the house in order for it to be reconsidered. Normally, that number is 60 votes – some of the ‘moderate’ republicans joined with the democrats and forced that number down to 57 votes.

The association has been busy out of the gate.

The associate has two top legislative priorities. These being securing continued funding for the wool lab located at MSU – Bozeman. And, second, to secure an additional level of funding for the livestock loss board.

1. Wool lab –

For the last two legislative session, the association has been able to obtain an appropriation for the wool lab in the amounts of \$120,000 and \$110,000.

I am pleased to report that we have made early progress in reauthorizing funding for the wool lab this session. On Wednesday, the appropriations education subcommittee, headed up by MWGA member, Ilew Jones held a hearing on the budget for Montana State University.

During the hearing, I testified in favor of the budget for MAES and extension. In addition, I spoke in favor of continued for the wool lab.

The good news is that Representative Jones included money for the wool lab in the committee's decision package on the governor's budget. This means, that funding for the wool lab is presently in the state budget moving forward.

2. Funding for the livestock loss board

As the membership will recall, in 2011, the association secured a \$200,000 per year appropriation for the livestock loss board.

During the 2017 session, the legislature made the decision to add mountain lions to the list of species for which livestock producers can be compensated.

Adding mountain lions to the program, when combined with the growing number of grizzly bear depredations, has put the livestock loss board into a position where it may go into the red.

We have put in a bill request, through Ray Shaw of Madison County, to increase the statutory appropriation for the livestock loss board to \$300,000 per year.

3. The department of livestock's budget

An appropriations subcommittee held two days of hearings on the department of livestock's proposed budget.

The good news for the department is that the finances of the agency have turned around significantly from 2015. The department proposed a budget that calls for the board to have a cash reserve.

This may not have been a good thing for the department. This is because legislators called into question the board's request for additional general fund funding.

The board's requests for general funds for the following were met with skepticism

- (1) The board requested 100,000 in general fund for putting together a blue print for a proposed new diagnostic lab;
- (2) The board requested \$300,000 in new funds for meeting the requirements for an expanded DSA surveillance area, and
- (3) The board wants an authorization of \$50,000 to hire a part-time information officer

The last proposal was particularly hit with skepticism

I will keep you up to date on the goings on there as the department's budget moves forward

4. Aerial hunting bills

The board of livestock is running several of its own substantive bills this session.

Two of those came up for hearing earlier this week

1. The board is seeking authorization to move monies its receive from issuing private aerial hunting permits away from funding predator control done by wildlife service to covering administrative costs for administering the private aerial hunting program.
2. The board is seeking to gain authorization for the board to issue private aerial hunting permits to out-of-state pilots. This last proposal has garnered a bit of controversy, as FWP believes the bill is not tightly written and may result in the taking of non-predator species and some of the animal welfare groups just oppose aerial hunting altogether