

Position Statement of the Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society on Game Farms

The Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society represents professional wildlife biologists within the state of Montana. We are deeply concerned with the discovery of chronic wasting disease (CWD) on a Montana game farm in 1999, outbreaks of bovine tuberculosis (TB) in other Montana game farms during the past 10 years, and by several dozen reported escapes of game farm animals. These events have confirmed our view that free-ranging Montana big game herds are currently exposed to a risk far greater than has previously been acknowledged.

Wherever privately owned big game animals are held captive under penned conditions, the adjacent publicly owned game herds are affected by:

- Exposure to a wide variety of diseases and parasites introduced by imported game farm animals. CWD and bovine TB, in particular, are detrimental to the health of wildlife populations and could significantly compromise public health. Both are difficult to detect, diagnose, and dispose of; both are untreatable; and both have been transmitted from captive to free-ranging wildlife.
- Potential genetic pollution by escaped game farm stock. Hybridization of red deer with elk is theoretically prevented by law, but because the genetic tests are not definitive, imported red deer hybrids may not be detected.
- Escape of captive animals continues to occur. And, even where fences have not been breached, single fences are invariably inadequate to prevent contact between penned animals and those in the wild.
- The fenced enclosures restrict movement and habitat use by free-ranging public wildlife. In many cases, the habitat lost is essential winter range.

In addition to these direct threats to Montana big game herds, we object to the promotion of an industry that allows private ownership and sale of wildlife parts. Conservation of wildlife in North America has succeeded because wildlife belongs to everyone and everyone benefits. Economic incentives encourage a variety of adverse impacts. Some of these include:

- The conservation ethic is eroded through commercial operations that privatize wildlife. The wildlife resources of Montana should not be compromised in this manner.
- Confounding and reducing the concepts of fair chase through the morally indefensible act of killing "trophy" animals in a penned situation. In these conditions, fair chase is nonexistent, and the act is degrading to both the shooter and the animal.
- Creating a commercial market that provides an economic incentive for poaching.

The Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society recommends legislative review or a public referendum to determine whether the State of Montana should ban game farms altogether. While such action is pending, we further recommend:

- A moratorium on new game farm permits or expansions
- Limit sales to export only; allow no import of animals from outside Montana
- An immediate ban on "hunting" of penned animals

Adopted 1/29/2000