

STATE DOLLARS TO BOOST

TIMBER JOBS & GAME HABITAT

House Bill 2 contains a couple appropriations which will help stimulate the forest products industry as well as helping management of Fish, Wildlife and Parks Department.

Specifically, legislators have tagged \$615,000 for a timber inventory with a program to remove trees to improve wildlife habitat and reduce fire hazard on land under jurisdiction of FWP.

Duane Ankney, R-Colstrip, who chaired the Appropriations subcommittee on natural resources and transportation, said his committee had some concern over the amount of acreage now under control of FWP.

“We want them to quit buying private land and start managing land they own,” he said. “This study will cover 170,000 acres of FWP land. There is another 130,000 acres the department says don’t have enough timber to be included.”

Intent of the subcommittee is that the game habitat will be improved, private jobs will be created or preserved through timber removal and processing, and money would be returned to help with future management.

A second amount of \$300,000 has been set aside for a grizzly bear DNA population study in the Cabinet/Yaak grizzly management area of extreme northwest Montana. Information from this study will be valuable for FWP programs as well as for logging on the Kootenai National Forest and for possible copper mining at two locations. The money is only a part of what is being gathered from several counties and agencies by Lincoln County commissioners.

This study will be conducted by Kate Kendal, noted biologist for U.S. Geologic Survey who led a similar study for Glacier Park and Bob Marshall Wilderness Area. Lincoln County commissioners have instigated the study, and it will be carried out through the University of Montana.

Marianne Roose, chairman of the commissioners for the county which borders on Canada and Idaho, notes that uncertainty over grizzly population has stymied progress for copper mines by two companies, and that a once thriving lumber economy is non-existent. Unemployment rate in Lincoln County currently has been 20 percent this winter even with many loggers employed in North Dakota oil jobs.

Rep. Mike Cuffe, R-Eureka, recalls that logging, lumber and plywood employed 1200 workers by one company in Libby in the 80s and several other mills at Eureka and Troy were also operating. Cuffe was a member of Ankney’s committee along with Sen. Rick Ripley, R-Choteau, Sen. John Brendan, R-Scobey, Sen. Jim Keane, D-Butte, and Galen Hollenbaugh, D-Helena. Sen. Chas Vincent helped herd the legislation through the Senate.

“Jobs, economy, game range, and money back. It sounds like win-win-win-win to us,” Ankney commented.