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SPOTLIGHT

FWP bison expert 'shocked' by job change

By Michael Wright Chronicle Staff Writer May 22, 2015

MORE INFORMATION

Staffing changes at FWP have bison advocates upset

A longtime Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks biologist who was asked to accept a new job and a pay cut said Thursday he was surprised by the move.

“It obviously came as a huge shock,” said Arnie Dood, a biologist focused on bison planning. “And after dedicating my life to the agency, I didn’t think they would treat someone like this.”

Last week Dood was told his bison planning position would be eliminated due to budget cuts required by the Montana Legislature. FWP offered him a lower paying job as a brucellosis technician, a job that would focus on reducing the risk of transmitting the disease to livestock. He said he hasn’t decided whether to accept the offer.

FWP has said the move was budgetary and wouldn’t discuss the issue beyond that. Because of legislative action in 2013, five jobs needed to be cut from FWP’s wildlife division.

Across the department, about 20 positions had to be cut. FWP spokesman Ron Aasheim said that was done

with a mixture of vacancies and eliminating jobs.

In the wildlife division, three upland bird biologists are going to be cut back to three-quarters time from full-time, according to the division's head, Ken McDonald.

McDonald said the decision came down to determining where the department could do with less, and the bison planning position was one of those areas. McDonald said what that position was created for is nearly finished.

"The task of that one was to develop a statewide bison plan," McDonald said. "We're just completing that effort."

A statewide bison management plan is expected to be released this summer.

Dood has been working on bison for about five years. He's led public meetings and co-authored some of the bison background documents.

McDonald said the department couldn't offer Dood a job at the same pay grade because none were open.

There was an opening for a Helena-based carnivore coordinator, but Dood would have had to apply for the job because it had been open to the public, McDonald said.

Dood has worked at the department since the '70s. For 25 years he worked as the endangered species coordinator.

The news of Dood’s transfer offer pushed some Bozeman bison advocates to urge people to contact FWP, asking why this had happened. Some said the decision signaled the department didn’t care enough about bison conservation, which FWP said is completely false.

“I spend a lot of my time on bison,” said Andrea Jones, Bozeman’s FWP spokeswoman.

Jones said several people work directly on bison as part of their jobs. She added that the Bozeman office had received several calls and emails about Dood’s transfer.

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