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OTHER EDITORS SAY

Meeting walkout deserves high praise

Let's hear it for those state wildlife biologists who walked out of a meeting with federal officials after the feds refused to let the meeting be open to the public.

Kurt Alt and Arnold Dood of the state Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks were meeting with Chris Servheen, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's grizzly bear coordinator, in Bozeman when grizzly bear activists Louisa Willcox and Vannesa Johnson showed up to sit in on the meeting.

The officials were discussing how grizzlies should be managed when and if they are taken off the Endangered Species List.

Servheen said the meeting wasn't open to the public, and it wouldn't be fair to allow only one group to be present. "We can't just have certain people there," he said.

Servheen said state and federal agencies need to be able to talk freely with one another, and he didn't think they could do that with the activists present.

That's when Alt and Dood left the meeting, saying they weren't going to stay if the public couldn't be there. "It's our feeling if we can't operate in the light of public scrutiny, we shouldn't be doing what we're doing," Dood said. "I'm not afraid to discuss these matters in view of the public. People will have the opportunity to learn from the difficult discussions that go behind these things."

Ironically, Regional Forester Dale Bosworth had said only last month that strategy sessions on grizzly management would be open to the public, and his assistant subsequently confirmed that policy.

We suspect Servheen will be set straight about open meetings, but we want to take special notice of the two state employees who clearly understand the importance of open government. Their actions were not only a reflection of their good sense, but the walkout suggests that Montana employees' work habits include the assumption that the best government is open government.

— The Independent Record