



PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS

June 30, 2021

The Honorable Alex Nixon
Carbon County Attorney

Via e-mail: [REDACTED]

Dear Mr. Nixon:

I hope this letter finds you well. I'm writing on behalf of PETA to request that your office file appropriate cruelty-to-animals charges against John Lightburn, in addition to the negligent arson and criminal mischief charges that he faces in connection with the devastating Robertson Draw fire near Red Lodge. The suffering endured by animals in this fire must not be ignored.

While it's well known that the fire has destroyed at least two dozen homes and other structures and nearly 30,000 acres of land—including in Custer Gallatin National Forest—catastrophic fires also cause wildlife to endure terror, suffering, and prolonged, agonizing deaths. Birds at the nearby Yellowstone Wildlife Sanctuary were evacuated to protect them from smoke inhalation, but the enormous number of wild animals who resided in the area burned by the fire were undoubtedly less fortunate.

MCA § 45-8-211 states that a person “commits the offense of cruelty to animals if ... the person ... negligently subjects an animal to mistreatment ... by ... injuring ... or killing the animal.”¹ Given that Lightburn is accused of negligently causing a wildfire that surely led to serious physical injuries and death for an untold number of animals—and that such conduct hardly qualifies as lawful wildlife management practices otherwise exempt from prosecution—we respectfully ask that investigators and your office consider adding cruelty-to-animals charges to those he already faces, in the same way that an [Oregon prosecutor did last year regarding a defendant in a similar case](#).

Thank you for your consideration and for the difficult work that you do.

Sincerely,

Sarah Deffinger
Evidence Analyst
Cruelty Investigations Department

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¹MCA § 45-8-211, “Cruelty to Animals—Exceptions”

<https://leg.mt.gov/bills/mca/title_0450/chapter_0080/part_0020/section_0110/0450-0080-0020-0110.html> (Last accessed on June 30, 2021).