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HB HJ 4

House Joint Resolution 4
January 19, 2005
Presented by Jeff Hagener
House Federal Relations, Energy, and Telecommunications

Mr. Chairman and committee members, for the record I am Jeff Hagener, Director for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP).

FWP supports House Joint Resolution 4 urging members of the Montana Congressional Delegation to introduce and support legislation in the U.S. Congress to establish a minimum lake level in Ft. Peck Reservoir of 2,226 feet above mean sea level.

Ft. Peck Reservoir is a tremendous recreational, fisheries and economic resource for the State of Montana. It contains more than 50 fish species, and generated more than 100,000 angler days in 2001. These anglers provide a huge positive economic impact to the local economies around Ft. Peck Reservoir.

The federal government has invested over $23 million dollars in development of a fish hatchery at Ft. Peck and $5 million for fishing access road improvements. The return on these investments is seriously jeopardized by current low water levels. For example, in 2003 angler use declined by more than 25% due to the low reservoir levels.

As water levels drop below the recommended minimum level of 2,226 feet above mean sea level, there are increasingly greater impacts to the fisheries and the recreational facilities of the reservoir. For example, there are only seven boat ramps on Ft. Peck. These become increasingly inaccessible as water levels drop. At 2,226 feet, Crooked Creek bay, which is the main access point for boaters and anglers from Billings and Lewistown, has only 3 feet of water. Any lower, and it become unuseable. At 2,226 feet, more than 60% of the lake trout spawning habitat is lost, and extensive shallow water habitat is lost, affecting the minnow species on which the larger sport fish depend. This level (2,226 feet) is also identified as the absolute minimum pool recommended in the Department's Fort Peck Reservoir Fisheries Management Plan.

FWP asks for your favorable action on House Joint Resolution No. 4.