

House Bill 787  
March 23, 2005  
Presented by Jim Kropp  
House Federal Relations, Energy, and Telecommunications Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, for the record I am Jim Kropp, Law Enforcement Chief for Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). We believe repair and maintenance of federally owned roads is a federal government responsibility and question if utilizing FWP license agents to sell open road decals is the appropriate venue.

FWP supports maintaining public access to public lands where it is in the best interest of Montana's wildlife resources and the recreating public. FWP does so by participating in land use planning and development of travel plans by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. In addition, FWP works with willing private landowners and in cooperation with Federal land Management Agencies to reduce hunter impacts to private land in securing access to public lands through Access Montana. Reauthorization of the Hunting Access Enhancement Program, which includes Access Montana, a program to provide for hunting access to public land, and Block Management, a program to provide for hunting access to private land, is currently being considered in the House under SB 77.

FWP relies on over 300 license agents across Montana to sell licenses to hunters, anglers and trappers. Historically, FWP has paid agents a certain amount for each license transaction they completed. The amount has increased over time, and was raised to \$0.50 per transaction in 1994. The current definition of a "transaction" in 87-2-903(6) would not allow a license agent to retain a commission for the sale of open road decals.

HB 707, a bill to increase the compensation paid to a license agent, was recently rereferred to the House Appropriations Committee. This bill, as currently amended, changes the definition of a transaction in 87-2-903(6) to include such things as collecting a flat fee. Therefore, if HB 707 passes, license agents would be able to receive a commission for the sale of open road decals.

One of the issues this bill raises and FWP struggles with is just how much do we ask license agents to do? Is distributing these decals or other materials through FWP license agents the appropriate venue? HB 712, which will require license agents to display and provide voter registration materials has already passed the House and was recently heard in the Senate. While we support making voter registration materials readily available to people and would work with the license agents to accomodate the open road decals contemplated in this legislation, one has to ask "When will this all end?" How many items can we ask license agents to accomodate on their counter?