EXHIBIT 4
DATE 1.25.05
NO. 79

TESTIMONY ON HB 79, JANUARY 25, 2005

Robert C. Lucas, 5050 Huckleberry Rd., Missoula, MT 59803

My name is Bob Lucas. I live in Missoula. I have enjoyed many of Montana's Wildlife Management Areas for nearly 40 years and also some of the ranches under conservation easements. I am a member of the Big Sky Upland Bird Association and Pheasants Forever, both of which have been cooperators contributing dollars to help add several valuable tracts to the Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area in the Mission Valley. I strongly support HB 79.

HB 526, the Wildlife Habitat Act, is an excellent piece of legislation. It has made it possible for Montana to protect critical wildlife habitat through purchase, lease and, the most common way, by conservation easements. Unfortunately, this program is slated to sunset next year.

HB 79 will make it possible to continue to conserve Montana's most outstanding wildlife habitat by removing the sunset provision. This is a successful program that has proved itself. It should not be on thin ice, with an uncertain future, needing to face possible sunset every few years. Please make it a stable, continuing program by voting yes for HB 79.

These Montana habitat projects are a valuable asset. They add to the quality of life of the state's citizens, attract tourists and generate local economic activity. We see this economic benefit each year in Culbertson during the pheasant season for just one example. Conservation easements have been a lifesaver for some ranches, enabling them to remain intact and stay in the family, rather than being subdivided or sold to wealthy out of state corporations. Taxes continue to be paid on all of these lands, including State Wildlife Management Areas, which make in lieu payments equal to taxes paid by private land.

This is a good program that deserves your support. Thank you for giving it favorable consideration.