EXHIBIT 11
DATE 1.25.05
HB 79

To Montana legislators:
Testimony on behalf of HB 79--

From my window, I can see the forested ridgeline and sunny grasslands of Mt Jumbo—there for the elk in winter and all the other wildlife, thanks to Habitat Montana. In the course of my work as a writer, wildlife viewing consultant and as a former member of the Missoula Open Space Advisory Committee, I have had opportunities to see the impressive results of both land protection and support for landowners who want to conserve their lands. I've had the good fortune to meet and write about people like Virginia Brown who is so proud of the conservation legacy on her Three-mile Ranch in the Bitterroot Valley, a tribute to her late husband. That protected legacy would not have happened without Habitat Montana.

There's no question—HB 79 is a fine bill. I strongly urge passage of this bill to make the Habitat Montana program permanent. The timing is critical. As people flock to find the good life in Montana's beautiful open spaces, we are losing the open spaces they came for. Private lands hold some of the most important wildlife habitat in the state—along creeks, rivers, wetlands and the lower elevation winter ranges that are so critical for our elk, deer, bears and songbirds.

Habitat Montana has a proven track record as a successful strategy to conserve some of our most valuable lands by giving landowners a viable option for conserving their lands in their natural state—a win:win for landowners, for wildlife, and for all Montanans. Let's make it permanent. Our children will thank us for our foresight.

Sincerely,

Deborah Richie Oberbillig
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