EXHIBIT 6
DATE 2.1.05
HB 260

HB 260 Montana Boat Registration Bill

Fish, Wildlife and Parks Committee members:

House Bill 260 as written is simply not good legislation. The purpose of purchasing stream access sites is laudable – there's no doubt about that. These sites will become more and more valuable as our own population of boaters and boaters who visit Montana increases. The way this bill proposes doing so is poor. Do not vote for it as written and invite a myriad of problems in the future.

Licensing each non-motorized boat is somewhat akin to licensing each pair of boots you own, or perhaps a better analogy would be licensing each fishing rod!

I understand that FWP has made four recommendations. I would reluctantly support them but would prefer other methods of raising funds for access sites.

The vehicle license fee for State Parks has been a success. It shouldn't be pushed too far, but a small fee with good publicity might be effective.

Does FWP have a non-profit "foundation" or other fund-raising and/or educational goals? If not, they should!! Contributions to access sites in "planned giving" (wills) or in memory of some dear departed fisherman who's now at that "great fishing hole in the sky" could be unlimited. And think of the celebrities who want to make a good name for themselves in Montana!! Just name an access site for anyone willing to pay for its acquisition – the Hank Williams Jr. or Meryl Streep site. And you wouldn't have to pay the local licensing agent a cent! The rest of us who enjoy these rivers and streams would probably respond to a plea for a tax-deductable donation in "Montana Outdoors" or even a sign on the registration box at campgrounds and put-ins.

Let's get creative here – there are professional fund raisers out there who could give you a few tips and you won't have to look in the wallets of the average Montana recreationist. Aren't there matching grants to look into and transportation funds? And when subdivisions are created (even "ranchettes") why don't the developers have to provide for public stream access sites the way city developers have to provide park lands.

Enforcement might be a big issue here – seems to me our game wardens have enough on their hands. And making commercial companies have every boat or every person they give rides to have a license is a joke.

Weed control?? I'd love to see weed control in Montana, but as long as we keep grading the roads, making new trails or doing ANYTHING that disturbs the soil without REVEGETATION it just won't happen. Show me some progress first and I'll support this concept.

I'd also like to see more "volunteer days" with river cleanups, access enhancements and other activities that would give river users a better feeling of "ownership" of the streams and rivers of our great state.

Give Montanans and visitors alike a chance to know these areas – you can't love what you don't know and you don't value what you don't love.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this bill. Please don't deprive the occasional boater the chance to know and love our rivers by imposing fees on them that would keep them away. Far better to give them a chance to know and love and care for these areas in their own way.

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