EXHIBIT 12
DATE 2.17.05
HB 603

Dear Representative Gutsche:

I know you're swamped with legislative issues, but please push as hard as you can to pass HB 603.

My husband and I own a home in the upper reaches of the Ninemile Valley and have lived there for 6 years. We are also active voters and responsible pet owners with two labs as our hiking partners. This fall, I was hiking with my 11-year-old lab when she stepped off a Forest Service road and into a leg-hold trap. I was able to open the trap and release her, but the experience was horrible. Seeing your old dog stuck in a trap and in obvious pain is absolutely heart wrenching.

We contacted the trapper, Ken Schoening, who was initially concerned but quickly proclaimed that setting traps was his right, and if he so desired, he could set traps at the end of our driveway – 1000 feet from our home. Needless to say, we were dumbfounded at his arrogance and immediately downloaded the Montana trapping regulations to educate ourselves. We were horrified to learn that he could legally do exactly what he threatened.

Since that day, I know of at least four other valley residents whose dogs were subsequently caught in Ken Schoening's traps. In all instances, these people were simply hiking with their dogs along very well-used Forest Service roads.

While we believe that trapping is inhumane, we understand that working to eliminate all trapping is simply not feasible in Montana.

But, it is a reasonable request that trappers be well educated on both the regulations and ethics involved in their sport. And, I sincerely believe that they should also be required to post the areas in which they are actively trapping. Anyone hiking with a dog would certainly avoid an area known to contain traps.

Hunters are required, in effect, to post themselves as hunters (by wearing blaze orange). Trappers should be required to post as well.

I would love to help with the passage of this bill. If you need a hand, please let me know. Many thanks for your efforts!

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