EXHIBIT 1
DATE 3.8.05
SB 77

Senate Bill 77
March 8, 2005
Presented by Jeff Hagener
House Fish, Wildlife & Parks Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, for the record I am Jeff Hagener, Director of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP).

I am here to ask your support in passing SB 77, an act making permanent the Block Management Hunting Access Enhancement Program and ensuring that current funding for the program continues.

While the Block Management program actually began in 1985, the current enhanced program was authorized, on a trial basis with sunset provisions attached, ten years ago by the 1995 Legislature.

This enhanced program was designed to do the following:

- Help private landowners manage public hunting activities on lands under their control;
- Provide landowners with benefits and services to offset the impacts associated with public hunting access;
- Provide hunters with public hunting access free of charge; and
- Preserve Montana's hunting heritage and enable Fish, Wildlife, & Parks to utilize public hunting as a means of managing Montana's public game animal resources.

Over the past ten years, Block Management has become the largest and most successful public hunting access program in the nation. In 2004, over 1250 landowners enrolled nearly 9 million acres in the program statewide, and last year hunters spent more than 400,000 hunter days hunting on enrolled lands for deer, elk, antelope, upland birds, waterfowl, and other game species. Since 1995, over 3 million hunter days of recreation have occurred on land enrolled in Block Management.

FWP believes that the experimental program implemented in 1995 has proven itself successful and concurs with the Private Land/Public Wildlife Council that the program should be made permanent. Indicators of the program's success include the following:

- Data from numerous surveys of participating landowners and hunters, including a 2004 survey that indicated 93% of participating landowners were satisfied or very satisfied with the program, and 89% of hunters using the program were satisfied or very satisfied with the program;
- Data from more than 16,000 hunter comment cards voluntarily submitted by hunters who hunted on Block Management Areas in 2003, indicating that 81% of those hunters observed game they were hunting, 39% bagged game, and 82% rated the Block Management Area experience satisfactory;
- Results of a 1999 Performance Audit conducted by the Legislative Audit Division that found that the program was meeting its goals and that made several recommendations for improvement, which resulted in improved program direction and implementation; and

- Each year, more cooperators have indicated a desire to enroll than program funding can accommodate, and increasing numbers of hunters have indicated a desire to use the program. Local businesses in communities throughout the state have cited Block Management as a contributing factor in helping to stimulate local economies during fall hunting seasons.

It should be mentioned that FWP concurs with members of the Private Land/Public Wildlife Council regarding continuation of the Block Management Program. Since its inception in 1995, the Block Management Program has been shaped through extensive input of Montana citizens - landowners, hunters, outfitters, businessmen and women – and FWP believes that is one of the strengths of this program. This is a program built by Montanans to fit the landscape of Montana and meet the needs of Montana landowners, hunters, and outfitters. Note that Section 1 of this act makes permanent a citizen's review committee for continued review of the program and mandatory reporting to subsequent legislatures regarding the success of the program.

From FWP's perspective, the Block Management Program has become an integral part of Montana's hunting heritage, helping preserve a cherished Montana tradition where private landowners open their gates to public hunters. Not all landowners wish to enroll land in the program, nor do all hunters wish to hunt on enrolled lands. But, it provides an option to the many hunters and landowners who do wish to participate, and serves as an essential tool for FWP to use in managing Montana wildlife resources.