

EXHIBIT 17  
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HB 637

House Bill 637  
February 16, 2005  
Presented by Jim Kropp  
House Judiciary Committee

Madam Chair and committee members, for the record I am Jim Kropp, Chief of Law Enforcement for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP).

House Bill 637 would give FWP the ability to enforce laws prohibiting minors in possession of intoxicating substances (MIP) in state parks and fishing access sites. This is important to protect public safety as well as public and private property.

Consider this scenario: It is 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend at Tongue River State Park in Bighorn County. A Warden or Park Ranger contacts three underage kids who just pulled into the park. They have a six-pack of beer and a bottle of whiskey. Their parents are not home and the sheriff's deputy is 100 miles away on another important call. Right now, FWP has no legal authority to deal with this – FWP cannot even make the kids pour out their liquor. Similar examples occur every weekend at FASs and parks all over the state during the year.

HB 637 would give FWP enforcement staff the authority to handle this violation while also improving the ability of managers to handle their own problems in a timely way. FWP has also seen an increase in vandalism at many of our state parks and fishing access sites that has cost tens of thousands of dollars in repairs and clean up. The vandalism that occurs is often associated with a party that took place at the site. The passing of this bill will give FWP enforcement the ability to handle problems onsite - efficiently and legally.

Some have questioned whether FWP officers are trained and prepared to enforce this type of law. For the record, FWP wardens and park Rangers undergo the same training at the Montana Law Enforcement Academy as County Sheriffs, City Police and the Montana Highway Patrol.

In addition, FWP has been working in conjunction with Missoula County Sheriff's office to deter MIP's in the Blackfoot River Corridor. The Corridor is a very busy place in the summer with many young people partying and floating the Blackfoot River. Last summer the Missoula County Sheriffs Office coordinated a MIP patrol, on which FWP enforcement assisted, to deter the amount of MIP's that were occurring in the area. This law will strengthen FWP's ability to assist in the coordination efforts to minimize MIP's. The law will also allow our enforcement to handle the MIP violations that are occurring on FWP's parks and fishing access sites without burdening another law enforcement agency.

Others have questioned whether FWP officers, funded with state special revenue, should enforce general laws, such as MIP. MIPs often lead to vandalism, littering or other impacts on Parks and FASs that must be repaired with state special revenue. We believe an "ounce of prevention" is a good investment.

Finally, MIPs in a Park or FAS inevitably turn into MIPs on our highways on their way home. Giving FWP officers authority to enforce MIP on our lands could avoid a needless, tragic accident or fatality involving an underage, drunk driver.

I urge your support for HB 637.