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SENATE FISH AND GAME
EXHIBIT NO. 3
DATE 3/3/05
BILL NO. HB 79

January 17, 2005

To: House FWP Committee

From: Steven Page, Page Witham Land & Cattle Company, Glasgow

RE: SUPPORT FOR HB 79 – REAUTHORIZING HABITAT MONTANA

During the spring of 1994, Page Whitham Land and Cattle accepted title to the Brewer Ranch from MFWP, in trade for a conservation easement on two ranches in Valley County.

This transaction effectively placed over 40,000 acres of deeded land under easement, and impacts the management of an additional 178,000 acres of intermingled state and federal land.

By terms of the easement, the rangelands are managed under rest-rotation grazing systems, leaving up to 75% of the landscape vacant to the exclusive use of wildlife with more than 50% being rested from grazing during the growing season each year. Additionally, over 1500 acres of irrigated river bottom land is managed for wildlife enhancement, with 300 acres set aside for dense nesting cover.

Following ten years of prescribed grazing, a significant improvement in habitat condition has occurred, livestock production has been enhanced, and healthy populations of wildlife occupy the properties. Each year more than 3000 hunter-days of recreation are provided, and from a ranching perspective, a dramatic increase in calf weaning weights and yearling weight gains are being experienced.

MFWP personnel have been a pleasure to work with and we have absolutely no regrets regarding this arrangement.

“Habitat Montana” is a unique program – one that Montanans can be proud of. It is mutually beneficial to landowners and sportsmen alike, and at no cost to taxpayers. It deserves to be placed permanently into law.

(from Steven Page by e-mail)

Senate Fish, Wildlife and Parks Committee
March 3, 2005

Testimony in support of HB 79

Senator Tropila and Committee members:

My name is Stanley F. Meyer. I live in Great Falls. It was my privilege to chair the FWP Commission during Governor Racicot's two terms.

Habitat Montana is not just about conserving habitat; it is a valuable tool for the ranching community. Traditional ranching families have used the payment – and it is big money – to buy more land, to create more income for a son or daughter who want to join the ranch, or to allow an older generation to retire while keeping the ranch in the family.

David Mannix and his brothers are the fourth generation on the family ranch near Helmville. The \$350,000 from FWP helped them expand a one-family ranch into one that now supports David and his two brothers – all married, raising children on the ranch. David told me: “The FWP easement pays cash for the blue sky and habitat that Montanans value so highly, while the rancher maintains ownership and control of his land.”

The Keogh family in Jefferson County used the easement cash to help Mom and Dad retire, turning the ranch over to their daughter and her husband. The Fluss family in Prairie County sold an easement because their two sons didn't want to seek jobs out of state – they wanted to ranch, just like Mom and Dad. The Fluss family needed more land.

Virginia Brown, in Ravalli County, had a different challenge: Death took her husband too soon. Virginia promised her dying husband that she would protect their beloved ranch from subdivision. Habitat Montana allowed Virginia to keep that promise. With easements purchased from three families, FWP has conserved 7200 acres in Ravalli County – benefiting landowners and providing open space for present and future Montanans.

Last Fall, I met with directors of a statewide farm organization, seeking their support for what has become HB 79. In the discussion, one of them asked “What's the alternative? What other tools are available to help a family pass the ranch on to the next generation?” With 15 agricultural leaders around the table, no one had an answer.

All six FWP commissioners appointed by Governor Racicot enthusiastically supported Habitat Montana while in office; I speak for the five of us still living in endorsing HB 79 and asking your support. Thank you.

Stan Meyer

Private Land/Public Wildlife Advisory Council



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October 11, 2004

Dear Stan Meyer,

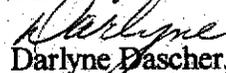
As chair of the Private Land/Public Wildlife Council I am writing on behalf of the Council to fully support the re-authorization of the FWP Habitat Montana Program. Governor Martz appointed a diverse group of citizens representing landowners, sportsmen and the outfitting industry with a common goal of improving landowner/sportsmen relations. The Habitat Montana Program can be a management tool for the livestock industry to further enhance wildlife habitat while providing a significant financial incentive for families who elect to use it. In addition, all Montana citizens benefit from wildlife resources being protected and enhanced. Before we moved any recommendation forward we agreed to 100% consensus.

The Council agreed to support the Habitat Montana Program with the following rationale:

1. Existing program is successful and has potential to protect additional important wildlife habitat that is seriously threatened.
2. It is the intent of the Council to support FWP in protecting and preserving important wildlife habitat that is seriously threatened.

Please feel free to contact the Council at any time as we welcome any input from the public.

Sincerely,



Darlyne Dascher, chair

Private Land/Public Wildlife Council

C/O Field Services Division
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