SENATE FISH AND GAME
EXHIBIT NO. 6
DATE 3/31/05
BILL NO. HB235

House Bill 235
March 31, 2005
Presented by Jeff Hagener
Senate Fish and Game 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 HB 235, an act implementing certain recommendations of the Private Land/Public Wildlife Council for new, additional sources of funding and new landowner incentives to allow for enhancement and expansion of the Block Management Program.

The Private Land/Public Wildlife Council spent the past eighteen months evaluating the Block Management Program and developing recommendations with extensive input from the public. The Department concurs with Council conclusions that the program has proven successful and has the potential to expand and improve if additional funding and landowner incentives become available.

Each year, more landowners are identified as potential candidates for enrollment in the program than funding will allow. But program enhancement and expansion includes more than simply enrolling more landowners in the existing Block Management Program. The Department has also recently begun new efforts focused on developing long-term access agreements with landowners to maintain or create public access to large tracts of isolated federal and state lands, and we've also successfully worked with groups of landowners to develop localized elk hunting access agreements which include hiring hunt coordinators to help manage hunting on enrolled lands.

Both the Department and the Council have also concluded that program growth can only occur if the Department is also able to provide the necessary patrol presence and staff assistance to help manage additional Block Management Areas or new areas opened to public access.

Section 1 of this bill would create a new funding source from an annual lottery of special hunting licenses issued by the FWP Commission each year. The bill proposes the issuance of one lottery license each year for each species (deer, elk, moose, mountain sheep and mountain goat). This proposal is based on a similar system implemented by Idaho two years ago which has proven popular and been successful in generating revenue for that state's hunting access program.

Section 2 of this bill creates a new opportunity for resident or nonresident landowners who are currently eligible to receive a complimentary nontransferable hunting license for their own use as a benefit for enrolling land in Block Management. Under this proposal, instead of the license being issued to the landowner, a landowner enrolled in Block Management could designate an immediate family member to receive the non-transferable license for his or her own use instead. This would allow a resident landowner to designate either a resident or a nonresident family member to receive a license, and allow a nonresident family member to also designate either a resident or nonresident family member to receive a license. If a family member would be designated to receive the license, the landowner's Block Management compensation is reduced

by the amount of the license cost, allowing more program funding to be available to enroll other cooperators.

Section 2 also proposes changes to existing law which would provide for more equal treatment of nonresident landowners who enroll land in the program. Currently, resident landowners who enroll land in the program are entitled to receive both a complimentary hunting license for their own use AND compensation, while nonresident landowners may receive a complimentary license OR compensation, but not both. House Bill 235 proposes to change this rule to allow nonresident landowners to receive the same benefits offered to resident landowners.

The Department feels that with these modifications to current landowner incentives and the additional funding which may become available under this proposal, the Block Management Program can be enhanced and expanded strategically to not only include more landowners and accommodate more hunting opportunity to address management objectives, but also provide better program management through increased presence of FWP enforcement and program personnel.

The Department has worked closely with the Private Land/Public Wildlife Council during the past eighteen months, and appreciates their efforts in evaluating the Block Management Program and developing recommendations. We believe the recommendations brought forth in House Bill 235 have merit, and the Department stands ready to implement those recommendations upon adoption by the 59th Legislature.