

House Bill 564
March 8, 2005
Presented by Doug Monger
Senate Local Government Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, for the record I am Doug Monger, Administrator of Parks for Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP).

In 1985, the Montana Legislature passed a statute and an appropriation for Fish, Wildlife and Parks to acquire property in Ft. Benton for the Montana Agricultural Center and Museum of the Northern Great Plains providing there would be no additional costs to the state. This property included about 3 acres and a vacant industrial metal building. Since 1985, the property has been leased to and operated by either the City of Ft. Benton or the River and Plains Society, a non-profit organization.

Today, the Agricultural Center is an incredible asset to the people of this state and our guests; it is the result of many local benefactors and volunteers who have worked tirelessly to develop a first class facility. It has so many artifacts and interesting exhibits that viewing them all in one day is a challenge.

We believe that transfer of the property to a qualified local government entity such as the City of Fort Benton will streamline management of the facility. There is no reason for the state to continue owning this property when local citizens have so graciously built and managed it for almost twenty years. The state's role of providing for the initial acquisition of the property has been fulfilled. We further believe that the state's long-term fiduciary responsibility is met by the proposed language in HB 564 that allows the state to reclaim ownership of the property if for some reason the property ceases to be used as an agricultural center and museum.

We are pleased to ask for your support of HB 564.