

State of Montana House Appropriations Committee  
Hearing on HB 388

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify this afternoon in support of HB 388.

I urge you to give careful consideration to HB 388 and the benefits that it will provide to Montanans. HB 388 is about renewable resource restoration. It will be a stimulus to Montana's economy by creating high wage jobs; it will encourage additional and ongoing investment in Montana's communities through immediate improvements in community infrastructure; and it will encourage long-term economic growth by revitalizing Montana's precious watersheds, wildlife habitats, forests, and grasslands.

Let me provide a commonly used definition so we may understand what restoration means. Restoration is the process of reestablishing to the extent possible the structure, function, and integrity of indigenous ecosystems and the sustaining habitats they provide. It sustains human communities and the cultures that these communities nurture. It invests in the future by learning and respecting the past.

Restoration is also about rethinking our place on the land and the growth sectors in our economy. These areas of growth are frequently identified – housing, tourism, trade, energy, and commercial development. Support to these growth sectors requires investments into their design and their operation, and it requires both people and skills to make it happen. We have the good fortune in Montana to already possess many of these people and skills. Our existing talent in timber management, construction, and heavy equipment operation is more than capable in accomplishing tasks in residential and commercial development, watershed restoration, and forest management. What we lack, and what HB 388 provides, is modest seed capital to leverage additional investments in restoration, allowing all Montanans, now and in the future, to reap the benefits of healthy watersheds, vital forests, and sustainable, livable communities.

Restoration investment is investment in Montana – creating communities and surrounding landscapes that are attractive to Montana businesses and residences. Let me provide an example from a sector with which I'm familiar. Forest operations in Montana have moved well beyond the much publicized "timber wars." Our friends in the conservation and logging industries have come together to agree on a new overriding purpose of forest management, which we call "stewardship." It means modifying the density and structure of forest stands such that they are more resilient to insects and diseases, more adaptive to disturbances like wildfire, and more aligned with the

requirements of tree growth such that they are more productive. Stewardship operations in the forest are really restoration operations – in the process of recreating this new structure and density, they provide income generation opportunities from the harvest of both sawtimber and roundwood. This provides jobs, income, and revenue for the state. Interestingly, we are also now seeing that these restoration operations can produce biomass for energy, so instead of stored carbon in trees being burned in wildfires or brush piles, this biomass heats our schools or homes, reducing our energy dependence on fossil fuels and providing a cornerstone in our strategy to address global warming.

Research programs from Montana universities on restoration design and evaluation also contribute to the Montana economy. Restoration sciences are growing elements in research portfolios, which bring in significant external funding and provide new opportunities for jobs for Montana students. Restoration research and education has stimulated growing faculty cooperation between Montana State University and The University of Montana for 364 days a year (there is one Saturday before Thanksgiving where we tend to look less favorably on each other).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, restoration investments protect and sustain for future generations Montana's private property. Montanans are land stewards, but if state government wishes to help property owners, investments in restoration technologies, tools, and projects are far more effective than tax abatements could ever be. Restoration of Montana's lands and waters increases property values, provides more highly productive soils, more stable water supplies, and greater agricultural and forestry yields. The need to provide statewide support to restoration is evident for all landowners, and the leadership provided by this committee to become investment partners for Montana's property owners will be this legislature's greatest legacy.

Thank you, again, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to testify on this important bill.