EXHIBIT 1
DATE 3.13.07
SB 126

Senate Bill 126
March 13, 2007
Presented by M. Jeff Hagener
House Fish, Wildlife and Parks Committee

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, for the record I am Jeff Hagener, Director of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

I am here today to support SB 126, which would remove the sunset dates and make permanent the Future Fisheries Improvement Program and the Bull Trout/Cutthroat Trout Enhancement Programs.

These programs have significantly increased the quantity and quality of fish habitat available in Montana today. As of October 31, 2006, 329 projects had been completed and another 63 projects were in various stages of completion. Fish, Wildlife & Parks has made grants totaling more than eight million dollars from the Future Fisheries Improvement Program and the Bull Trout/Cutthroat Trout Enhancement programs for these projects. Another eighteen million dollars has been provided in matching funds from other agencies, non-governmental organizations and private parties.

Projects have: (1.) substantially increased spawning habitats and rearing cover; (2.) improved hundreds of miles of riparian areas which function to naturally stabilize stream channels, minimize erosion, and prevent degradation of fish habitat; (3.) screened dozens of irrigation diversions thereby preventing entrainment of fishes - particularly migratory species; (4.) protected the genetic purity of numerous isolated populations of Yellowstone and westslope cutthroat trout by eliminating avenues for hybridization; (5.) restored connectivity of habitats for migratory fishes, such as bull trout, by removing artificial barriers or constructing fish ladders; (6.) restored the natural pattern, profile and dimensions to dozens of miles of streams that had been channelized or damaged; (7.) improved stream flow in dewatered streams thereby restoring their ability to sustain fisheries.

Both of these programs are extremely popular with landowners and anglers. Not only has fishing been improved but also habitat restoration activities have made a substantial contribution towards economic development in Montana. Consulting firms specializing in stream restoration, fencing companies, heavy equipment operators, re-vegetation specialists, metal shop fabricator, farmers, and ranchers have all benefited from these programs - not to mention guides, outfitters, and sporting goods dealers who all benefit from better fishing.

SB 126 will ensure that these benefits continue beyond the scheduled sunset date of the original authorization. We hope that you will support reauthorization of these important fish habitat restoration programs.