EXHIBIT 6
DATE 3-10-09
SB 188

Senate Bill 188
March 10, 2009
Presented by Chris Smith
House Fish, Wildlife & Parks Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, for the record I am Chris Smith, Deputy Director of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP).

SB 188 makes a minor revision in the law related to constraints on hunters who draw special antlerless elk permits. Under current law, a hunter who draws a special permit for an antlerless elk in a hunting district may only take an antlerless elk, regardless of what hunting opportunity exists for hunters using their A-5 elk license. This statute was adopted at a time when antlerless elk permits were relatively hard to draw and hunters who got one were perceived as having an advantage over hunters without a permit who were universally restricted to taking a bull. With the recent growth in elk numbers and the need to expand cow harvests, FWP has liberalized regulations and allows taking of cows in many districts without a special permit. In a few districts, the regulations contain both a limited number of permits valid for the entire season and a shorter period when anyone with an elk license can take a cow.

SB 188 would "level the playing field" by lifting the restriction on hunters with special permits taking bulls during any time when hunters without a permit could take a cow. This change would eliminate an issue that some percieve as inequitable.

For the committee's information, FWP is moving away from issuing special permits for antlerless elk, in favor of an approach that parallels the way we manage deer harvest. Two sessions ago, the legislature created the A-9, elk antlerless "B" tag. Last session, the legislature eliminated the prerequisite to purchase an A-5 elk license before purchasing an A-9 anlterless tag. Thus, FWP can now allow the use of either limited or unlimited numbers of A-9 licenses in any hunting district, in the same manner that we issue deer "B" doe licenses. Until the regulations are fully adapted to this new approach, the changes in SB 188 would resolve the issue raised by the sponsor.

FWP can easily implement the change proposed by SB 188 should the legislature choose to adopt this bill.