EXHIBIT 5
DATE 1-29-09
HB HB 336

Gallatin River Ranch Fire and Rescue – Board of Trustees

Local Government Committee
Montana House of Representatives

January 28, 2009

Dear Chairwoman Arntzen:

As members of the Gallatin River Ranch Rural Fire District's Board of Trustees, we stand in opposition HB 336 in its current form. Our district has a very small pool of residents to draw from for the elected positions on the Board of Trustees. Some of our Board members have been in continuous service for more than three terms, not out a desire for power or control, but simply because no one else is available to fill the positions. Each of our five board members contributes between 75 and 200 hours per year to fulfill their management and fiduciary responsibilities.

We strongly support fiscal responsibility and programmatic accountability for all government programs. To that end we publish notices of meetings and agendas in the newspaper, set aside an open comment period at each meeting, and provide access to the minutes of our monthly meetings. However, the reporting requirements listed in HB 336 represent an onerous and unfunded burden to our Fire District. In order to fulfill these reporting requirements we would have to contract with an individual to complete the report. This cost takes away from our primary mission of protecting and serving the public within our district.

From our perspective, fire district boards represent one of the purest forms of self-government. Each of us is a full time resident of the district. Each of us is a registered voter. Each of us makes difficult decisions about taxation of our own property. Clearly, we have an innate desire to be wise stewards of our own, and our neighbor's, fiscal resources.

Again, we appreciate Representative Washburn's desire for accountability. However, this bill provides an undue burden on small, rural fire districts and the volunteers who agree to serve on the Boards of Trustees. We ask that you vote no on HB 336.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact any of the signatories below.

Sincerely,

Nels D. Sanddal, Chair

Dr. Kathleen Schachman

Kathleen Schachman, Secretary

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