

ORAL TESTIMONY ON HB425

This bill is about giving hunters, anglers and landowners more advance notice of leasing decisions that DNRC is considering on state lands so they have an opportunity to communicate with the department early on in the process. That is a better, more transparent government.

What this bill does not do is restrict development in any way. It is about fair notice given earlier in the leasing process.

The Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership has spent the last 21 months completing the Montana Sportsmen User Value Mapping Project, which meant meeting repeatedly with 40 sportsmen's clubs in 30 Montana communities in every corner of the state and mapping their "bread and butter" hunting and fishing areas that they - the clubs' members - want retained in the face of development.

The club members are not asking for an end to oil and gas development but they are absolutely expecting that oil and gas development will be done in a more responsible manner than it has been conducted in so far by either the state or federal agencies. Better advance notice of state land leasing is viewed as an essential part of "responsible energy development."

In the past year, we have seen big game and upland bird habitat on state lands along the Rocky Mountain Front, Centennial Valley, and the Ruby Valley - some of Montana's most coveted hunting and angling regions - leased for oil and gas development. Lands along our Blue Ribbon trout streams like the Yellowstone, Beaverhead, and Big Hole have been leased.

One of the core values Montanans hold dear is private property rights. With the split estate notification requirement, land owners are assured that if they do not own the mineral rights under their land, that the state will not be leasing those lands without their knowledge.

Montana DNRC will be required to provide *meaningful* notice of lease sales to the people and in the counties that are affected by oil and gas leasing of state lands.

This bill will put into law most of the procedures that DNRC already uses to notify the public of lease sales, such as sending notices to split estate owners and using a similar timeline and posting notification on their Web site. This bill will not drastically change what the department already does.

Currently, DNRC is not required by law to provide any notice of lease sales anywhere. The only notification that is required by law is after leases are sold when the land board approves leases. By putting notification requirements into law, we will be ensuring that average Montanans have a seat at the decision-making table and are able to voice their opinions about how our state lands should be managed.

Reaching out to affected citizens early on is good government. That is what this bill is all about, providing opportunity for people to be engaged in the leasing process early on so that potential conflicts can be headed off before there is a controversy.

Thank you.

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