SENATE FISH AND GAME
EXHIBIT NO. 6
DATE March 5, 2009
BILL NO. HB137

House Bill 137
March 5, 2009
Presented by Chris Smith
Senate Fish and Game Committee

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

I am here to offer the Department's support for passage of House Bill 137, which was developed by the Private Land/Public Wildlife Council. Under current law, landowners who enroll land in the Block Management Public Hunting Access Program are entitled to receive a complimentary hunting and fishing license for their own use. In lieu of the landowner receiving the license, the license may be issued to an an immediate family member related by blood, but the cost of the license must then be deducted from the landowner's Block Management Payment.

This license designation and cost deduction provision was passed into law in 2005. The intent was to increase the benefit of the complimentary license incentive, and to allow for increased revenue to enroll more landowners.

Since that time, less than a dozen of the approximately 1250 landowners annually participating in the program have elected to utilize this license option. For many, it is simply a matter of principle. If they are entitled to receive a complimentary license, then they say they should not be penalized with a monetary deduction if they choose to designate a family member to receive the benefit instead of using it themselves. For others, the definition of "immediate family member" which restricts them from designating a family member related by marriage makes the license benefit less useful.

The Department has heard from many landowners who have said they would like to be able to give the complimentary license to their son-in-law or other in-law, because those are the people who like to hunt, rather than the daughter or other blood relative who may not like to hunt. Also, many elderly landowners have also requested the ability to have the complimentary license go to the ranch manager, because that is the person who deals with the public hunters and who likes to hunt, whereas the landowner may no longer actually live on the ranch or like to hunt.

The complimentary license benefit is intended to recognize the landowner's contribution in providing habitat for Montana's public wildlife resources and sharing his or private land with members of the public. The small amount of revenue ($70 for a resident or $643 for a nonresident license) derived from deducting the cost of a designated license is offset by the reduction in incentive value the current benefit offers, and does little to affect the Department's ability to enroll new properties.

I would like to thank the landowners, outfitters, and sportsmen who make up the Private Land/Public Wildlife Council for their work over the last year to develop a consensus on this proposal.

The Department asks that you support passage of House Bill 137.