

Testimony opposed to HB 151:

I am Mary Ellen Schnur, chairman of Montana Outfitters and Guides Association Fish and Game Committee. I reside at Townsend, Montana. I cannot appear in person at this hearing today, due to having to attend the Montana Outfitters and Guides Association in Billings.

While Montana Outfitters and Guides Association appreciates the sentiment behind this bill, we cannot support it in its current form. We sympathize with the hunter who applies year after year for a special permit, when less than 2% of applicants draw a permit. This bill will not significantly increase those odds.

We ask our Fish Wildlife & Parks Department to base management on science. This bill, setting a hard number of either sex permits, bypasses science. There may come a time when the elk herd is so small that 125 permits are not sustainable. Who ever thought the Bitterroot or the Gallatin would be nearly devoid of elk? It could happen in the Elkhorns, too.

The limited number of available either sex permits in the Elkhorns (and in HD 339) is driven by unlimited hunting pressure on spike bulls (yearlings). About 150 spike bulls are taken in the Elkhorns every year. Approximately 50 brow tined bulls are taken by special permit holders. If spike bulls were protected in the Elkhorns, approximately 200 brow tined bulls could be taken each year. All the surrounding hunting districts are brow tine districts. The Elkhorns and 339 should be made brow tine bull areas, also. Hunter opportunity will increase, and age diversity of bulls will increase. There should be no need for limited entry either sex permits in the Elkhorns under a brow tine regulation. Limited entry permits aren't needed in adjoining districts. There is a successful method in place to address harvest of cows. Approximately 900 antlerless elk licenses were issued for the Elkhorns in 2010.

Finally, the ranchers surrounding the Elkhorns mountains are some of the most hospitable in the state. Very few landowners restrict public access for hunting. The Elkhorn Working Group has spent thousands of hours over the past ten years working to mitigate the significant forage loss on private land due to elk. Fish Wildlife & Parks can attest to this with its own information. It is unjust to penalize these landowners by disqualifying them for the landowner preference that is enjoyed by all other landowners in the state. Disqualifying the landowner preference for permits in one district is opening Pandora's box for a landowner backlash across the entire state.

MOGA looks forward to working with Representative Washburn in amending this bill to address these concerns, so that we can support it.

*Mary Ellen Schnur*