

House Bill 209  
January 27, 2011  
Presented by Dave Risley  
House Fish, Wildlife and Parks Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I am Dave Risley, Wildlife Division Administrator of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). I am here in opposition to House Bill 209.

Currently the earmarked funding for Habitat Montana is split 80% for acquisition and 20% for maintenance. Of the 20% for maintenance, half can be used for annual maintenance, and the other half goes into a trust account, the interest on which can be used for annual maintenance. This trust account currently has approximately \$9.4 million, generating about \$400,000 in interest this past year. Having this trust account ensures there is always funding available for O & M on Wildlife Management Areas, even if a single license isn't sold that year.

HB209 changes the allocation of Habitat Montana earmarks from 80:20 to 50:50, putting the 50% for O&M in the good neighbor account, and does away with the allocation to the trust account. Additionally, it removes the statutory authority of the Good Neighbor account. We believe that 50% for O&M is too high and we would have a difficult time spending that amount without additional FTE.

While taking care of lands FWP owns is a very high priority, FWP opposes this bill as written primarily because it pre-determines O&M needs with no prior evaluation of actual needs or assessment of existing O&M efforts. While there is always room to do more, FWP believes that most of the primary O&M needs on Wildlife Management Areas are being addressed, with special emphasis on weed management and boundary fencing and signing. WMAs don't receive the amount of concentrated public use that Fishing Access Sites and State Parks do, so the O&M needs are different and less than on those types of sites.

Access will always be a high priority with Montana hunters and anglers. In a 1994 survey of Montana households, 94% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that wildlife and fish habitat protection was important to them. This position has not changed. The Habitat Montana program has been in existence since 1987. It is successful and is not broken.