

House Bill 361
February 8, 2011
Presented by Dave Risley
House Fish, Wildlife and Parks Committee

EXHIBIT 18
DATE 2/8/11
HB 361

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I am Dave Risley, Administrator of the Fish and Wildlife Division of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). I am here in opposition of House Bill 361.

HB361 prohibits the FWP Commission from limiting the type or reducing the number of archery-only permits available in a hunting district from the number issued in that district in 2007. In 2008 the FWP Commission voted to move from unlimited over-the-counter archery permits to limited either-sex archery permits in all hunting districts where the general rifle season for bull elk required a limited permit. This was done to address issues ranging from hunter crowding and as a fairness issue between archers and rifle hunters. It should be noted that antlerless opportunities for archers remained liberal in most units.

Some argue that limited either-sex permits represent additional restrictions in areas that may be over objective; however, many of these same districts have come to be over objective in spite of—if not because of—the previous general license or unlimited structure. Either-sex permits are really bull tags in our constituents view, and overall populations are only controlled via cow harvest.

In total, 30 hunting districts were affected in 2008 – 7 in the Missouri River Breaks, and 23 outside the Breaks. This was a major topic during the regulation-setting process that generated a significant level of public engagement that included:

- 2 lengthy FWP Commission hearings open to public comment, a 43-day public comment period and 44 different season-setting meetings held across the state.

In total, public input included submission of over 1,800 written comments, significant verbal testimony at the 2 FWP Commission hearings and attendance of approximately 2,000 people at the meetings held across the state.

HB361 would negate that very extensive and open public process used by the FWP Commission to reach their decision, and would dictate in statute a permit type and level independent of science, data, or changing circumstances on the ground. Furthermore, this micromanagement of wildlife would restrict management flexibility and authority at the FWP Commission level where these decisions are most appropriately debated and resolved.

Archery was once considered by wildlife biologists to have a relatively benign impact of populations because of low participation rates and low success rates. However, archery has become increasingly popular with the hunting public. The sale of archery stamps has increased from 13,461 stamps in 2000 to 40,215 in 2010. While strong sales alone are not reason for change, the increased participation has undeniably moved archery from a quiet season with few recognized implications to something far more significant with unintended management consequences occurring as noted above. Accommodating this expanded interest in archery hunting, maintaining quality hunting opportunities, effectively managing big game populations on private and public lands and dealing with allocation issues between various user groups requires a dynamic decision making process. Additionally, HB361 would impact permit decisions in hunting districts that have long had accepted elk archery permits since well before the 2008 FWP Commission adoptions. For these reasons, FWP opposes this bill.