

House Bill 619
April 2, 2011
Presented by Art Noonan
Senate Finance and Claims Committee

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Bill No. HB619

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for the record my name is Art Noonan, Deputy Director at Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). I support this bill if amended to meet the intent of the sponsor.

FWP supports the appropriate management and harvest of timber on FWP-owned lands, when and where it is consistent with our management objectives for fish, wildlife and outdoor recreation. Contrary to some people's perception, FWP does manage and harvest timber. FWP testified in favor of HB42 last session, which requires FWP to address fire mitigation, pine beetle infestation and wildlife enhancement on FWP lands (see the existing language of HB619 on page 3, lines 13-15 and section 3). The department has harvested timber on several state parks in the past and is doing so this winter on the Mt. Haggain and Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Areas (1.6 million board feet), possibly as we speak now. We have plans for future timber management on additional WMAs in order to meet wildlife management objectives.

FWP is supportive of completing timber inventories on FWP lands and developing forest management plans. The problem we have with HB619 as written is that it then requires FWP cut an amount of timber equal to the annual sustainable yield. This not only may be counter to the management objective of FWP lands, but also jeopardizes federal funding, as described in the fiscal note.

The mission and statutory obligation of FWP is to manage fish, wildlife and public recreation. We acquire and manage land in order to maximize the sustained yield of fish and wildlife and the habitat that supports them, not timber. This point is illustrated by the existing language of section (2) of this bill. See for example, page 2, lines 14-15 which give the department the ". . . power to spend for the protection, preservation, management and propagation of fish, game, fur-bearing animals and game and non-game birds. . ." FWP can and does manage timber on our land, but for the purpose benefitting fish and wildlife not for the purpose of harvesting the annual growth increment of a forest.

Much of the land FWP owns was acquired using federal funding sources that require FWP to manage these lands for the benefit of fish and wildlife. Section (1) requires FWP to manage and harvest timber based upon an annual sustained yield of timber. FWP is concerned that the U.S. Fish and wildlife Service may consider this requirement a loss of control of license revenues, which potentially could jeopardize our federal funding.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, the annual sustained yield timber harvest concept contained in HB619 is fundamentally flawed for FWP lands. FWP supports appropriate timber management and harvest objectives on department land, we currently are harvesting timber on department lands and expect to harvest more timber in the future on department-owned lands. This bill is well intentioned. We urge you to vote "Yes" on HB619, when amended.