

**Testimony on SB 303
February 16, 2011**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Janet Ellis and I am here today representing Montana Audubon, which has approximately 3800 members in 9 chapters around the state.

We oppose SB 303 for the following reasons:

1. The Habitat Montana program at FWP was set up to purchase, lease, and acquire conservation easements on critical wildlife habitat. There is no research or biological basis for enacting a "non net gain" policy for land purchases in program. Purchase of land is an important tool that needs to be available—freely available.
2. It doesn't make sense to restrict FWP to lease agreements and conservation easements only—when fee title purchases may be the best option for certain landowners.
3. It is important to retain the full range of options for acquiring interests in land. Conservation easements and lease agreements are important tools in the toolbox, but purchasing land in fee title is also an important tool.

We believe that limiting the State and landowners in their purchases will not be beneficial to either the landowners or the State. For these reasons, we ask you to oppose SB 303.