

Senate Bill 353
March 2, 2011
Presented by Chas Van Genderen
Senate Taxation Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I am Chas Van Genderen of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). I am here in opposition of Senate Bill 353.

This bill would require state parks to pay property taxes over and above the assessments already paid for landfill, fire, and sewer. The timing of this legislation is formidable. Montana has one of the weakest state park systems in the nation. As many of you have heard, we are struggling financially. That is why there is general fund in the fiscal note. State Parks just does not have the cash balances to add another \$200,000 to our operations.

Additionally, State Parks are not just another form of government; we are good partners to local government and really part of the community. This bill would tax the program that has helped establish swimming pools, boat ramps, ball fields, playgrounds and city parks in places like Glasgow, Choteau, Thompson Falls, and Lockwood.

We are connected at the hip to local recreation groups and school districts to keep communities livable. Consider that we provide millions of dollars into counties and cities annually either through grants or partnerships for local parks, trails, snowmobiling, and ATV use.

State Parks also works with counties to help local road projects. We have spent almost \$4.0 million on collaborative road projects statewide.

Legislators long ago decided that applying property taxes to historical sites, recreation sites and state parks was not a good idea. Most counties do not have park systems. Therefore, state parks are looked at as part of the community.

Please do not pass SB353.