

Testimony before the
Members of the Joint Appropriations Subcommittee for Education

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Chairman Hollandsworth and Members of the Joint Appropriations Subcommittee for Education;

My name is Chuck Bowey and I am a partner in Ranch Resources, a small business located in Sheridan, Montana. My company manages nearly 30 ranch properties in Montana. I am here today to share with you my support for the Montana Natural Heritage Program.

Firstly, the products of the Natural Heritage Program are an invaluable asset to my company. I use information provided by the Program to identify species occurrence or habitat that may be found on ranches I manage. I use this information to ensure that ranch activities do not further impact sensitive or rare species. I believe by tending to the needs of these species on a small level, we go a long way in tending to them on a larger level. I think we can all agree that management of plants; fish and wildlife are best served at the local level.

Secondly, the Natural Heritage Program provides not only raw data, but also expertise to help indentify and mitigate impacts to rare species. My company is too small to have staff zoologists and botanists conduct surveys and inventories on all the properties we manage. The staff at the Natural Heritage Program has helped me specifically with a Northern leopard frog conservation project in the Ruby Valley. They provided expertise and advice on habitat modifications, and guidance on inventories.

This brings me to the third and final point. The Natural Heritage Program is housed within the framework of the Montana State Library. This is a neutral, regulatory-free zone. Most, if not all of my clients would have serious misgivings working with the Natural Heritage Program if it was located within a regulatory branch of State Government. Why provide information to the Program, such as species occurrence on private lands, if this information could be used by state bureaucracy as a club held over private land owners at a later date?

In closing, I support the current Natural Heritage Program because it best serves the needs of private landowners and businesses due to it's location in Montana State Library; and, because the information and expertise provided by the Natural Heritage Program is a tremendous asset to private land managers in Montana, including my company, Ranch Resources.

Thank you.

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**To: Chairman Hollandsworth and Members of the Joint Appropriations
Subcommittee for Education**

Plum Creek would like to submit this letter in support of the Montana Natural Resources Information System (NRIS) and the Montana Natural Heritage Program (NHP).

The Montana NRIS and NHP provide a valuable repository of a wide variety of natural resource information routinely used by Plum Creek. The NHP is a great partner in the environmental stewardship of public and private lands in Montana, providing science-based information on the distribution of Montana's plants, animals and aquatic and terrestrial communities.

An example of how Plum Creek uses the NHP is in our implementation of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). SFI is the largest forest environmental certification program in North America, enrolling over 180 million acres. Mandatory performance measures within SFI require the use of regional databases on plant and animal distribution in resource management planning. NHP fits this requirement perfectly, providing not only site specific locations of endangered and threatened species, but also map-based information that can be used to display and evaluate landscape scale implications of forest management programs. NHP provides this information in a non-regulatory environment and allows Plum Creek the opportunity to access and improve these data as we obtain more precise information on our lands.

In summary, the NHP and NRIS provide valuable services to Montana citizens, business and landowners. In particular, the information compiled and distributed by the NHP positively informs the management of Montana's fish, wildlife and plant community resources. Plum Creek supports the continued funding of NHP and NRIS to improve Montana's biological resource information.

Tom Ray