

**SB 380 – Sponsored by Senator Chas Vincent
Senate Fish and Game Committee**

Jean D. Johnson, representing Professional Wilderness Outfitters Assn.

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Good morning, Chairman Brenden and members of the Senate Fish and Game Committee. I'm Jean Johnson, representing the Professional Wilderness Outfitters Association and 86 family businesses. Senator Vincent has done a good job of presenting this issue and I wish we could give him a room full of supporters. Back country outfitters are scrambling for clients as the license deadline is tomorrow. Jack Rich, Seeley Lake outfitter, is serving snowmobilers today and can't be spared.

I've been in these halls for 11 sessions and there is one issue that never goes away. In fact, it seems to get stronger and louder each session, as you witnessed a few weeks ago with the "Hill Bill Rally." We have 3 other suggested solutions, but one (HB 404 – Rep. Flynn) takes revenue from wildlife habitat and directs it to the Block Management program. Another (HB 440 – Rep. Kary) also takes revenue from the same source and directs it to a new, earmarked account, the Hunting Access Easement Account." The third bill (HB 444 – Rep. Jacobson) would incentivize landowners with a tax credit. Sportsmen organizations oppose HB 404 and HB 440, but seem to support the tax credit. While the tax credit appears to be a credible solution, it requires all taxpayers to subsidize what is basically a hunting access effort.

The solution with the greatest support was HB 235 and while sportsmen filled the Rotunda and Capitol grounds, it was a "force the landowner issue" and it's simply bad policy. Success in that effort would lead to negative consequences that would become hugely difficult to overcome.

We believe the answer is a new source of revenue – nonresident dollars use to incentivise. While wildlife habitat funds include nonresident dollars, resident hunters also contribute. The Come Home to Hunt fund is a new source – new money, nonresident licenses. Because there are also other Montana family-oriented licenses, this particular license has not met its full potential. As presented, SB 380 would inject \$1,237,500 into that account.

We realize now that SB 380 would have a negative effect on the Department's general license account and would likely result in the residents having to pay an even greater increase when that comes. SB 380, as presented, might result in the resident's increase occurring more quickly than necessary because of a drain on the Department's general license account.

We have discussed asking the Department to set a reasonable limit on the CHH account and when that limit is reached, it would trigger further revenue from the sale of these wilderness licenses into their general license account. Further, we would ask the Department to report to the 2015 Legislature projects completed, projects in the pipeline and what is need for completion, projects that were unsuccessful – and why – and of course, the money spent and committed.

If HB 440 passes and is signed into law, there will be a Hunting Access Easement Account, but it will come at a price; sportsmen don't support it. We believe SB 380 provides a strong solution because it is so contained. Yes, it is 1,500 NEW nonresident licenses, but under the outfitter sponsored license, the targeted number of nonresident hunters was greater in more than one hunting season and no one seemed to complain because there was considerable more money for Block Management..

In the last 4 years, the Department has been able to spend < \$100,000 securing access to public lands with only 5 completed projects. Of course, that's important but we believe they can do better or we wouldn't have HB 235 or HB 440 or HB 444.

My guess is that the Department simply was not able to spend the time on small projects, but this is a new day with a new director who not only comes from the Dept. of State Lands, and the original PL/PW, and more recently, the director's office, he has expressed a personal commitment to mending relationships between landowners and FWP. It's those relationships that benefit all sportsmen. It's a new day for everyone.

I've informed several sportsmen organizations about this bill with the essential facts well ahead of this hearing, but didn't get – and didn't expect – any outright support. We hope when they consider how much can be gained if creative and thoughtful minds commit to working with landowners and the Department they will come to think SB 380 might not be a bad thing. [RMEF \$ corrals at trailhead – Tom Miner Basin]

We've been a part of the Private Lands / Public Wildlife Council for 18 years and we're very pleased to learn that Gov. Bullock intends to re-vitalize that Council with the charge to review the program and commit to landowner incentives that will surely provide more Montana hunters with more of what they need – Access.