

HB Bill 146
February 6, 2015
Presented by Jeff Hagener
House Appropriations Committee

Madame Chair and committee members, I am Jeff Hagener, Director of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP). I am here today in opposition to House Bill 146.

While the Department appreciates the intent of the sponsor for this bill to increase funding for the popular Block Management Hunting Access Program, the Department respectfully opposes the bill because it simply shifts a significant amount of money, over \$1.4 million, from the General License Account, which funds a wide array of critical Department programs and activities, to the earmarked Hunting Access Account which primarily funds only the Block Management Program.

The Department's General License Account is already facing significant shortfalls, which the Department hopes to correct in another bill, House Bill 140. That bill has been heard in House Fish, Wildlife and Parks and is awaiting executive action. The recommendations contained in that bill are the result of nearly a year's worth of effort put in by the Citizen's License and Funding Advisory Council, whose members spent months studying the agency's current funding and license structure prior to developing their recommendations. If passed in its entirety, HB 140 keeps the department budget balanced for four more years at current levels, and doesn't accommodate any program growth such as this.

We view House Bill 146 as having the potential to significantly exacerbate the structural balance of the General License Account, and for that reason, the Department requests committee members vote "Do not pass" on House Bill 146.