

House Bill 269  
January 29, 2015  
Presented by Jeff Hagener  
House Fish, Wildlife and Parks Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I am Jeff Hagener, Director of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP). I am here today in support of House Bill 269, as it provides new revenue for hunting access enhancement – a very important issue for the Department, hunters, and landowners. Ultimately this bill, along with HB 268, will need to be reconciled since they contradict each other. FWP is supportive of the concept embodied in both bills – additional revenue for a high priority hunter access program.

The Hunting Access Enhancement Fee was created by legislation proposed by the Private Land/Public Wildlife (PL/PW) Council in 2001. The PL/PW Council considered various other funding mechanisms, such as creating a Block Management Stamp or other FWP hunting licenses before deciding to propose the Hunting Access Enhancement Fee. Part of the Council's rationale in support of this recommendation was that they felt all hunters should contribute to access funding, whether or not they use a particular program, because all hunters benefit from hunting activities being spread more evenly on the Montana landscape.

The \$6 increase to the resident hunting access enhancement fee, from \$2 to \$8, will generate an estimated \$983,844 of additional revenue available to the Hunting Access Enhancement Program. The increase to the maximum payment a Block Management cooperator can receive per year, from the \$12,000 currently in statute to the \$15,000 proposed in HB 269, is estimated to cost approximately \$165,000/year, resulting in a net increase of \$818,844 to the existing \$7+ million dollar (annual) Hunting Access Enhancement Program. The funding proposal in HB 269 provides a simple way to modify an existing fee, without being encumbered with additional enforcement or administrative complexities.

With that said, it is important to note that FWP's support of this bill, and the new revenue it generates, is based on the premise that it does not impact the revenue increase requested through HB 140. The Department wants to make it clear that support for the increase proposed by this bill is based on it being additive to HB 140, and not a substitute for funding proposals contained in HB 140.

In conclusion, FWP supports the concept of this bill, both for its simplicity and the rationale that it calls for more resources for hunting access, which nearly everyone agrees is a high priority, without taking away resources from other important FWP programs.

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Hagener  
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