

Laurel Rod & Gun Club
Laurel, MT

Dear Senator Brenden & Committee Members:

Laurel Rod & Gun Club consists of 400 family members, most of which hunt elk. LRGC appreciates this opportunity to comment on issues of importance to our 400 members and would like this comment to be placed in the official record. LRGC thinks this comment should count for more than one comment as we have 400 members. LRGC strongly **opposes SB-245** and sincerely asks this committee to do likewise.

SB-245 will have devastating, cumulative effects on Montana's fair chase public hunting heritage. It is falsely pitched as more hunting opportunity for everyday sportsmen when in fact it is nothing more than a bill aimed at further commercializing and privatization of our public wildlife.

The 2003 Montana Legislature mandated FWP reduce elk numbers to their objective populations through HB-42. As a result, FWP rewrote its statewide elk plan, unanimously commission approved and still valid. Prior to rewriting that plan, late seasons for cow elk were used in an effort to control elk numbers in many hunting districts. Through HB-42, FWP instituted many changes, including eliminating custom seasons. FWP emphasized the general rifle season – the longest of any Western state – as the primary tool for managing elk numbers. We moved from a regulation structure designed to grow more elk, to one more flexible with elements for relatively quick reductions in elk populations as needed. But it was all based on the use of ordinary hunters as the tool to manage public wildlife, a Montana principle followed for over a century.

A few bullet points on what HB-42 did:

- Cow elk tag numbers were liberalized, including;
- FWP gave landowners all the tools needed to meet this goal, including thousands of second elk cow "B" tags and in many areas, five weeks of cow elk hunting with a general license.
- When needed, landowners receive game damage and management hunts to help address crop and fence damage, as well as overpopulated herds. Late seasons are in fact alive and well for qualified landowners, many are taking place right now.
- It brought about the end of customized seasons, which weren't working-hence: HB-42, and concentrated on the 5 week general season with public hunters as the main tool.

- This structure would keep elk spread over the landscape throughout the general season therefore promoting sound management would break up large herds and spread those animals across the landscape

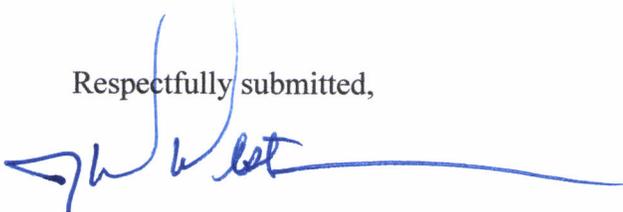
Landowners with skin in the game deserve help dealing with game damage. But they must meet FWP in the middle with reasonable public access that accommodates sound wildlife management principles. Commercialization and privatization is not mutually exclusive with that.

Such late seasons, if adopted, are bad for public hunters and our agriculture industry as well. They accommodate large concentrations of elk that damage crops, fences and are more prone to spreading diseases that we don't want in our public elk and our neighbors, the livestock industry certainly doesn't want in their livestock.

We need to get to the real problem with elk numbers, Harboring-plain and simple, let's work together to end that practice.

Don't buy that SB-245 will lead to more hunting opportunities. In closing LRGC wants to thank you for this opportunity to comment on this important issue for our 400 family members. Please oppose SB-245, we do.

Respectfully submitted,



JW Westman, Conservation Committee