

(S) Fish and Game – SB 333 – Sen. Jedediah Hinkle – Feb. 19, 2015

Montana Outfitters and Guides Association – Jean Johnson

SB 333 is a very simple bill that does only one thing: it transforms the legal warning regarding nonresidents licensed to hunt in this state from an insult to an expression of appreciation.

Currently, and for 50 years, by virtue of being a licensed nonresident hunter, you're somehow classified as someone who must be watched because you're likely to waste wildlife and destroy property. Aren't those who waste wildlife called "poachers?" Is that really what we want to express to the very hunters who have for years supported about 67-70% of our wildlife agency?

87-3-303 instructs the state to "avoid the deliberate waste of wildlife and destruction of property." How does the state do that? Are Montana game wardens instructed to treat nonresident hunters differently than resident hunters? Does this section of law imply that resident hunters are somehow incapable of wasting game and destroying property? When, several years ago, a member of the Private Lands/Public Wildlife Council told how her irrigation wheel lines had been shot full of holes, she wasn't reporting on nonresident behavior.

Some might say that Fish, Wildlife and Parks "uses this [section of law] a lot." Perhaps they're referring to sections that limit nonresidents to no more than 10% of any restricted licenses or permits. Montana has the legal right to discriminate against nonresidents in favor of residents and that's the way it should be. But courts do not allow Montana to go too far in that regard. Surely no one in Fish, Wildlife and Parks would want to explain to a judge that insulting a whole class of hunters is an acceptable part of an argument for discrimination.

Nonresidents are also family members. You'll recall the Come Home to Hunt bill in 2009, and former Senator Joe Balyeat's bills in 2009 and 2011 for nonresident relatives of residents. 87-3-303 classifies all those folks as potential wasters of wildlife and destroyers of property, too.

Instead of insulting these folks, let's recognize their contribution to Hunters Against Hunger. According to the Livingston Food Share, about ½ of all donated game comes from nonresidents, thus serving an important humanitarian need.

SB 333 is an opportunity to turn an insult into an expression of appreciation and recognition. It's the right thing to do and the right time for doing it. Please support SB 333. Thank you.