

Testimony for HB 42 Status of Fuel Load Assessment  
Presented to Environmental Quality Council  
January 7, 2010

Mr Chairman, members of the council, for the record my name is Chas VanGenderen I am the Parks Division Administrator for Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks.

Within the parks division, we manage 54 State Parks and 330 Fishing Access Sites. Most of our sites are relatively small in acreage but we have large numbers of visitors and are often located close to other landowners, therefore, we have to manage our sites actively and intensively.

House bill 42 codified the need for the agency to address fire mitigation, insect infestation and wildlife enhancement in State Parks, Fishing Access Sites, and Wildlife Management Areas with priority on forested lands over 50 acres. The parks division had a good start on the task before the legislation.

Since 2006, we have completed forestry projects on 9 areas (900 acres) through formal contracts to address fire mitigation, forest health, disease/insect infestations, and wildlife habitat. That does not include many projects where we selectively cut small stands with low-level disease outbreaks, in poor health, or hazard trees that are an ongoing task performed through managers to address public safety.

As it relates to meeting the intent of the law in priority areas for 2010, the division has identified two more sites that need formal forest health assessments developed.

Those are:

- 1) Sluice Boxes State Park, a 1,450-acre site near Belt.
- 2) Lewis and Clark Caverns, the first Montana State Park, which is 2,900 acres.

In each of those cases, we have made that assessment part of the performance agreements for the park managers and we will be evaluating forestry issues then laying out our plan to deal with those through harvest, thinning, monitoring and/or other management approaches as appropriate.