



Protecting Montana's wildlife,  
land, waters and hunting & fishing  
heritage for future generations.

Feb. 16, 2018

Gov. Steve Bullock  
Chairman  
Montana State Land Board  
1539 Eleventh Ave.  
Helena, MT 59601

RE: Horse Creek Complex Conservation Easement

Dear Gov. Bullock and Montana State Land Board Members:

The Montana Wildlife Federation (MWF) is Montana's oldest sportsmen-wildlife conservation organization. We were founded in 1936 when hunters, anglers, wildlife-watchers, farmers, ranchers, and other concerned Montanans came together to restore depleted wildlife and recover degraded habitats. For 82 years we have worked to promote abundant wildlife, healthy habitat and public access to enjoy our public trust wildlife resources.

Those goals would all be advanced by the Horse Creek Complex conservation easement in Dawson and Wibaux counties. This is an excellent use of hunter's dollars. The Horse Creek Complex easement will protect more than 15,376 deeded acres in Dawson and Wibaux Counties. It's an incredible conservation achievement that will benefit wildlife, keep traditional working lands in private hands, and provide more hunting opportunities for Montanans.

The Horse Creek Complex Conservation Easement would provide year-round habitat for mule deer, with more than 85 percent of the proposed easement considered high-quality mule deer winter range. The land is within sage-grouse general range and contains intact sagebrush grasslands that provide nesting and winter cover for sage-grouse and habitat for other sagebrush-associated species.

As you know, access opportunities in eastern Montana are extremely limited. This easement represents an opportunity to provide high-quality public access for hunting and other wildlife-associated recreation. The Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks estimates the easement will provide a minimum of 600 hunter days annually for mule deer, upland birds, antelope, white-tailed deer, and occasionally elk. The land also lends itself to wildlife watching and is easily accessed by three county roads at the northern and southern ends of the easement property.

This easement would also open up access to landlocked public land, which when taken with the private land would establish nearly 20,000 acres of protected land that is open to public hunting. It's an example of an incredible public-private partnership. These type of easement projects that use Habitat Montana program funds benefit the landowner, hunters and other recreationists, and

wildlife managers. Habitat Montana uses a small portion of hunting license fees to pay for conservation easements as well as targeted land purchases to protect important wildlife habitat and grow public access.

The Horse Creek Complex exemplifies the important role of the Habitat Montana program in maintaining our Montana outdoors heritage, rural agricultural economy and ultimately our way of life. We strongly recommend approval of this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dave Chadwick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the "k".

Dave Chadwick  
Executive Director