

Jan. 22, 2019

Rep. Bob Brown, Chairman  
House Fish, Wildlife and Parks Committee  
Montana Legislature  
State Capitol  
1301 E. Sixth Ave.  
Helena, MT 59601

Dear Chairman Brown and Committee members,

The Montana Sporting Coalition is made up of more than a dozen hunting and angling organizations, collectively representing tens of thousands of Montanans. We come from all walks of life and every corner of the state. We share a deep commitment to our sporting heritage, the habitat that provides our opportunity and to Montana's fish and wildlife. Perhaps most importantly, our coalition values our constitutional right to work with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) through public comment and our ability to present our positions, opinions and biological take on specific issues related to fish & wildlife management.

With that in mind, the Coalition strongly opposes HB 161. This bill would eliminate consideration of sportsmen and sportswomen's voices in management decisions and limit consideration on key issues to a very narrow set of stakeholders, many of whom oppose the bill as well. We also oppose efforts to eliminate the ability of Montanans to simply enjoy their wildlife, regardless of rifle or rod in hand. What good is a fall morning with bull elk if we don't enjoy the marmot below us, or hawk above us? Striking out the ability of the public to enjoy our own wildlife seems unnecessary and confusing to the intent of the bill.

HB 161 ignores decades of cooperation between Montana's landowners, sportsmen and sportswomen and FWP to help build up the world-class fish and wildlife resources we all enjoy. It seeks to create a superior class of constituents by placing only the concerns of certain groups at the forefront of decision making processes, as lined out in section one.

HB 161 could potentially violate our State Constitution's guarantee of a right to participate in government, as well as the Montana Environmental Policy Act and possibly the Montana Administrative Procedures Act. All Montanans deserve to have a say in how these resources are managed. HB 161 simply seeks to divide Montanans, rather than bring them closer together. Our groups' interests vary widely. At times we have passionate disagreements on key issues. We all deeply value our right to express our views on the management of our public fish and wildlife resources, and for the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission to consider those diverse views. Simply put, public involvement is essential to our system of wildlife conservation.

The ability to use social science in wildlife management decisions is paramount in the issue of access, in finding a path forward that provides enfranchisement to all citizens, and to help plot courses on difficult issues, while navigating toward that common ground we all seek to find. The wide diversity of opinion of our shared wildlife resource is not a negative attribute. It is a sign of a passionate populace well interested and well empowered by our own government to participate in the processes and programs that make Montana the Last, Best Place.

For these reasons, the Montana Sporting Coalition respectfully requests that the committee table HB 161. The bill is divisive, runs counter to decades of cooperation on wildlife conservation and is unconstitutional.

Sincerely,

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Montana Wildlife Federation, Ducks Unlimited, Montana Bowhunters Association, Montana Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Pheasants Forever, Montana Sportsmen's Alliance, Montana Wild Sheep Foundation, Montana Trout Unlimited, Mule Deer Foundation, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, The Wildlife Society