

April 18, 2019

The Honorable Steve Bullock
Governor of Montana
P.O. Box 200801
Helena, MT 59620-0801

RE: Request for veto of HB 265

Dear Gov. Bullock,

Our organizations represent tens of thousands of Montana hunters and anglers. We include groups with a focus on fisheries, general wildlife groups and species-specific conservation organizations with a more narrow focus. We all know that habitat is essential to having abundant fish and wildlife resources and the public sporting opportunity that comes with it. In fact, that's why the Montana Sporting Coalition was formed in 2015; to defend the Habitat Montana program and the numerous benefits it has for our state after years of attacks both in terms of the program, and its spending authority.

For that reason, we are writing to ask you to please veto HB 265: Revise laws related to approval of FWP easements (Rep. Kerry White, R-Bozeman). This bill adds a layer of unneeded government bureaucracy into conservation easements under Habitat Montana, and threatens the future of this sterling program. Our organizations have opposed this bill throughout the session.

Landowners who make the effort to go down the road of an easement through Habitat Montana are making a deep commitment to conserving wildlife habitat, and sharing that land with Montana's hunters and anglers. This decades-long partnership between sportsmen and sportswomen, and landowners through Habitat Montana conservation easements provides a strong tool for agricultural producers to secure their financial future while providing public hunting access for Montanans. The program is entirely funded by fees on hunting licenses, and it shows the deep commitment hunters have to working with landowners to benefit them, public access and our public wildlife.

HB 265 would subject landowners to an arbitrary, political process where politicians would be in charge of the private property rights decisions being made by landowners. When the Legislature approved Habitat Montana, its intent was not to place more politicians in charge of private property rights, nor was its intent to have these easements go before the Land Board. With the recent Supreme Court ruling, we have that well established. Removing bureaucratic and political processes from the easement issuance ensures the future of Habitat Montana so it can continue to work as well as returns the program back to the original intent of the founders.

Please protect private property rights, hunter access and our premier conservation and access program. We respectfully ask that you veto HB 265.

Sincerely,

Ducks Unlimited

Pheasants Forever

Montana Trout Unlimited

Mule Deer Foundation

Montana Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers

Montana Wildlife Federation

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Montana Wild Sheep Foundation

Montana Bowhunters Association

Orion, The Hunter's Institute

National Wildlife Federation

Montana Sportsmen Alliance

The Wildlife Society