

May 24, 2019

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

RE: Coalition thank you for veto of HB 265

Dear Gov. Bullock,

Our organizations that make up the Montana Sporting Coalition represent tens of thousands of hunters, anglers and recreationists. We are deeply committed to conserving and enjoying our public lands, waters and wildlife resources. We're passionate conservationists who work on key policies that make Montana such an incredible place for sportsmen, sportswomen and recreational users who love wildlife.

That's why we're deeply appreciative to you for vetoing HB 265, a bill that would have required state Land Board approval for conservation easements under the Habitat Montana program. You are well aware of the issue, having gone to the Montana Supreme Court last year to defend this program. But from our perspective, it's important to point out the tremendous benefits for Montanans that Habitat Montana has had, and will continue to have because of this veto.

Habitat Montana's sterling record of benefiting landowners, protecting wildlife habitat and providing public hunting access for Montanans has resulted in more than 880,000 acres of lands protected for wildlife. These are targeted, high-value lands that provide essential winter range for big game, include habitat for game birds, and are important for non-game wildlife species. They also provide public hunting access for all Montanans, and they're a big reason Montana hunters enjoy world-class opportunities every year.

Our coalition of more than a dozen hunting and angling organizations was formed to maintain Habitat Montana, and we saw the serious threat that this bill posed to its future. While our groups have diverse interests in terms of fish and wildlife species that we work to conserve and enhance, we all share an understanding that habitat is essential to that work. Habitat Montana has for over three decades been essential to providing that habitat through fee title purchases and conservation easements with willing landowners.

Requiring an extra layer of uncertainty into conservation easement projects that have been through two years of review and been approved by the Fish and Wildlife Commission would have made landowners think twice before they even begin working with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to craft an easement that works for their agricultural operation, wildlife and the hunters of Montana.

Thanks to your veto, Habitat Montana will continue to work to benefit farmers and ranchers, wildlife and hunters. These investments will be essential to continuing our agricultural heritage, as well as our sporting heritage. This is about future generations, and their ability to continue to enjoy what we have. We are deeply appreciative for your veto and are hopeful that we can continue to work with our farmers and ranchers to build on our wildlife legacy and build the strong working relationship between sportsmen, sportswomen and landowners.

Sincerely,

Robert Sanders  
Ducks Unlimited

Clayton Elliott  
Montana Trout Unlimited

Scott Laird  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Brian Solan  
Montana Wild Sheep Foundation

Marlon Clapham  
Montana Bowhunter's Association

Tom France  
National Wildlife Federation

John Sullivan  
Montana Backcountry Hunters and Anglers

Chad Harvey  
Pheasants Forever

Nick Gevock  
Montana Wildlife Federation

John Borgreen  
Montana Sportsmen Alliance