

May 5, 2021

Gov. Greg Gianforte  
Montana State Capitol  
1301 E. Sixth Ave.  
Helena, MT 59601

RE: Sporting organizations request for veto of HB 637

Dear Gov. Gianforte,

Our organizations collectively represent thousands of hunters from Montana and throughout the United States. We have a deep commitment to Montana's public wildlife, public lands and the public sporting opportunities they provide. Our groups are the customers that purchase licenses, fund the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and commit thousands of hours and millions of dollars to conservation work on the ground and in the halls of the capitol every year. We thank you for your desire to bring better customer service to the political world. We hope you receive this letter in that fashion.

We respectfully ask that you veto HB 637, a bill titled "Generally revise fish and wildlife laws." This bill dramatically changed in the second to last day of the legislative session and passed both chambers that same day with no real opportunity for input or consideration. While we all understand that the legislature is a pressure cooker, the interest in licensing allocation is well known to every legislator this session and how this bill was amended smacks of swamp-style politics and not the science-based, thoughtful approach to wildlife management that Montanans deserve.

When Montanans passed I-161 in 2010, we made it clear that one industry does not deserve more priority than everyone else as it relates to who can get a nonresident big game license. Removing those outfitter set-asides was controversial, and many signatories to this letter had differing views, but the voters spoke. That must be respected.

But even more problematic with the licensing is the permanent change to the preference point system. HB 637 gives hunters using an outfitter an extra preference point to draw the coveted B-10 and B-11 combination licenses. Within a couple years, this model will create a situation where only outfitted clients will have any certainty in their ability to come to Montana to hunt, and help support the over \$7 billion outdoor industry. Those do-it-yourself nonresident hunters are our family members, college roommates and friends, and they spend considerable money when they are here. There is no shortage of companies in Montana that make their living off of the nonresident DIY hunter as well, and this bill is harmful to their business model, while seeking to elevate an industry that has just as much opportunity to be made whole by a pandemic

that every other small business owner in Montana does. This bill simply seeks to gild the lily, and hand management resources to private enterprise, rather than remain in the hands of the public, to whom wildlife is entrusted.

Despite not having much opportunity before or during the session, resident and nonresident hunters have come forward with solutions to help outfitters develop more certainty to market their services. For example, the Senate floor amendment to SB 143 would have put Montana outfitters in the earliest pool for drawing the B-10 & B-11 licenses in the nation. That kind of competitive edge respects free-market ideals, and it keeps our draw system fair and balanced. Outfitters are not competing with do-it-yourself, nonresident hunters; they are competing with outfitters in every other state, and creating an early-draw system would provide a leg up on the competition. Hunters have also offered to sit down with outfitters in the interim to find more tenable solutions like the one mentioned above, but we have yet to been taken up on that offer.

HB 637 is bad policy in creating a system of winners and losers, heavily favoring outfitted hunters and going against the will of Montana voters. It was heavily opposed by Montana hunters as well as nonresident do-it-yourself hunters who greatly benefit our state.

We thank you for your excellent work on the FWP budget and the increase in spending on access through the boost to Habitat Montana, and we remain committed to working with you to make Montana a wildlife oasis where everyone has an equal opportunity to hunt and fish.

For those reasons, we respectfully ask that you veto HB 637.

Montana Wildlife Federation

The Montana Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

Montana Bowhunters Association

Traditional Bowhunters of Montana

Hellgate Hunters and Anglers

Great Falls Archery Club

Laurel Rod and Gun Club

Helena Hunters and Anglers

Bearpaw Bowmen

Gallatin Wildlife Association

Western Bear Foundation

Flathead Wildlife, Inc.

Bridger Bowmen