

February 2, 2023

Speaker of the House Matt Regier & Senate President Jason Ellsworth
State Capitol
1301 E. Sixth Ave.
Helena, MT 59601

RE: Montana sporting groups support for conservation funding from HB 701 (2021)

Dear Speaker Regier & President Ellsworth:

The undersigned Montana organizations are comprised of hunting, fishing, and conservation organizations representing tens of thousands of Montanans. Therefore, we support allocating full funding from the voter-approved recreational marijuana excise tax to conservation interests, as approved in 2021 under HB 701. While we support and appreciate the Governor's budget request to appropriate \$12 million in sporting license dollars for the Habitat Montana program, we also strongly support maintaining the allocation of nearly \$20 million in excise tax revenue for future Habitat Montana appropriations that the citizens of Montana overwhelmingly supported, as did the 67th Montana Legislature in a bill signed by Governor Greg Gianforte.

Hunters and anglers have been the primary funders of fish and wildlife conservation for nearly a century and will continue to be leaders in this field. However, given the significant influx of people moving into our great state, we all recognize the need for visionary funding mechanisms, especially to continue funding the proven Habitat Montana program. I-118 and I-190 were the most popular measures on the ballot in 2020, and conservationists, landowners and opinion-makers were quite vocal in recognizing a unique opportunity to support the future of our great state.

These measures provide a secure source of permanent, stable funding for conservation in our state, including land acquisitions and easements that improve wildlife habitat, state parks, trails, public access, and non-game wildlife conservation. These funds also provide critical matching dollars for securing federal, corporate, and philanthropic support – and historic projects that unlock access to public land like the Big Snowies acquisition and the Willow Creek purchase at Mount Haggin WMA. Within the next five years, FWP is aggressively seeking to increase their habitat work, in addition to keeping up with everyday demands from landowners for traditional fee simple acquisitions and conservation easements. As we strive to meet these obligations, Montana must be prepared for land appraisal costs to continue to climb. Funding from recreational marijuana excise taxes will facilitate more of these transactions, which benefit landowners, ranchers, farmers, and hunters alike.

As our state's leaders, you know the value of Montana's outdoor and agricultural economies. As Montana grows and more visitors come to our state, we must continue to build on the successful programs that provide support to both.

We urge you to defend the conservation funding from these measures to maintain the Montana we all love.

Sincerely,

Anaconda Sportsmen's Club
Bearpaw Bowmen
Ducks Unlimited
Gallatin Wildlife Association

Laurel Rod and Gun Club
Flathead Wildlife Inc.
Helena Hunters and Anglers
Hellgate Hunters and Anglers
Montana Artemis Alliance
Montana Bowhunters Association
Montana Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
Montana Union Sportsmen Alliance
Montana Wildlife Federation
Montana Wild Sheep Foundation
Public Land Water Access Association
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

CC:

Governor Greg Gianforte
Senate Majority Leader Steve Fitzpatrick
Senate Minority Leader Pat Flowers
Senate President Pro Tempore Kenneth Bogner
House Majority Leader Sue Vinton
House Minority Leader Kim Abbott
House Speaker Pro Tempore Rhonda Knudsen
House Appropriations Committee Chair Llew Jones
House Appropriations Committee Majority Vice Chair Bob Keenan
House Appropriations Committee Minority Vice Chair Mary Caferro