



Mr. Chairman. Committee members. My name is Drewry Hanes. I am the Executive Director of the Montana-based non-profit the Public Land Water Access Association, and I wish to testify today **IN SUPPORT of SB 256.**

As the Executive Director of an organization that has advocated for and defended public access in Montana since 1985, and among its membership represents a large magnitude of hunters and anglers both within and outside of the state, we applaud SB 256 and its capacity to advocate for outdoorsmen and women in Montana.

Over the years our organization has seen a disturbing increase in the number of public access complaints across the state of Montana. More and more, recreationists – among them hunters and anglers – have found themselves barred from their public lands by anyone with wire to run an illegal gate and the willingness to risk a fine of \$10 a day. A fine which is often not even levied.

For people who, in some cases, make far more than the annual fine of \$3600 per year off of leasing this closed public access to private outfitters, there is currently little deterrent, and enormous reward. And what of Montana's hunters and anglers? Harassment against hunters and anglers has also been on the rise in Montana. It is being discussed in the media and among game wardens, who encourage reporting of such incidents. I'm sure many of us at this hearing can remember fishing or hunting in Montana as a young person, and the positive effect these experiences have had upon our life and character. Sadly, many, including myself, now also have memories of being harassed while attempting to fish or hunt on Montana's public lands. The right to access our public lands to, for example, hunt to feed our families, is a historic part of Montana's culture.

According to a 2016 US Fish and Wildlife study, a higher percentage of Montanans are hunters than the national average. Hunters spent \$324 million in hunting related expenses in the state in 2016. When someone knowingly takes away a public access route to public lands, they are taking away the public's right to hunt, to fish, to recreate. They are also hurting the economy of Montana – as each of these gates go up and stay up, the available access to public lands for recreation goes down, and Montana and its outdoor related industries take a hit.

This bill is about justice, and about standing up for Montanans. As the daughter of a cattle farmer, I appreciate that SB 256 also allows for landowners to have their needs met while creating an equitable outcome for the public. For our hunters, anglers – our outdoorsmen and women, SB 256 says several important things:

WWW.PLWA.ORG

 @publiclandwateraccess

 @plwamt

2100 FAIRWAY DR., #211
BOZEMAN, MT 59715

406-690-0960
PLWA@PLWA.ORG



1. Firstly, you don't get to prevent our hunters and anglers from exercising their rights while accessing public lands through public right-of-ways. It says that Montana is serious about advocating for its hunters and anglers, and about protecting access to a major source of its GDP. That's all just common sense.
2. But what it also says is you don't have to have \$5,000,000 to be able to hunt or fish for your dinner, and if someone tries to prevent you from legally doing that, the law and legislators of Montana will protect you.

Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, this is a good bill, and I must conclude that I **fully support SB 256**. Thank you.

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