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Ref: DO280-14
July 31, 2014

Dear Friends:

The 2015 Legislative Session is still several months away but I want to draw your attention to a draft bill that's important to the future of fishing and hunting in Montana.

The Environmental Quality Council, or EQC, is an interim legislative committee taking public comment now on a draft bill that would generate enough fishing and hunting license revenue to support FWP through 2021.

As you may know, Montana's fish and wildlife management budget faces a \$5.75 million shortfall starting in fiscal year 2017. The funding gap will be addressed by Montana's Legislature beginning in January. Solutions will come down to three choices alone or in combination: (1) a fee increase; (2) cuts to fish and wildlife management operations; or (3) a shift of "earmarked" funds away from specific programs to shore up day-to-day operations.

The EQC asked FWP to conduct more educational outreach to focus on what proposed revenue adjustments would do for FWP and why they're needed. This letter is part of that effort and more outreach will continue through the fall and winter.

EQC's draft bill is similar to the recommendations developed by the Licensing and Funding Advisory Council, an independent citizens' group. Governor Steve Bullock directed me to appoint the citizens council to streamline licensing and to find simple, fair and stable sources of revenue for fish and wildlife conservation. The council spent a year discussing options and holding public meetings that ultimately resulted in the recommendations that went to EQC.

As it reads now, the EQC's initial draft of House Bill 609 embraces most of the License and Funding Advisory Council's proposals, while reducing its recommended funding by about \$500,000.

Under the EQC draft bill, the average Montanan would pay \$8 more to hunt and \$3 more to fish annually. Seniors would receive a discounted license at age 67 versus the current age of 62, and the price of most free and discounted licenses would be standardized at 50 percent of normal price.

I have accepted the advisory council's recommendations and endorse the draft bill proposed by the EQC.

With your interest in the future of fish and wildlife conservation in Montana I urge you to read and comment on the EQC's draft bill. Download the [draft study report](#) and the [draft bill](#). Email comments to hstockwell@mt.gov with the subject line "HB 609 Licensing Study." Comment is open through August 16.

Meanwhile, it's important to know that FWP's budget shortfall isn't unexpected.

Most Montana state agencies are funded from the state's general tax dollars. FWP, however, is funded almost exclusively by Montana's hunters and anglers who annually purchase licenses to hunt and fish.

With the support of hunters and anglers, FWP has operated for more than a generation on a unique budget cycle that asks the Legislature to consider new hunting and fishing license fees only about once per decade. The last general increase for residents was approved in 2005, which was predicted to keep FWP financially stable for 10 years—or until now.

Your continued participation as hunters and anglers—and well-informed citizens—will play a decisive role in the future of Montana's management of its fish and wildlife.

In the meantime, please stay tuned and involved and take the time to review and comment on the draft bill that EQC is offering for public comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "M. Jeff Hagener". The signature is written in a cursive style with a vertical line to its left.

M. Jeff Hagener
Director