

**From:** [Engle, Jazmin](#)  
**To:** [McClain, Kammi](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Montana BHA comments re: the proposed Habitat Lease Program  
**Date:** Friday, July 22, 2022 11:07:46 AM  
**Attachments:** [MT BHA Comments on Habitat Lease Program.pdf](#)

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Hey Kammi,

Would this comment also go to you?

**Jazmin Engle**

Director's Office

[Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks](#)

P.O. Box 200701

Helena, MT 59620-0701

Ph: (406) 444-7826

[Montana FWP](#) | [Montana Outdoors Magazine](#)



THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

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**From:** Montana Chapter <[montana@backcountryhunters.org](mailto:montana@backcountryhunters.org)>  
**Sent:** Friday, July 22, 2022 10:43 AM  
**To:** Engle, Jazmin <[Jazmin.Engle@mt.gov](mailto:Jazmin.Engle@mt.gov)>  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Fwd: Montana BHA comments re: the proposed Habitat Lease Program

Hey Jazmin - Just wanted to make sure this gets to everyone who needs to see it, and included in the public comments compilation.

Thank you!

-Kevin

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Montana Chapter <[montana@backcountryhunters.org](mailto:montana@backcountryhunters.org)>  
**Subject:** Montana BHA comments re: the proposed Habitat Lease Program  
**Date:** July 21, 2022 at 3:32:29 PM MDT  
**To:** "[commissionerregion1@mtfwp.org](mailto:commissionerregion1@mtfwp.org)" <[commissionerregion1@mtfwp.org](mailto:commissionerregion1@mtfwp.org)>, "[commissionerregion2@mtfwp.org](mailto:commissionerregion2@mtfwp.org)" <[commissionerregion2@mtfwp.org](mailto:commissionerregion2@mtfwp.org)>, "[CommissionerRegion3@mtfwp.org](mailto:CommissionerRegion3@mtfwp.org)" <[CommissionerRegion3@mtfwp.org](mailto:CommissionerRegion3@mtfwp.org)>,"

"[commissionerregion4@mtfwp.org](mailto:commissionerregion4@mtfwp.org)" <[commissionerregion4@mtfwp.org](mailto:commissionerregion4@mtfwp.org)>,  
"commissionerregion5@mtfwp.org" <[commissionerregion5@mtfwp.org](mailto:commissionerregion5@mtfwp.org)>,  
"commissionerregion6@mtfwp.org" <[commissionerregion6@mtfwp.org](mailto:commissionerregion6@mtfwp.org)>,  
"commissionerregion7@mtfwp.org" <[commissionerregion7@mtfwp.org](mailto:commissionerregion7@mtfwp.org)>

**Cc:** Jake Schwaller <[jakeschwaller@gmail.com](mailto:jakeschwaller@gmail.com)>, Montana Chapter  
<[montana@backcountryhunters.org](mailto:montana@backcountryhunters.org)>

Chair Robinson; Vice Chair Tabor, Commissioners Waller, Byorth, Walsh, Cebull and Lane:

On behalf of Montana BHA, attached are comments re: the proposed Habitat Lease Program.

We thank you for your careful consideration and appreciate the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Jake Schwaller, Billings, MT  
Eastern Montana Board Member  
Montana Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers



**BACKCOUNTRY**  
**HUNTERS & ANGLERS**  
MONTANA

July 21, 2022

Chair Robinson, Vice Chair Tabor, Commissioners Waller, Byorth, Walsh, Cebull & Lane  
Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks  
1420 East Sixth Avenue  
P.O. Box 200701  
Helena, Mt 59620-0701

Re: The Proposed Habitat Lease Program

Chair Robinson; Vice Chair Tabor, Commissioners Waller, Byorth, Walsh, Cebull and Lane:

I'm submitting this comment on behalf of the Montana Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (MT BHA) and our nearly 3,000 dues-paying in-state members, as well as all the public interested in preserving, protecting and enjoying our wild places and wild species. While we broadly support efforts to provide vital habitat for wildlife in this state, we believe this new lease program is misguided and wholly unnecessary. This program is expensive, duplicative, barely enforceable, and runs counter to the best tool already available to landowners: the existing Habitat Montana program. For these reasons, we implore you not to support conservation leases under this program.

The conservation lease program would take \$25-35 million dollars from Habitat Montana, Pittman Robertson Restoration, and other sources to fund temporary 30- or 40-year leases that could be terminated at any time, with a small penalty. Ultimately, we worry that many landowners will take advantage of this program to use land as they have already been using it, with little consequence should they choose to sell to someone willing to terminate the lease. We see little value in this new proposal, especially considering the numerous short-term programs that currently exist to incentivize property owners to conserve lands.



We also fear that at a payout of just 5-10 percent of the property's value – if this becomes the preferred method for Habitat Montana easements – this will likely fall short of what many Montana's agricultural families will need to keep their properties and will lead to more subdividing and development.

Alternatively, Habitat Montana offers substantial value to landowners while requiring no general fund money or outside money. Instead, the incredibly popular program uses license dollars to purchase permanent conservation easements, to the benefit of both the hunting public and Montanan's working landowners. These easements specifically help preserve habitat that is beneficial to working families, to wildlife and to livestock in perpetuity. These easements run with the land and will keep Montana's families, farms, ranches and wildlife on the landscape. It would be egregiously wrong to take money from this program and spend it in a way that won't last and won't make a significant enough impact for Montana's landowners to gain much traction.

We recognize and appreciate the many private landowners who have utilized Habitat Montana to continue to provide habitat and we recognize the value of keeping working lands conserved, even in the short term. But this leasing program is a step backward and an expensive temporary approach that likely won't change much on the ground. We implore the commission to maintain the use of Habitat Montana dollars for their intended purpose, and not approve conservation leases under this new program.

We appreciate your careful consideration,

Jake Schwaller, Billings, MT  
Eastern Montana Volunteer Board Member  
Montana Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

