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Sportsmen Call on Montana Legislature to Restore Vital Funding

MISSOULA, Mont.—The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Montana Wild Sheep Foundation, Ducks Unlimited and other Montana hunters and anglers call on the Montana Legislature to restore the spending authority of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP).

“This does not make sense,” said David Allen, RMEF president and CEO. “In essence, the Legislature is both jeopardizing crucial access and habitat funding while also turning its collective back on Montana’s sportsmen who have long fought for better access to public lands and improved wildlife conservation and management. It is sportsmen and women who funded these programs for the betterment of wildlife in the state.”

At issue are the cuts to some of Montana’s most productive and heavily-supported wildlife programs. On March 25, 2015, the House Appropriations Committee removed FWP’s spending authority for the following programs from [HB 403](#), and the Montana House subsequently passed the measure:

- Eliminated the Habitat Montana program appropriation of \$10,668,000
- Eliminated the Upland Game Bird program appropriation of \$849,000
- Eliminated the Big Horn Sheep Habitat program appropriation of \$460,000
- Eliminated the Fishing Access Site program appropriation of \$345,000
- Reduced the state special revenue appropriation for the Migratory Bird Program by \$210,000 and restricted the use of the balance to prevent land acquisition

“The Habitat Montana program is critical because it protects crucial habitat including elk, deer and sheep winter range and migration corridors. It also expands and improves wildlife management areas,” said Allen.

“These are sportsmen’s dollars, not tax dollars, and cannot be used for any purpose other than habitat improvement and recreational access,” said Bob Sanders of Ducks Unlimited. “The Legislature should be looking for ways to improve these programs, not eliminate them. It’s very baffling.”



The amendments resulted in a reduction of more than \$12.5 million to FWP habitat and access programs. The money will still accrue in accounts, but since lawmakers stripped FWP of its spending authority, it would remain in a stagnant situation.

“The Bighorn Sheep Habitat Program is funded through the sale of the Governor’s Bighorn Sheep License. This funding is vital in terms of enhancing failing bighorn sheep populations across Montana,” said Brian Solan, president of the Montana Wild Sheep Foundation. “With Montana bighorns facing unprecedented pressures from disease, loss of habitat and poaching, the last thing they need is political interference.”

The funding in question is generated by the sale of hunting and fishing licenses and equipment. By law, it is earmarked solely for conservation efforts. No general fund dollars or tax dollars are at issue. Sportsmen remain concerned that politics take precedent over the stated wishes of the people who provide the funding for these critical programs.

“Access and quality habitat for wildlife are the top issues for sportsmen across Montana. We’re counting on the Senate to restore this funding in order to maintain our hunting heritage,” added Allen.

About the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation:

Founded over 30 years ago, fueled by hunters and a membership of more than 205,000 strong, RMEF has conserved more than 6.6 million acres for elk and other wildlife. RMEF also works to open and improve public access, fund and advocate for science-based resource management, and ensure the future of America’s hunting heritage. Discover why “Hunting Is Conservation™” at www.rmef.org or 800-CALL ELK.