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Feb. 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021

House Fish, Wildlife & Parks Committee  
1301 East Sixth Avenue  
Room 172  
Helena, MT 59601

Re: House Bill 241

Chair Fitzgerald and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on House Bill 241. My name is Walker Conyngham, and I am the president of Hellgate Hunters & Anglers, a Western Montana-based, all volunteer conservation organization that represents over 500 sportsmen and women. Our organization and our members have deep ties to the Flathead Reservation and an excellent working relationship with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Accordingly, we were dismayed to see this shortsighted, misguided legislation introduced, given that it would effectively wreck decades of collaborative fish and wildlife management between the State and tribal nations across Montana.

Let's be clear: this bill is an attack on tribal sovereignty across our state and will result in bitter, endless litigation, tying up state resources and shutting down cooperative management between Fish, Wildlife and Parks and tribal management authorities. Proponents of this bill would paint this as a simple case of private property rights, but the truth is far more complicated and tied to legal precedents that will ultimately favor the tribes. Those who choose to live on native ground, like the Flathead Reservation, should recognize that they are guests on the limited ground remaining to the tribe. I'll note that I grew up on the Flathead Reservation, and my family still lives up there. The bill's proponents do not represent all nontribal landowners on the Flathead Reservation; there are plenty who respect the sovereignty of the CSKT and who are profoundly grateful for their hospitality in allowing us to access their lands. Likewise, many residents of Western Montana have deep ties to the lands and waters of the Flathead Reservation and are profoundly grateful to the CSKT for their generosity in allowing us to hunt birds and fish in one of the most beautiful places in Montana.

That opportunity is the result of the 30-year old Montana-CSKT Fishing and Bird Hunting Agreement, developed after legal battles in the 1990s that affirmed tribal sovereignty. This agreement allows non-tribal hunters and anglers access to reservation lands to pursue species that are not typically targeted by tribal members seeking to feed their families. Should this legislation

pass, that agreement will end and we will lose access to tens of thousands of acres of prime habitat on CSKT lands. My organization, along with other sporting groups, stands behind the CSKT and other tribes in Montana in asking you to swiftly reject this bill. HB 241 will cause far more harm than good for sportsmen and women in our state, so I wholeheartedly ask that you do not advance this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment,

Walker Conyngham

President

Hellgate Hunters & Anglers