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Feb. 17, 2021

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

Re: House Bill 417

Dear Committee Members:

I write on behalf of Hellgate Hunters & Anglers, an all-volunteer rod and gun club representing over 400 sportsmen and women in Western Montana, to express our dismay at seeing HB 417 receive a hearing in your committee. This bill takes a chainsaw to Montana's incredible hunting opportunities by instituting a no-holds-barred slaughter in our premier hunting districts. If there was a game plan to ruining quality hunting opportunities in Montana, I have no doubt that the language in this bill would be included.

HB 417 ignores basic population management science — that female harvest should be increased to reduce numbers — in an attempt to reduce deer, elk and antelope numbers to below objective. First, let me note that these population objectives are based on landowner tolerance, not ecological carrying capacity. In the majority of hunting districts, the established objective falls below the true carrying capacity of the habitat, indicating that we are already below what the standards of quality hunting in Montana should be. Opening up antlered elk tags in premier, limited-draw units like the Missouri River Breaks and Elkhorn Mountains to general purchase will have no meaningful effect on these population numbers, but will severely reduce the quality of these prized hunts, particularly on public land. Montana hunters should not suffer because some outfitter wants to be able to hunt our trophy units every year.

This bill insults Montanans like myself who have waited decades to draw tags in our most famous elk and deer units. Already, hunters across the state are reckoning with the question: How much more can we hunt these deer and elk populations before any remnants of Montana's renowned hunting heritage are gone? With ever-increasing pressure, limited draw units are the foundation for quality hunting in states like Montana, and hunters value these units for the incredible animals they produce. I ask that you swiftly reject HB 417 and keep our wildlife management authority in the hands of credentialed wildlife managers.

Sincerely,

Walker Conyngham

President

Hellgate Hunters & Anglers.