



AN ACT GENERALLY REVISING LAWS RELATED TO THE BLOCK MANAGEMENT PROGRAM; ALLOWING THE FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION TO ADOPT SIMPLIFIED RULES FOR AGREEMENTS THAT ONLY PROVIDE ACCESS TO ADJACENT PUBLIC LANDS; PROVIDING RULEMAKING AUTHORITY; AND AMENDING SECTION 87-1-265, MCA.”

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

Section 1. Section 87-1-265, MCA, is amended to read:

"87-1-265. Hunting access programs -- block management program -- private landowner assistance -- rules -- restriction on landowner liability. (1) There is established a block management program administered by the department to provide landowner assistance that encourages public access to private and public lands for hunting purposes.

(2) The department may also develop and administer alternative programs to the block management program that are designed to promote public access to private and public lands for hunting purposes.

(3) Participation in a hunting access program established under this section is voluntary. A lease, acquisition, or other arrangement for public access to or across private property for hunting purposes must be negotiated through a cooperative agreement between the landowner and the department that will guarantee reasonable access for public hunting. Landowners may also form a voluntary association when development of a unified cooperative agreement is advantageous. A cooperative agreement must contain a detailed description of the conditions for use of the private property, including but not limited to:

- (a) hunting access management;
- (b) services to be provided to the public;
- (c) ranch rules and other restrictions; and

(d) any other management information to be gathered, which must be made available to the public.

(4) Private land is not eligible for inclusion in a hunting access program if outfitting, commercial hunting, or fees charged for private hunting access unreasonably restrict public hunting opportunities.

(5) If the department determines that an agreement may adversely influence game management decisions or wildlife habitat on public lands, then other public land agencies, interested sportspersons, and affected landowners must be consulted. An affected landowner's management goals and personal observations regarding game populations and habitat use must be considered in development of the agreement.

(6) The commission may adopt rules to implement the provisions of this section, including but not limited to rules that determine tangible benefits to be provided to a landowner who participates in a hunting access program. Benefits are intended to offset potential impacts associated with public hunting access, including but not limited to those associated with general ranch maintenance, conservation efforts, weed control, fire protection, liability insurance, roads, fences, and parking area maintenance. Factors used in determining benefits may include but are not limited to:

- (a) the number of days of public hunting provided by a participating landowner;
- (b) wildlife habitat provided;
- (c) resident game populations;
- (d) number, sex, and species of animals taken; and
- (e) access provided to adjacent public lands.

(7) For a proposed agreement that only provides access to adjacent public lands for hunting purposes, the department shall:

(a) notify adjacent public land leaseholders;
(b) ensure the proposed agreement does not violate or interfere with the terms of any adjacent public land lease agreement;

(c) incorporate the relevant terms of an adjacent public land lease agreement into the proposed access agreement; and

(d) allow an adjacent public land leaseholder the opportunity to support or object to the proposed access agreement.

(8) In considering a proposed agreement that only provides access to adjacent public lands for

hunting purposes, the commission may:

(a) consider an adjacent leaseholder's support for or objection to a proposed access agreement;

(b) exempt the access agreement from tracking the number of days of public hunting access provided by a participating landowner;

(c) agree to a payment to the landowner that is a flat fee rate and not based on the number of days of public hunting access provided by a participating landowner;

(d) use the amount and opportunity provided by public lands access as factors to determine benefits; and

(e) otherwise implement simplified rules.

~~(7)(9)~~ (a) Benefits earned by a landowner who participates in a hunting access program may include but are not limited to those applied in the manner described in subsections ~~(7)(b)~~ ~~(9)(b)~~ and ~~(7)(c)~~ ~~(9)(c)~~.

(b) A landowner may receive direct payments:

(i) for weed control or may direct payments to be made directly to the county weed control board;

(ii) for fire protection or may direct fire protection payments to be made to the local fire district or the county where the landowner resides; and

(iii) to offset insurance costs incurred for allowing public hunting access.

(c) The department may provide assistance in the construction and maintenance of roads, gates, and parking facilities and in the signing of property.

~~(8)(10)~~ (a) Except as provided in 87-1-264 and subsection ~~(8)(b)~~ ~~(10)(b)~~ of this section, payments to a landowner who participates in a hunting access program through an annual agreement may not exceed \$50,000 a year, and \$25,000 a year for agreements that only provide access to public land for hunting purposes.

(b) Each landowner who participates in a unified cooperative agreement pursuant to subsection (3) may be eligible for payments not to exceed \$50,000 a year, and \$25,000 a year for agreements that only provide access to public land for hunting purposes.

~~(9)(11)~~ The restriction on liability of a landowner, agent, or tenant that is provided under 70-16-302(1) applies to a landowner who participates in a hunting access program."

- END -

I hereby certify that the within bill,
HB 763, originated in the House.

Chief Clerk of the House

Speaker of the House

Signed this _____ day
of _____, 2025.

President of the Senate

Signed this _____ day
of _____, 2025.

HOUSE BILL NO. 763

INTRODUCED BY J. SECKINGER, W. GALT, S. NOVAK, L. MUSZKIEWICZ, J. ISALY, E. ALBUS, E. BYRNE,
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