

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

GREG GIANFORTE
GOVERNOR



KRISTEN JURAS
LT. GOVERNOR

May 5, 2025

The Honorable Brandon Ler
Speaker of the House
State Capitol
Helena, MT 59620

The Honorable Matt Regier
President of the Senate
State Capitol
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Speaker Ler and President Regier:

For nearly 40 years, Montana's bighorn sheep conservation tag auctions have been the primary mechanism for protecting and expanding the population of bighorn sheep in our state. The program works, and the proof is in the pudding. From 2014 to 2025, Montana's bighorn sheep tag auctions have generated over \$3 million for conservation of the species.

While bighorn sheep populations have grown in recent decades, disease, excessive predation, and poor genetic diversity continue to threaten the recovery of this species. To highlight these ongoing challenges, the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission recently closed bighorn sheep hunting in the Middle Missouri Breaks because of a decline in population counts. Montana is fortunate to have strong conservation partners who are an invaluable resource in defending our Montana way of life. These partnerships are vital to our continued success.

As a proud hunter, I am always eager to explore commonsense ways to increase hunting opportunities while upholding our shared dedication to conservation efforts. In 2023, I was proud to work with the Legislature and the now-Speaker of the House to sign into law House Bill 456, which gave Montana residents a free super tag lottery entry for a tag to hunt several species, including bighorn sheep, in addition to the regular permit draw available to every Montana resident hunter each year.

House Bill 283, however, discounts the success of the auction model that has worked for Montana for so long. Instead of building on the tried-and-true auction method, House Bill 283 would allow the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission the option to consider awarding a bighorn sheep tag through a lottery process. The uncertainty of a lottery gives me pause as it could impact funding critical to our conservation efforts.

Speaker Ler, President Regier

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Given the challenges surrounding the bighorn sheep population, I do not believe now is the time to inject uncertainty into the funding mechanisms for these partners.

Therefore, in accordance with the power vested in me as Governor by the Constitution and the laws of the State of Montana, I hereby veto House Bill 283: "AN ACT PERMITTING THE ISSUANCE OF MOUNTAIN SHEEP AND SHIRAS MOOSE TAGS THROUGH A LOTTERY; AMENDING SECTIONS 87-2-722 AND 87-2-724, MCA; AND PROVIDING A DELAYED EFFECTIVE DATE."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Greg Gianforte", is written over a printed name and title.

Greg Gianforte
Governor

Enclosure

cc: Legislative Services Division
Christi Jacobsen, Secretary of State