

HOUSE BILL NO. 568

INTRODUCED BY C. SPRUNGER, W. GALT, E. ALBUS, J. SECKINGER, P. ELVERUM, M. THIEL, M. BERTOGGIO, E. BUTTREY, S. GIST, L. JONES, G. LAMMERS, D. LOGE, B. LER, J. ETCHART, G. HERTZ, G. PARRY, K. SEEKINS-CROWE, S. MANESS, K. BOGNER, J. HINKLE

A BILL FOR AN ACT ENTITLED: "AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE MONTANA HUNTERS FIRST ACT; CREATING A STUDY OF IMPACTS ON MONTANA'S HUNTING SEASONS RELATED TO BLOCK MANAGEMENT, SEASON STRUCTURE, PRIVATE LANDS LEASED FOR HUNTING PURPOSES, AND RESIDENT AND NONRESIDENT LICENSE ALLOCATION; ASSIGNING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE STUDY TO THE DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE, AND PARKS; DEFINING THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY; REQUIRING A PUBLISHED REPORT THAT INCLUDES RECOMMENDATIONS; AND PROVIDING AN IMMEDIATE EFFECTIVE DATE AND A TERMINATION DATE."

WHEREAS, there has been a steady growth in nonresident hunting license sales and hunting pressure on publicly accessible lands; and

WHEREAS, Montana's significant population growth necessitates a detailed assessment of hunting season structure after 40 years; and

WHEREAS, there has been a decline of roughly 1 million acres in the amount of private land enrolled in the block management program over the past 10 years, concentrating hunters on smaller amounts of publicly accessible lands; and

WHEREAS, hunter success rates have been steadily falling, while hunter use days have been steadily increasing; and

WHEREAS, public sentiment indicates that Montana's wildlife resources are being strained by a variety of factors; and

WHEREAS, landowner fatigue with the current hunting season structure relative to elk hunting opportunities is setting in; and

WHEREAS, the wildlife of Montana belongs to all citizens; and

WHEREAS, the process of finding solutions to the issues surrounding the current management of

1 hunting seasons, including resident and nonresident license allocation, should include all stakeholders.

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

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5 NEW SECTION. **Section 1. Short title.** [Sections 1 and 2] may be cited as the "Montana Hunters
6 First Act".

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8 NEW SECTION. **Section 2. Nonresident hunting impact study.** (1) The department of fish, wildlife,
9 and parks shall conduct a study of nonresident impacts on deer, ~~and elk,~~ UPLAND GAME BIRD, AND WATER FOWL
10 hunting in the state and in each of the fish and wildlife commission's administrative regions.

11 (2) The study must utilize a range of data, including but not limited to hunter days, harvest
12 reporting, use of lands that are part of hunting access programs, hunting pressure on public lands, elk and deer
13 population trends, ~~THE ACREAGE AND DURATION OF PRIVATE LAND LEASES FOR HUNTING PURPOSES,~~ and licensing.

14 (3) Upon completion of the study, the department shall publish a report that is accessible to the
15 public. The report must include:

16 (a) a comprehensive assessment of the data as it relates to nonresident impacts on deer and elk
17 hunting in the state and in each of the commission's administrative regions;

18 (b) specific information about the methods used for collecting or acquiring data used in the report;
19 and

20 (c) the identification of specific issues for consideration by the legislature, department, and
21 commission concerning nonresident impacts on deer and elk hunting.

22 (4) The study and report must be completed by December 1, 2026.

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24 NEW SECTION. **Section 3. Effective date.** [This act] is effective on passage and approval.

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26 NEW SECTION. **Section 4. Termination.** [Sections 1 and 2] terminate December 31, 2026.

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