

## 1 HOUSE BILL NO. 763

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

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

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

16 **"87-1-265. Hunting access programs -- block management program -- private landowner**  
17 **assistance -- rules -- restriction on landowner liability.** (1) There is established a block management  
18 program administered by the department to provide landowner assistance that encourages public access to  
19 private and public lands for hunting purposes.

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

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

- 1 (a) hunting access management;
- 2 (b) services to be provided to the public;
- 3 (c) ranch rules and other restrictions; and
- 4 (d) any other management information to be gathered, which must be made available to the public.
- 5 (4) Private land is not eligible for inclusion in a hunting access program if outfitting, commercial
- 6 hunting, or fees charged for private hunting access unreasonably restrict public hunting opportunities.
- 7 (5) If the department determines that an agreement may adversely influence game management
- 8 decisions or wildlife habitat on public lands, then other public land agencies, interested sportspeople, and
- 9 affected landowners must be consulted. An affected landowner's management goals and personal observations
- 10 regarding game populations and habitat use must be considered in development of the agreement.
- 11 (6) The commission may adopt rules to implement the provisions of this section, including but not
- 12 limited to rules that determine tangible benefits to be provided to a landowner who participates in a hunting
- 13 access program. Benefits are intended to offset potential impacts associated with public hunting access,
- 14 including but not limited to those associated with general ranch maintenance, conservation efforts, weed
- 15 control, fire protection, liability insurance, roads, fences, and parking area maintenance. Factors used in
- 16 determining benefits may include but are not limited to:
- 17 (a) the number of days of public hunting provided by a participating landowner;
- 18 (b) wildlife habitat provided;
- 19 (c) resident game populations;
- 20 (d) number, sex, and species of animals taken; and
- 21 (e) access provided to adjacent public lands.
- 22 (7) For agreements that only provide access to adjacent public lands for hunting purposes, the
- 23 commission may:
- 24 (a) exempt the access agreement from tracking the number of days of public hunting access
- 25 provided by a participating landowner;
- 26 (b) agree to a payment to the landowner that is a flat fee rate and not based on the number of
- 27 days of public hunting access provided by a participating landowner;
- 28 (c) use the amount and opportunity provided by public lands access as factors to determine

1 benefits; and

2 (d) otherwise implement simplified rules.

3 ~~(7)~~ (8) (a) Benefits earned by a landowner who participates in a hunting access program may include  
4 but are not limited to those applied in the manner described in subsections ~~(7)~~ (b) ~~(8)~~ (b) and ~~(7)~~ (e) ~~(8)~~ (c).

5 (b) A landowner may receive direct payments:

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

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

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

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

12 ~~(8)~~ (9) (a) Except as provided in 87-1-264 and subsection ~~(8)~~ (b) ~~(9)~~ (b) of this section, payments to a  
13 landowner who participates in a hunting access program through an annual agreement may not exceed  
14 \$50,000 a year, and \$25,000 a year for agreements that only provide access to public land for hunting  
15 purposes.

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

19 ~~(9)~~ (10) The restriction on liability of a landowner, agent, or tenant that is provided under 70-16-302(1)  
20 applies to a landowner who participates in a hunting access program."

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