

14 APR 2017 RCVD

TOWE, BALL, MACKEY, SOMMERFELD & TURNER, P.L.L.P.

ATTORNEYS AT LAW
P.O. BOX 30457
BILLINGS, MT 59107-0457

THOMAS E. TOWE
COURT E. BALL
STEPHEN C. MACKEY
DONALD D. SOMMERFELD
JEFF A. TURNER
ADRIAN M. GOSCH

TELEPHONE: (406) 248-7337
FAX: (406) 248-2647

2525 Sixth Avenue North
Billings, MT 59101

April 11, 2017

Governor Steve Bullock
Office of the Governor
State Capitol Building
P.O. Box 200801
Helena, MT 59620-0801

Dear Governor Bullock:

I urge you to sign HB 324 and not to veto it. I know that you did not want to see Parks as an independent agency with less control from your office but it is truly the best solution to a very serious problem that exists right now.

I detailed my concerns in a letter to Tracy Stone Manning recently. I presume you received a copy. If not, it is enclosed. Although I initially thought that this could not be that big a problem, I soon learned that it really is. Parks cannot grow and be the agency it needs to be if it is left under the thumb of Fish and Wildlife.

It is philosophical – the fish and wildlife people do not want land that is purchased for wildlife habitat developed for parks with campgrounds and trails even if part of the funds were from recreation (Land and Resource Funds) or State monies because this would bring in too many people. Too many people, they believe, is inconsistent with true wilderness and true protection of the environment. We respond that our mission is to make the outdoors available to as many people as possible. At the present time these differences genuinely seem irreconcilable; they cannot be quickly or easily resolved. We saw this at Fish Creek when Parks proposed to develop a camp ground there and we saw this in the wildlife and wilderness people lobbying against HB 324. It will stay long after you and I (and Martha Williams) are gone from our current positions.

It is an issue of money – the fish and wildlife people don't want the State to use any Pitman Robertson moneys (taxes on guns and ammunition) and Dingle Johnson moneys (taxes on fishing gear) or hunting and fishing licensing moneys on recreation, even if it involves developing water recreation for fishing on water areas such as Hell Creek, Cooney, and Tongue River Reservoir. The cooperation that has existed in the past is rapidly disappearing. And the monies are very large. At the present time these differences also seem irreconcilable; they cannot be quickly or easily resolved.

It involves personnel – the people who work in fish and wildlife divisions do not get along well with those in the parks division. For example, at one time someone brought some duct tape to work in a common office building and put it on the floor between the park offices and the fish and wildlife offices

April 11, 2017
Page 2 of 2

with the admonition that no one should violate each other's territory. And this is not just State employees but the wildlife people and support groups are now stepping away from recreation support groups. At the present time these differences genuinely seem irreconcilable; they cannot be quickly or easily resolved.

Martha Williams is very capable and very committed to helping parks. But even she will not be able to resolve these differences. Further she should not be required to spend all of her time on these issues when there are so many other demands on her time and attention. As I have stated in the attached letter, both you and Tracy (and Dan Villa) were not able to prevent a crisis that resulted in the firing of our administrator, a nationally known parks person and enthusiast for State Parks, and prevent a budget crisis that resulted in even less funding than we previously have had even though our visitation is up 42% in the last 6 years.

I am convinced that the only way that we can let Parks grow and develop as a majority of the people of Montana really want is to give Parks more independence. This bill will do that. At the same time it will keep us in the Department and we will be able to work out our differences much easier and more effectively than if Martha is the final arbiter and final decision maker on all park issues. I genuinely fear that if this bill is vetoed, there will be a mass resignation in the Parks Division because the morale is so low right now. We have already been told that Melissa Baker is leaving to head up North Dakota State Parks, an independent Department in North Dakota.

If you let HB 324 become law, Parks will be able to take a giant leap forward and become much more important to all Montanans. That is what I want and I really believe that is what you want too.

Sincerely,
TOWE, BALL, MACKEY, SOMMERFELD
& TURNER, PLLP

By 
Thomas E. Towe

TET/mk