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HOUSE BILL NO. 417

INTRODUCED BY C. SPRUNGER, V. RICCI, E. ALBUS, J. SECKINGER, R. GREGG, L. BENNETT, C. SCHOMER, C. COCHRAN, T. MILLETT, J. ELLIS, J. ELLSWORTH, T. RUNNING WOLF, D. HARVEY, J. KASSMIER, D. LOGE, B. USHER, B. BARKER, E. BOLDMAN, S. MORIGEAU, K. SEEKINS-CROWE, S. MANESS, J. DARLING, C. FITZPATRICK

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, 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; REQUIRING MANDATORY REPORTING OF HUNTING ACTIVITY BY HUNTERS OF GAME ANIMALS; PROVIDING RULEMAKING AUTHORITY; AND PROVIDING EFFECTIVE DATES 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

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

2 WHEREAS, the process of finding solutions to the issues surrounding the current management of
3 hunting seasons, including resident and nonresident license allocation, should include all stakeholders.

4

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

6

7 NEW SECTION. Section 1. Short title. [Sections 1 through 3] may be cited as the "Montana Hunters
8 First Act".

9

10 NEW SECTION. Section 2. Nonresident hunting impact study. (1) The department shall conduct a
11 study of nonresident impacts on deer and elk hunting in the state and in each of the commission's
12 administrative regions.

13 (2) The study must utilize a range of data, including but not limited to hunter days, harvest
14 reporting, use of lands that are part of hunting access programs, hunting pressure on public lands, elk and deer
15 population trends, and licensing.

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

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

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

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

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

25

26 NEW SECTION. Section 3. Mandatory reporting of hunting activity -- rulemaking. (1) A person
27 who is issued a hunting license for a game animal as defined in 87-2-101 shall report to the department all of
28 the person's hunting activity for each animal.

1 (2) A person shall report all of the person's hunting activity for a game animal before the person is
2 eligible to purchase a new game animal hunting license in the following license year.

3 (3) The department may make rules to implement this section, including but not limited to reporting
4 systems, deadlines, and penalties.

5

6 NEW SECTION. Section 4. Codification instruction. (1) [Sections 1 and 2] are intended to be
7 codified as an integral part of Title 87, chapter 1, part 2, and the provisions of Title 87, chapter 1, part 2, apply
8 to [sections 1 and 2].

9 (2) [Section 3] is intended to be codified as an integral part of Title 87, chapter 2, part 1, and the
10 provisions of Title 87, chapter 2, part 1, apply to [section 3].

11

12 NEW SECTION. Section 5. Effective dates. (1) [Sections 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6] are effective on passage
13 and approval.

14 (2) [Section 3] is effective March 1, 2026.

15

16 NEW SECTION. Section 6. Termination. [Section 2] terminates December 31, 2026.

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