

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

STEVE BULLOCK
GOVERNOR



MIKE COONEY
LT. GOVERNOR

April 20, 2017

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

The Honorable Scott Sales
President of the Senate
State Capitol
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Speaker Knudsen and President Sales:

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 324 (HB 324), "AN ACT GENERALLY REVISING THE ADMINISTRATION OF RECREATIONAL RESOURCE PROGRAMS; ADMINISTRATIVELY ATTACHING THE STATE PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD TO THE DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE, AND PARKS; CLARIFYING DEPARTMENTAL AND BOARD POWERS AND DUTIES RELATED TO STATE PARKS AND BOATING, SNOWMOBILE, AND OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE PROGRAMS; AUTHORIZING THE HIRING OF AN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF STATE PARKS AND RECREATION; PROVIDING A STATUTORY APPROPRIATION; PROVIDING RULEMAKING AUTHORITY; AMENDING SECTIONS 2-15-3401, 2-15-3406, 15-35-108, 17-7-502, 18-2-301, 22-3-1002, 22-3-1003, 23-1-101, 23-1-102, 23-1-105, 23-1-108, 23-1-110, 23-1-111, 23-1-126, 23-1-128, 23-1-201, 23-1-202, 23-2-101, 23-2-102, 23-2-103, 23-2-404, 23-2-407, 23-2-409, 23-2-502, 23-2-519, 23-2-533, 23-2-536, 23-2-601, 23-2-615, 23-2-633, 23-2-636, 23-2-641, 23-2-657, 23-2-801, 23-2-806, 23-2-814, 23-2-824, 45-6-101, 45-6-203, 50-53-209, 61-3-321, 61-5-104, 70-16-302, 70-30-102, 77-2-101, 82-11-127, 82-11-185, 85-1-802, 87-1-201, 87-1-209, 87-1-218, 87-1-301, 87-1-603, AND 87-1-604, MCA; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE AND A TERMINATION DATE."

Montanans value our public lands and the amazing outdoor recreational opportunities those lands provide. Our state parks are one of the many ways we access public lands and a vibrant state parks system is an important part of our heritage and our economy. Montana's state parks provide family recreational and educational experiences as well as public access to key waters across the state from Flathead and Ackley Lakes to the Tongue River Reservoir. Our state parks protect some of our most cherished historical sites and natural features and contribute significantly to the state's outdoor economy.

Speaker Knudsen
President Sales
April 20, 2017
Page 2

The demand for Montana's top-notch parks system is evidenced by the 42 percent increase in visitation the State has experienced since 2011. While we can be extremely proud of the demand for our park system, the increased visitation is not without challenges. Recent analysis shows that our state parks have \$22 million in unmet needs for infrastructure improvements, and handling the increased visitation has strained an already overworked staff. Unfortunately, despite the rise in people accessing our parks, our annual expenditures for state parks exceed annual revenue. We must tackle these challenges with focus and leadership in order to sustain our parks system for today and for future generations. I do not believe this bill moves us in the right direction.

If enacted, HB 324 would remove oversight of state parks from the Director of Fish, Wildlife and Parks and place it with a volunteer board that would manage a parks director to oversee park operations. While I know the sponsor and proponents of HB 324 have the best interests of state parks at heart, the administrative structure the bill creates is not an effective way to manage our parks or to provide the results and accountability that are required to solve the challenges I noted above. Governor Anderson wisely consolidated dozens of boards into 19 departments in the early 1970s to make our government more effective and efficient. This bill would be a step backward. Additionally, rather than saving money in an already strapped program, HB 324 will exacerbate the financial challenges the state parks system faces.

While I do not believe HB 324 is the right approach, I do agree with the aim of the bill to elevate and solve the challenges our state parks system faces. Working with the Director of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, I will launch a Parks in Focus initiative to address the financial, operational, and cultural challenges facing our state parks. I am committed to ensuring that Montana's state parks system meets the needs and expectations of this and future generations.

For these reasons, I veto HB 324.

Sincerely,



STEVE BULLOCK
Governor

cc: Legislative Services Division
Secretary Corey Stapleton