

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

GREG GIANFORTE
GOVERNOR



KRISTEN JURAS
LT. GOVERNOR

May 15, 2025

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

The Honorable Matt Regier
President of the Senate
State Capitol
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Speaker Ler and President Regier:

Montana's rivers are among our most treasured natural resources. They provide water for farmers and ranchers, power our homes and businesses, and offer outstanding recreational opportunities. As anyone who spends time on water knows, river usage has increased dramatically in recent years.

House Bill 762 aims to address the significant increase in river usage by requiring the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to study the purpose and number of watercrafts operating on 16 different stretches of river, totaling nearly 1,000 miles, and publish a biennial report of its findings.

While House Bill 762 is well intended and I appreciate the sponsor's commitment to better understanding increased river usage, House Bill 762 drains \$2.6 million from the state parks account, which would otherwise be used to address important infrastructure projects at our state parks, including maintenance backlogs.

House Bill 762 will require hiring more staff. Beyond paying this larger staff, the bill's \$2.6 million cost includes providing the staff with housing, monthly per diem allowances, technological and communications equipment, vehicles, and other expenses to complete the study.

While I remain committed to our shared priority of protecting our Montana way of life, we can address the increase in river usage in a better, more cost-effective manner. The approach of House Bill 762 takes too big a bite at the apple at too great a cost to taxpayers. Given the bill's fiscal impact, this comprehensive approach is simply too much at this time.

That said, I believe we can achieve the same goal over a longer period, potentially using a pilot program for FWP to study some portion of the 16 different stretches of river identified in House Bill 762. FWP and the Legislature can determine what worked in the pilot program, what didn't, and what needs to change for future studies.

The idea of a pilot program is just an example, and over the course of the interim, I look forward to working with the bill sponsor, members of the Legislature, and FWP officials to find a more cost-effective way of addressing this important need.

Therefore, 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 762: "AN ACT REQUIRING THE DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS TO PUBLISH A BIENNIAL RIVER-USE REPORT; ALLOWING FUNDS IN THE STATE PARK ACCOUNT TO BE USED FOR THE RIVER-USE REPORT; AMENDING SECTIONS 23-1-105 AND 87-1-201, MCA; PROVIDING AN APPROPRIATION; AND PROVIDING AN IMMEDIATE EFFECTIVE DATE."

Sincerely,



Greg Gianforte
Governor

Enclosure

cc: Legislative Services Division
Christi Jacobsen, Secretary of State