

Summary of Research



MONTANA FWP

Selected Results of Block Management Landowner and Hunter Evaluation Surveys Conducted by FWP in 2020

HD Program Research Summary No. 50

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Abstract: *Montana's Block Management Program is a long-standing, cooperative, adaptable program designed to maintain hunting heritage and traditions by providing landowners tangible benefits to encourage public hunting access on privately owned lands; promote partnerships between landowners, hunters, and the state of Montana; and, help manage wildlife resources and the impacts of public hunting on private lands. Following the 2019-20 hunting season, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) conducted surveys of private landowners and hunters to evaluate the Block Management Program. Results from this evaluation indicate that enrolled landowners are overwhelmingly satisfied with and support the program. For landowners, the monetary payment and hunter management assistance provided by field technicians are the primary reasons for enrollment. Landowners also believe the program has been very successful at improving hunter-landowner relations. Likewise, hunters are big supporters of the program and believe the program has been successful at strengthening hunter-landowner partnerships and provides easy to find hunting access opportunities on privately owned lands found across the state. Hunters are most likely to use Block Management to pursue deer and elk and nearly 60 percent have used FWP's Hunting Access Guide to assist with hunting Block Management Areas in Montana. Research findings suggest FWP needs to find ways to increase field technician presence, seek alternative and more funding for enrolled landowners, do more outreach to hunters to inform them of the ins and outs of the program, and utilize technological solutions such as use of apps or online reservations.*

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Block Management provides for managed hunting access on private and isolated public land enrolled through cooperative agreements between Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), private landowners, and public land management agencies. Administered by FWP, Montana's Block Management Program was formally established in 1995 with the following goals:

- To maintain public hunting access to private and isolated public land.
- To help landowners manage public hunting on lands under their control and provide benefits to offset the impacts of those public hunting activities.
- To help FWP accomplish its mission of managing wildlife resources. In a state where nearly 65 percent of the land is privately owned, FWP depends on public hunting to manage populations of deer, elk, and other game animals.

A total of 1,251 landowners were enrolled in the program in 2019-20, comprising more than 7.1 million acres of Block Management Area (BMAs) across the state. Approximately 105,00 people hunted a BMA during the various 2019-20 hunting seasons in Montana (which resulted in more than 548,000 hunter days on all BMAs combined).

To measure the success of the program, FWP periodically conducts landowner and hunter evaluations. Two separate evaluation surveys were conducted by FWP following the 2019-20 hunting season in Montana.

1. **Landowner Evaluation.** All private landowners (N=1,251) enrolled in the program in 2019 were sent a survey by mail. A subsequent follow-up mailing was sent to nonrespondents during the administration of the survey. Ultimately, the survey was successfully delivered to 1,209 landowners and there were 812 respondents resulting in a 67 percent survey response rate.
2. **Hunter Evaluation.** Individuals who were licensed to hunt in Montana during the 2019-20 season were the focus of the hunter survey. A randomly selected sample of 5,000 hunting license holders was selected from FWP's Automated License System (ALS), and each of these license holders was sent a survey by mail. A subsequent follow-up mailing was sent to nonrespondents during the administration of the survey. Ultimately, the survey was successfully delivered to 4,785 license holders and there were 1,906 respondents resulting in a 40 percent survey response rate.

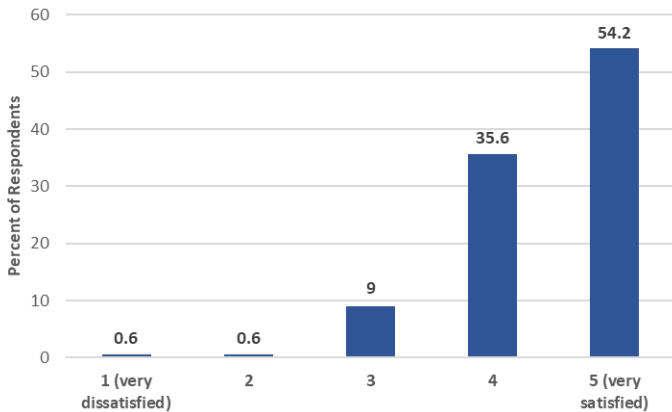


This research summary provides selected findings from both the landowner and hunter Block Management evaluation surveys conducted by FWP following the 2019-20 hunting season in Montana. More detailed survey findings are available from FWP.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LANDOWNER EVALUATION

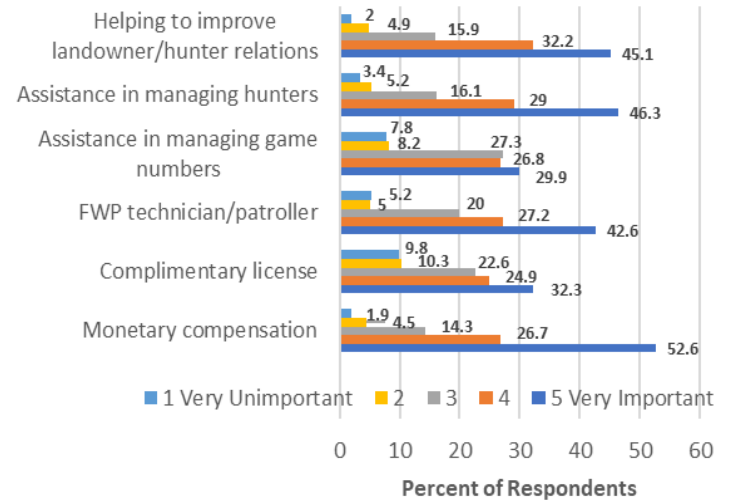
When asked how satisfied they were with the overall Block Management Program, 90 percent of the landowners (e.g., Block Management cooperators) who responded to the survey indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied (Figure 1). This compares to 92 percent in 2009, 93 percent in 2003, and 80 percent in 1996.

Figure 1. Response to: “On a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), how satisfied were you with the overall Block Management Program?”



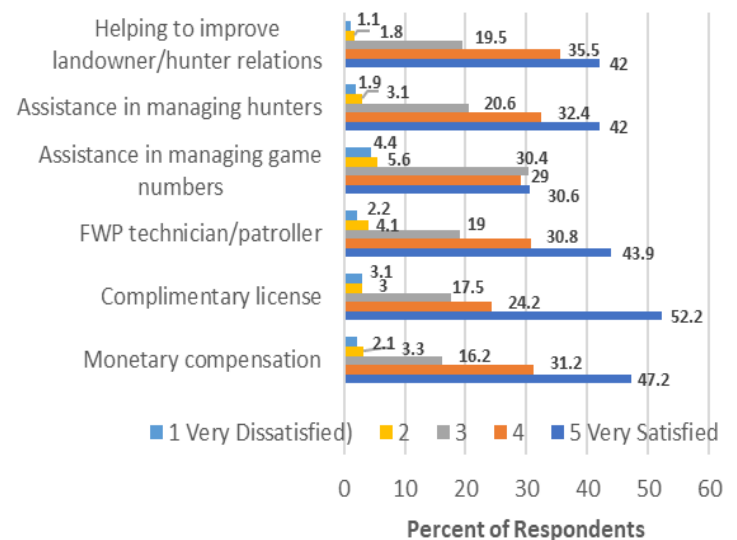
A number of benefits were important to landowners in terms of their decision to enroll in the Block Management Program for the 2019-20 hunting season. Monetary compensation, helping to improve landowner/hunter relations, assistance in managing hunters, and having a FWP technician/patroller were reported as being important or very important by 75-80 percent of landowner respondents (Figure 2). In addition, 57 percent of the respondents indicated that receiving a complimentary license and assistance in managing game numbers were important or very important benefits as well.

Figure 2. Response to: “On a scale from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important), how important were the following benefits to you in terms of your decision to enroll in the Block Management Program for the 2019-20 hunting season?”



Landowners were asked how satisfied they were with the benefits they received as a program cooperator for the 2019-20 hunting season. Anywhere from 74-79 percent of the survey respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the monetary compensation they received, help in improving landowner/hunter relations, assistance in managing hunters, the complimentary license they received, and the FWP technician/patroller (Figure 3). Sixty percent were satisfied or very satisfied with the assistance they were provided in helping to manage game numbers on their property.

Figure 3. Response to: “On a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), how satisfied were you with the benefits you received as a Block Management Cooperator for the 2019-20 hunting season?”



In terms of hunter behavior, 84 percent of the landowner respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the behavior of the people who hunted on their BMA's. Only four percent were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. In addition, 78 percent think that hunter behavior has been improved or greatly improved by the Block Management Program. Another 72 percent of the landowner respondents think their relationship with hunters has improved or greatly improved because of their participation in Block Management. Only two percent of the respondents believe their relationship with hunters has been harmed or greatly harmed because of their participation in the program.

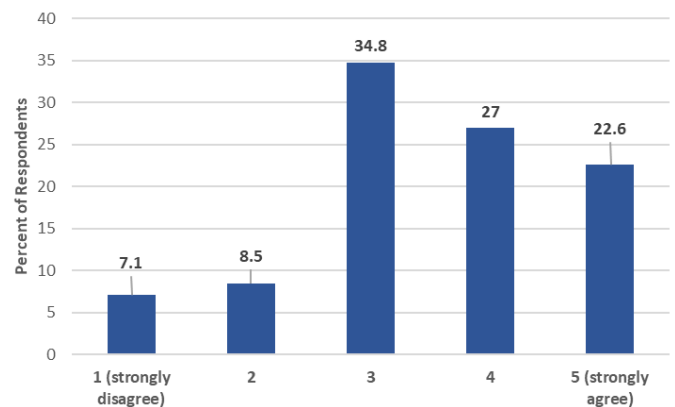
Landowners were asked several statements concerning their relationship with FWP related to their participation in the Block Management Program. Survey findings show very positive results regarding the working relationship between private landowners enrolled in the program and FWP. No fewer than 80-89 percent of respondents agree or strongly agree with the statements outlined below in Table 1. Only half a percent to 4.4 percent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with these statements.

Table 1. Response to: "On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?"

Statement:	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree	
	1	2	3	4	5	
Overall, I am satisfied with my dealings with FWP related to the Block Management Program	0.5%	0.1%	7.2%	32.1%	60.1%	
I think FWP listens to my points of view related to the Block Management Program	1.5%	2.3%	15.8%	32.5%	47.9%	
I believe FWP is open and honest in dealing with me related to the Block Management Program	0.4%	2.0%	8.5%	29.6%	59.6%	
I think FWP cares about what I want related to the Block Management Program	1.4%	2.2%	12.4%	30.7%	53.3%	
I think FWP provides important Block Management related services to me in a timely manner	0.8%	0.8%	9.0%	27.8%	61.6%	

When asked if there is a need for more FWP staff to assist landowners to manage hunters, hunter access, and the impact of hunting via Block Management, 50 percent of the landowner respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this notion (Figure 4). Fifteen percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. Thirty-five percent neither agreed nor disagreed. Related, landowners indicated they would like to see more technicians afield, increased enforcement, a general increase in FWP staff presence in the field, more signage/equipment, and utilization of technology such as an application for hunters or online reservation systems.

Figure 4. Response to: "On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), to what extent do you agree or disagree that there is a need for more FWP staff (e.g., boots on the ground) to help assist private landowners to manage hunters, hunters access, and the impacts of hunting via the Block Management Program?"

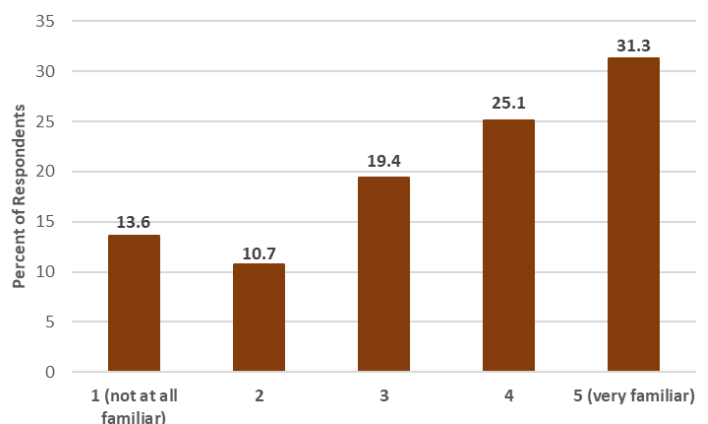


Ninety-two percent of the landowner respondents indicated that they plan on participating in the Block Management Program going forward into the future. Only one percent said they would not participate in the future, and seven percent were unsure.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE HUNTER EVALUATION

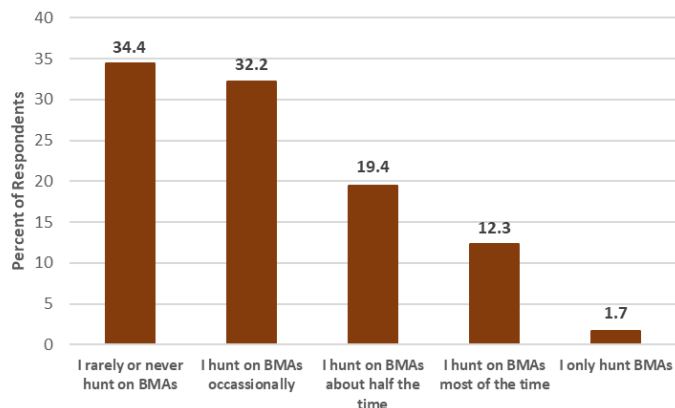
Fifty-six percent of the hunter respondents indicated they are familiar or very familiar with the Block Management Program (Figure 5). Fourteen percent were not at all familiar with the program. Of note, 75 percent of the respondents reported they have hunted on a BMA in Montana at some point in time in the past.

Figure 5. Response to: "Block Management is a state program that assists private landowners in managing hunting access and impacts of hunting on privately owned lands in Montana. On a scale from 1 (not at all familiar) to 5 (very familiar), how familiar are you with the Block Management Program?"



When asked how Block Management fits into their overall list of options for places to hunt in Montana, 14 percent of the hunter respondents reported they only hunt BMAs or hunt BMAs most of the time (Figure 6). Two-thirds of respondents reported they hunt on BMAs occasionally, rarely or never hunt on BMAs.

Figure 6. Response to: “Currently, how does Block Management fit into your overall list of options for places to hunt in Montana?”



From the evaluation, it was learned that there is not a lot of hunter awareness regarding the specific details of the Block Management Program:

- **Only 41.3 percent** of respondents were aware that Block Management does NOT pay private landowners to provide hunting access. It is a program that assists landowners who want to provide hunting access to their lands and provides tangible benefits from FWP in the form of on-the-ground assistance and/or payments that are used to help manage hunters, hunter access, and the impacts of hunting.
- **Only 12.5 percent** of respondents were aware that every Block Management contract with a landowner has an additional five percent of payment that goes towards weed management (a real and potentially significant impact of allowing hunting access on privately owned lands in Montana).
- **Only 32.5 percent** of respondents were aware that some private landowners enrolled in the Block Management Program also have conservation easements which, among other things, requires that some level of public hunting access is provided by the landowner. In some instances, landowners need assistance with managing the public hunting access requirement of their conservation easement. Block Management can be used in these instances to help these landowners in the form of on-the-ground assistance and/or payments that are used to help manage hunters, hunter access, and the impact of hunting.

Hunters were asked several questions about their general perceptions of the Block Management Program. Results from these questions are outline in Table 2. Of note, 67 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are big supporters of the program. Only eight percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement. And, survey findings show mixed finding regarding whether BMAs offer quality hunting opportunities. While 28 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that BMAs generally don't offer the quantity (numbers) of game species they are looking for, 30 percent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement. Regarding hunter/landowner relations, 53 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the program has helped improve hunter/private landowner relations. Only eight percent disagreed or strongly disagreed.

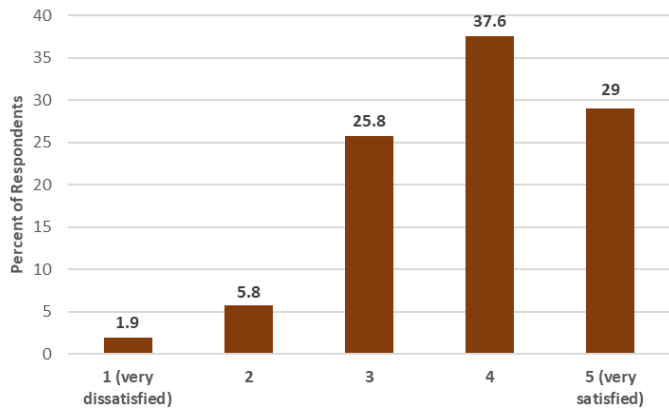
Table 2. Response to: “Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks hears from many people regarding the Block Management Program. We are interested in your perceptions of this program. On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?”

Statement:	Scale				
	Strongly Disagree (1)	2	3	4	Strongly Agree (5)
BMAs generally offer the type of hunting experience I am looking for	5.7%	12.8%	43.7%	23.8%	13.9%
BMAs generally have too many people hunting them	4.0%	17.5%	40.2%	23.4%	14.9%
BMAs generally offer the type of wildlife habitat conditions I am looking for	4.1%	11.4%	42.9%	30.0%	11.6%
BMAs generally don't offer the quantity (numbers) of game species I am looking for	8.1%	21.8%	42.0%	18.8%	9.3%
It's easy to gain access to hunt most BMAs	4.2%	10.0%	32.7%	33.6%	19.6%
I believe gaining permission to hunt BMAs that I would most prefer to hunt is difficult	10.5%	25.8%	38.4%	17.1%	8.2%
I am a big supporter of the Block Mgt. Program	3.9%	4.2%	25.3%	25.5%	41.1%
I am dissatisfied with the Block Mgt. Program	39.7%	27.1%	25.7%	4.7%	2.9%
The Block Mgt. Program is adequately funded	4.6%	9.9%	69.7%	10.8%	5.1%
The Block Mgt. Program has helped improve hunter/private landowner relations in Montana	3.6%	4.9%	38.4%	33.3%	19.8%



Forty-six percent of hunter respondents reported they hunted on a BMA during the 2019-20 hunting season in Montana. Of those respondents, 67 percent were satisfied or very satisfied with the hunting opportunities provide by the Block Management Program in 2019-20 (Figure 7). Only 8 percent were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

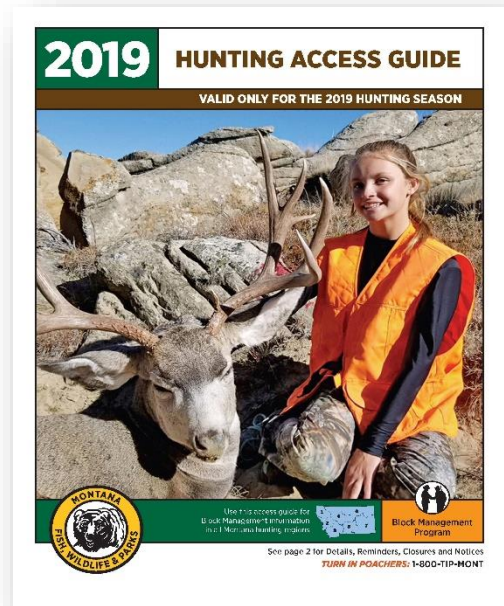
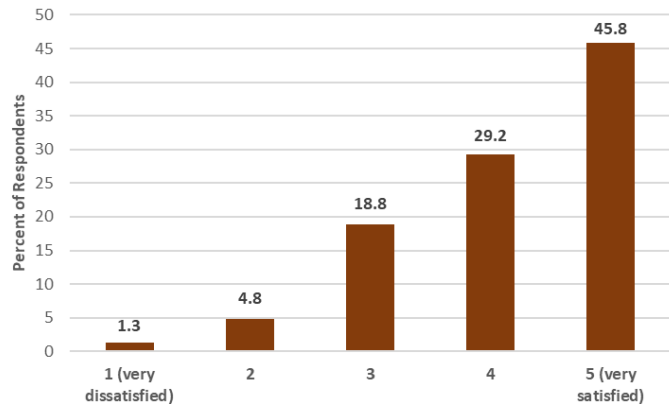
Figure 7. Response to: “Overall, on a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), how satisfied were you with the hunting opportunities provided by the Block Management Program in 2019-20?”



Respondents reported hunting deer (71 percent), elk (51 percent), antelope (18 percent), upland game birds (22 percent), and waterfowl (3 percent) on BMAs during the 2019-20 season.

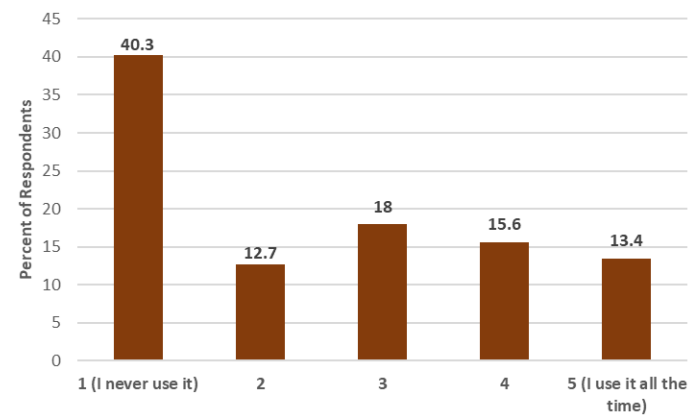
Seventy-five percent of the hunter respondents who hunted on a BMA during the 2019-20 hunting season in Montana were satisfied or very satisfied with the contacts/communications they had with a BMA private landowner in 2019-20 (Figure 8). Only six percent were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Figure 8. Response to: “Overall on a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), how satisfied were you with any contacts/communications you had with BMA private landowners in 2019-20?”

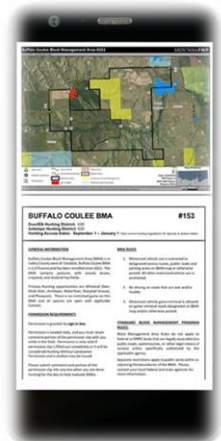


A majority of respondents (nearly 60 percent) reported they use the Block Management Hunting Access Guide (Figure 9). Only 40 percent of respondents reported they have never used this guide.

Figure 9. Response to: “On a scale from 1 (I never use it) to 5 (I use it all the time), how often do you use the Block Management Hunting Access Guide?”



When asked how the Block Management Program can be improved, hunters reported they would like to see increased compensation for landowners, more online tools, and the development of BMA related applications (such as mobile or phone apps). Hunters also spoke to a need for better signage on BMAs.




DISCUSSION

Formally started in 1995, the goals of the Block Management Program aim to: *Maintain Montana's hunting heritage and traditions by providing landowners tangible benefits to encourage public access to private land, promote partnerships between landowners, hunters, and FWP and help manage wildlife resources and impacts of public hunting on private lands.*

Block Management Evaluation surveys conducted by FWP following the 2019-20 season indicate that both landowners and hunters believe the program has been very successful and is succeeding in achieving these goals. In fact, in 2021, nearly one-third of the original landowners enrolled in the program have re-enrolled and partnered with FWP to offer hunter access opportunities on private lands in exchange for help managing hunters and wildlife and realizing other tangible benefits.

Enrolled landowners are overwhelmingly satisfied with the program and believe it has had a very positive impact on hunter-landowner-FWP relations. Landowners are most interested in receiving a monetary benefit as well as utilizing seasonal FWP field technicians to assist with managing hunters. Landowners would like to see more technicians afield, more signage, and the utilization of technologies such as apps for hunters and/or online reservations.

Likewise, hunters who utilize Block Management are generally satisfied with the program. Hunters believe the program is very successful at offering opportunity to access private lands and has improved hunter-landowner relations. In addition, hunters support increased compensation for enrolled landowners and believe the program could benefit from having more and better sign-in boxes (and signs). They also believe the utilization of technology such as mobile apps, phone apps or online reservations will help improve the user experience.

This research summary provides selected findings from the Block Management landowner and hunter evaluation surveys conducted by FWP following the 2019-20 hunting season in Montana. More detailed survey findings are available from FWP. 



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