

# Hitting the Target



MONTANA FWP

**PULL!** Montanans use shooting ranges for target practice, recreation, and competition. Hunters flock to ranges before the start of big game season to check the accuracy of their rifles. Above: Helena Trap Range. Right: Shooters check targets at a range near Troy.



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## **FWP grants are helping communities create family-friendly shooting range facilities** BY DAVE CARTY

**D**ale Pfau wants people to know the Fish, Wildlife & Parks grant that Lewistown's Central Montana Shooting Complex received to expand its facilities was spent mainly to benefit families. "We have roughly 1,000 family memberships, which is about 3,500 people," says Pfau, a club member and owner of a local

sporting goods business. "That's a lot of people for this area, a lot of kids and their parents out at the complex shooting for recreation. The grant really helped us out."

Pfau says the Lewistown community had raised funds for a smaller shooting range. But an initial \$75,000 FWP grant, matched by in-kind services worth more than

\$300,000 by a local contractor, allowed the club to expand its facility to create shooting features—including a sporting clays course and an outdoor rifle range up to 500 yards—that far larger cities would be proud to own.

According to Kurt Cunningham, who administers the FWP Montana Shooting Range Grant Program, the Lewistown facility

is just one of dozens of new ranges built or refurbished statewide in recent years. Montana now has more than 150 shooting ranges, in all but nine of its 56 counties. Some are simply outdoor public areas where people can sight in their rifles before hunting season. Others, both public and private, offer a variety of ranges of different distances for rifles,

shotguns, pistols, muzzleloaders, and archery.

Cunningham says shooting ranges are extremely popular in Montana and across the United States. “Hunters use them to practice marksmanship, law enforcement personnel train there, and clubs hold competitions,” he says. The ranges also provide recreation for families. “They give youth something to do, especially in many small towns where there’s just not much else going on,” says Cunningham. “Shooting is a life skill. And it’s something people can work on if they want to get into competition.

“In a lot of small communities in Montana,” he adds, “the shooting range is the most popular—and sometimes the only—family recreational facility.”

Shooting ranges got a big boost in 1999 when the Montana legislature put into law an existing FWP grant program that uses hunting license revenue to help clubs, local governments, and school districts develop and improve their shooting facilities. Lawmakers continue to strongly support the FWP shooting range program, providing it with an additional \$300,000 each year in state funds. Most of the FWP grants require 50:50 matches from the local community, which can be in the form of cash or donated in-kind work.

Like most grants, the FWP money comes with stipulations to ensure it is spent appropriately. Adele Stenson, a 4-H extension agent who helped the Conrad community apply for a grant, believes the process is well worth the effort. She says the new Pondera Shooting Sports Complex in Conrad includes wheelchair access on the trap range and a large, heated building that houses archery, air rifle, and pistol ranges. All the ranges are seeing increased use by the local 4-H kids she works with, Stenson says. “It’s all about giving the kids around here something fun and rewarding to do with their time.”

As in many communities, Conrad-area residents pitched in to help build the new facility. “It was like an old-fashioned barn raising,” Cunningham says.

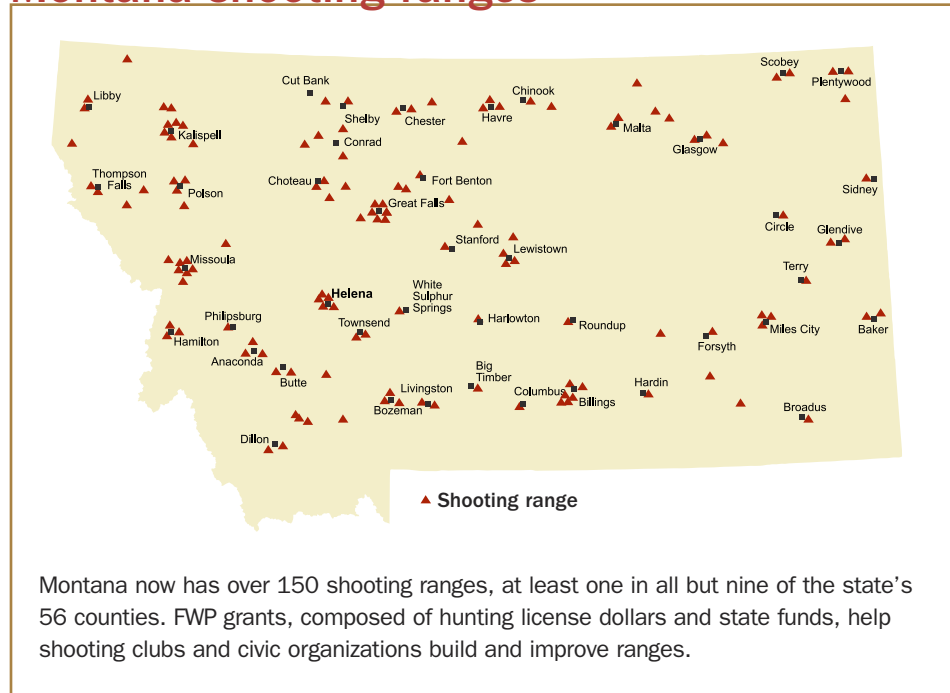
Both private and public clubs can apply for FWP grants. Private groups must be nonprofit and allow public use for a “rea-

*Dave Carty is a freelance writer in Bozeman.*



**FUN AND REWARDING YOUTH SPORT** 4-H members preparing for competition work on their air rifle marksmanship at the new Pondera Shooting Sports Complex in Conrad.

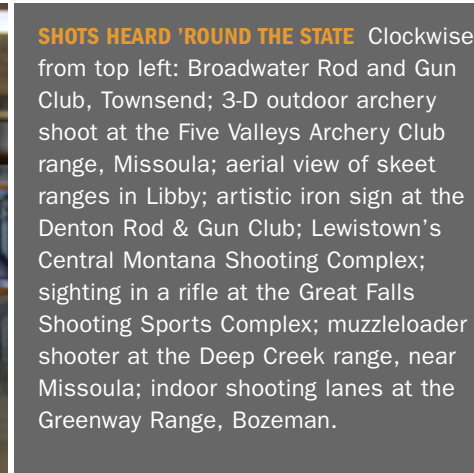
## Montana shooting ranges



sonable fee,” according to state statutes. “Or they can require a membership, but the membership has to be open to anyone who qualifies for a Montana hunting license,” says Cunningham. Many private ranges are open to the public for a small fee before the big game hunting season so hunters can sight in their rifles.

Shooting clubs across Montana benefit from the state grants. In Glasgow, Valley

County Rifle and Pistol Club board member Darrell Morehouse says his group’s recently completed shooting range was sorely needed. “The city had a place to shoot, but it was basically just shooting into a hillside,” he says. Using a \$20,000 grant from another source and a \$48,000 FWP grant matched with donated labor from the community, the club built a covered rifle and pistol range. “The grant from FWP was definitely impor-



**SHOTS HEARD 'ROUND THE STATE** Clockwise from top left: Broadwater Rod and Gun Club, Townsend; 3-D outdoor archery shoot at the Five Valleys Archery Club range, Missoula; aerial view of skeet ranges in Libby; artistic iron sign at the Denton Rod & Gun Club; Lewistown’s Central Montana Shooting Complex; sighting in a rifle at the Great Falls Shooting Sports Complex; muzzleloader shooter at the Deep Creek range, near Missoula; indoor shooting lanes at the Greenway Range, Bozeman.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MONTANA FWP; COURTESY FIVE VALLEYS ARCHERY CLUB; MONTANA FWP; NEAL & MIJUSHLER; DEJVOGEL; GLENN BRADBURY; MONTANA FWP