

Respecting other perspectives

I was both honored and encouraged earlier this year when Governor Steve Bullock appointed me director of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

It was an honor knowing I'd be back at the helm of this remarkable agency. FWP plays an essential role in Montana's outdoor culture and recreation-based economy. And it's staffed by a dedicated and professional corps of biologists, game wardens, park managers, and others. I know of no more committed, qualified, and experienced group of conservation professionals than the men and women working for this department.

Encouragement came from across the state. Over the past two months I've heard from conservationists, legislators, guides and outfitters, livestock operators, and others—Democrats and Republicans—who told me they agreed with Governor Bullock's sensible approach to state management that looks for common ground and consensus.

That's the same approach I use for managing Montana's fish and wildlife conservation agency. My goal is to find solutions to fish and wildlife management issues. That almost always requires a lot of building—building relationships, building trust, and building on Montana's best traditions of wildlife conservation. And it means maintaining and strengthening good relations between landowners and sportsmen.

Disagreements about fish and wildlife management are nothing new. That's good; it shows that people care. In fact, the worst thing for bison, elk, wolves, walleyes, trout, and state parks would be if no one walked up to the microphone at an FWP Commission hearing or voiced an opinion in public input meetings.

But just because people disagree doesn't mean they can't respect each other's opinions and values.

As was the case when I was the FWP director from 2001 to 2008, my door is always open. If you have a beef with department policies or actions, come on in and let's talk. I can't say I'll do whatever you ask—that would be a reckless promise—but I will listen carefully and respectfully and do my best to understand your point of view and those of other individuals you may represent.

Ultimately, my responsibility and that of FWP is to the fish and

wildlife resources of Montana. The legislature created this department to establish a cadre of trained professionals dedicated to fish and wildlife stewardship for today's citizens and visitors and those of future generations. That's our mission, and we won't ever lose sight of that.

But the road to effective fish and wildlife conservation can take many routes. I'm a firm believer in the idea that if everyone compromises a little, we can all find common ground that strengthens Montana's great tradition of sustaining abundant and diverse fish

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and wildlife. I also believe we can find ways for those natural resources to continue supporting top-notch hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching in a manner that recognizes the rights of the public to wildlife held in trust by the state as well as the rights of private property owners.

If there's one word to represent what I and this department have in store for the next four years, it's "respect." FWP will continue to respect the fish and wildlife we're entrusted to conserve, while at the same time respecting hunters, anglers, landowners, outfitters, nonhunters, local businesses, wildlife watchers, and others whose values, livelihoods, or recreational activities are affected by how we manage those resources.

That's how things worked when I was here in the past, and that's how things will work from now on.

—M. JEFF HAGENER, Montana FWP Director