

# Inclusive, transparent, fair

**A**s FWP’s new director—the 24th over the department’s 116-year history—I want to thank outgoing director Jeff Hagener for his commitment to Montana’s fish, wildlife, parks, and recreational resources and for handing the baton to me to build from his legacy. I also want to let readers of *Montana Outdoors* know a bit about me and where I envision FWP going during the next four years.

I worked as an attorney for this department from 1998 to 2011, helping FWP fight for wolf delisting, protect stream access, and conserve habitat. During my 13 years here, I also learned the importance of securing access to public lands, how private property provides essential wildlife habitat, and how climate change threatens our valuable trout fisheries. After leaving FWP, I went to the Department of the Interior to work on parks, conservation, river, and wildlife issues. I then returned to Montana to teach natural resources and wildlife law at the University of Montana.

I hunt, fish, and enjoy camping and hiking in Montana’s wonderfully diverse state parks, among other outdoor activities.

A reasonable question by anyone who cares about FWP is whether I plan to continue the course set by Jeff during his 12 years as director. I do. I’m committed to our fish, wildlife, parks, and recreational resources and heritage. I’ll continue Jeff’s work to strengthen department relations with stockgrowers, farmers, and other landowners; delist the grizzly bear; open more public lands to hunting and other recreation; strengthen the financial health of our state parks system; and broaden our fish and wildlife funding base while serving a more diverse group of outdoor recreationists.

Right away my top priority will be to unify the agency around the FWP vision document.

That 22-page document was created over the past two years by FWP staff who drew upon ideas, concerns, and suggestions from employees and the public across the state. It sets a course for this agency over the next decade and makes clear FWP’s core values, such as embracing the public trust, respecting property rights, and using science. The vision document also commits the department to improving public service, accomplishing more through partnerships, and increasing opportunities for outdoor recreation, to name just a few goals.

In this fast-changing world, we as an agency need to adapt and adjust to remain relevant. Hunters and anglers continue to ask for more and better information, access, and opportunities. Public interest in nongame wildlife management and wildlife watching recreation continues to grow. Visits to state parks have doubled in the last few years, while revenue to manage and maintain those treasured sites has flatlined. Rapidly developing technologies such as smartphone apps create new opportunities for serving our various

publics. And that’s just for starters.

In responding to these and other challenges outlined in the FWP vision document, this department needs unity to become stronger, more responsive, and more creative. We also need to work more collaboratively with communities, businesses, interest groups, and other agencies. And all the while we must be inclusive, transparent, and fair.



The world we live in has never been so interconnected. Consider the recent discovery of invasive mussels in Montana. The invasive species threatens agriculture and fishing industries, outdoor recreation, and aquatic ecosystems. Responding to the threat has required all concerned parties to come together and agree on appropriate responses for containment and control. Despite FWP’s proven expertise in managing aquatic invasive species, this is not an issue we can tackle alone. That’s also true with so many issues we face.

As FWP’s new director, I’ll try some new approaches to solving problems, but I’ll be sure that the department’s long-held priorities and values stay the same. I’ve been with FWP before and have worked for years on the issues challenging the agency. I’m surrounded by smart and capable men and women from all divisions of the department. With their advice and support, I’ll do everything in my power to ensure that FWP continues to manage the state’s fish, wildlife, and parks responsibly and sustainably so that they remain central to the Montana experience we all value.

—**Martha Williams**, Director, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

*To view the FWP vision document online, Google “FWP Vision and Guide.”*