

Same direction, different approach

I'm not a scientist, but over the past nearly two decades I've had the good fortune to work with some of the nation's best wildlife and fisheries scientists here at FWP.

One of the many things I admire about those biologists, including their integrity and intellect, is the emphasis on asking questions: Why are moose numbers declining in one part of Montana but not another? How much cold water do bull trout need to survive? What factors limit grizzly bear population growth?

Scientists are right to be skeptical about what they and others observe. For instance, in the 2010s it appeared that wolves were causing declining elk numbers in the upper Bitterroot. But when FWP scientists rigorously tested that hypothesis, they learned it was mostly mountain lions that were eating into the area's elk herds.

This investigative process, known as the scientific method, reveals new information, new ways of getting things done, and new insights. It aims at improvement.

Inspired by this approach, I've asked everyone in FWP to apply it to the ways we conduct business.

For example, we recently reviewed and adjusted the approval process for our native fish habitat restoration projects. We are now giving proposed projects more public oversight—via the FWP commission, whose role is to represent the public's interest—in order to flag potentially controversial management actions and deal with them ahead of time.

We're taking the same approach to evaluating our wildlife research. Here we're looking at how effectively information gleaned from completed studies has been applied to wildlife management decisions. There's a real efficiency in applying research findings as much as circumstances allow, including outside the original study areas. We need to make sure that wildlife biologists across the state are fully aware of completed research projects and how the results might help them manage wildlife in their areas.

Informing management decisions and then appropriately monitoring the results is an adaptive approach to making effective use of completed research. In short, we're redoubling our efforts to make sure sound research projects from some of the world's top wildlife research scientists are applied wherever it makes sense to do so.

Why evaluate these and other FWP management processes? Because we're a public agency with an especially important responsibility: stewarding Montana's fish, wildlife, and state parks. We never have and never should stop striving to do better—to be more efficient, more transparent, and more effective. It would

be irresponsible to do otherwise.

This analytical approach in no way changes this agency's overall direction. We maintain our commitment to serving the public, embracing the public trust, using science, and honoring tradition.

Rest assured: We're staying the course of scientifically informed management and transparent processes. Montana will continue to manage viable grizzly bear and wolf populations. Stewardship of bull trout, cutthroat trout, pallid sturgeon, and other at-risk native species will remain a major focus of FWP fisheries management. As it has been for decades, habitat will continue to be the foundation



This analytical approach in no way changes this agency's overall direction. We maintain our commitment to serving the public, embracing the public trust, using science, and honoring tradition.

of wildlife and fisheries conservation.

But what may change is how we go about achieving these goals. We will look at all the processes this department conducts, ensuring each is as transparent, cost-effective, customer-focused, and socially sustainable as possible.

We may adopt some new ways of doing business, but the bottom line of our business—stewarding Montana's fish, wildlife, and state parks—will remain the same as always.

—Hank Worsch, Director, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks