

# A great tradition continues



New state funding will enable FWP to purchase more recreational sites such as Brush Lake State Park, a prairie oasis located in eastern Montana.

MONTANA FWP

During the past 70 years, many Montana leaders have had the foresight to acquire state parks, wildlife management areas, fishing access sites, and other public lands across the state. Wild Horse Island, wildlife management areas along the Rocky Mountain Front, and fishing access sites up and down the Yellowstone River are examples of resources we all enjoy today thanks to some forward-thinking initiatives carried out many years ago.

During the 2007 legislative session, lawmakers continued that tradition by appropriating \$10 million from the state general fund, part of Governor Schweitzer's Square Deal for Montanans, for one-time purchases of state parks, fishing access sites, and areas with vital access to other public lands. The governor and other elected officials recognize that land prices are skyrocketing and key parcels the state does not acquire now may soon become priced beyond reach.

FWP is now looking for new recreation land acquisitions. Among

the criteria are that the sites should be unique and located close to population bases, have local support, and contain wildlife habitat. We are also looking for sites that give the most value for the dollar.

For example, we are getting close to acquiring what will be a new state park near Culbertson along the Missouri River. The 5,000-acre ranch is a wildlife haven, containing biologically rich grasslands, river bottomlands, and rolling hills covered in juniper and ponderosa pine. Once we acquire the area, we plan to provide a campground where families can stay in summer and hunters can set up base camp during fall. The spectacular scenery and rolling landscape offer great potential for a trails network. Fishing and boating access to the Missouri River is another plus. We might also retain part of the irrigated agricultural land currently in production.

Years ago, this department acquired land if it had one strong benefit, such as providing good winter big game range or a site to launch boats. Acquisitions today have multiple benefits, such as habitat for both game and nongame species. They also provide a wider diversity of recreational opportunities, including camping, hiking, and bird watching along with traditional hunting and fishing. What's more, we are increasingly teaming with groups such as the Mule Deer Foundation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, and various state and federal agencies to put into public ownership lands that a single group could not acquire on its own.

Public lands are one of the greatest legacies any conservation-minded citizen, agency, or state can leave to future generations. I hope that in years to come, Montanans and visitors will look back at 2007 as a year when the state continued its great tradition of funding new recreational and wildlife sites, and that those public lands provide the same great benefits that past acquisitions are providing today.

—M. Jeff Hagener, *Director, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks*

NATURAL WONDERS  
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**Q. I've heard of a spot in Glacier National Park where, if you stood there and cried, your tears could end up in the Pacific Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, or Hudson's Bay. Can that be possible?**



**A.** Yes, at a spot called Triple Divide Peak, the continent's hydrological apex. North America's three major river systems begin on this one mountain. Precipitation falling on the mountain's north face eventually ends up in Canada's northeast-flowing Saskatchewan and Nelson rivers; water on the west face flows down to the Flathead then Clark Fork then Columbia rivers; and water on the east face goes to the Marias then Missouri then Mississippi rivers.

**Q. Recently our family hiked through Custer National Forest near Red Lodge. Is that the same national forest we drove through when in**

**South Dakota's Black Hills?**

**A.** Yes. Custer National Forest calls itself "the most diverse and widespread forest in the whole National Forest Service system."



It has three separate districts stretching 360 miles from the northwestern corner of South Dakota to the northeastern corner of Yellowstone National Park. The famous Derby Fire of 2006 burned in the northwesternmost corner of Custer National Forest, about 15 miles south of Big Timber.