

Summary of Research



Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks

Understanding the Values Montanans Hold Concerning Wildlife

RMU Research Summary No. 28

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The purpose of this research summary is to describe the values and basic beliefs that Montanans hold concerning wildlife and wildlife management. A recent study entitled *Wildlife Values in the West* serves as the foundation for the information presented herein (Teel et al., 2005). This study was conducted by Colorado State University (CSU), in cooperation with the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) and 19 participating states in the western United States. The primary objectives of the study were to: (a) describe the current array of public values toward wildlife and identify their distribution across states; (b) to segment publics on the basis of their values toward wildlife and understand their socio-demographic and lifestyle characteristics; and, (c) to begin to understand how and why wildlife values are changing and determine the possible implications of value shift for wildlife management.

A second study entitled *Hunting Access Management on Private Lands in Montana* offers additional “wildlife values” insight specific to private landowners in Montana (McCoy et al., 2009). This study was conducted by CSU, in cooperation with WAFWA and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). Building upon results from the *Wildlife Values in the West* research, a component of this study explored the values and basic beliefs that Montana landowners hold concerning wildlife and wildlife management.

WHAT ARE WILDLIFE VALUES?

The concept of wildlife value orientations has emerged as a way of capturing the diversity of values that people hold toward wildlife. A useful way of summarizing information about wildlife values is to identify different “types” of people on the basis of their orientations. The *Wildlife Values in the West* study identified four types of people: (1) Utilitarian, (2) Mutualist, (3) Pluralist, and (4) Distanced.

UTILITARIAN. Believe that wildlife should be used and managed primarily for human benefit. Individuals with a strong utilitarian orientation are more likely to prioritize human well-being over wildlife in their attitudes and behaviors. They are also more likely to find justification for treatment of wildlife in utilitarian terms and to rate actions that result in death or harm to wildlife as being acceptable.

MUTUALIST. View wildlife as capable of living in relationships of trust with humans, as if part of an extended family, and as deserving of rights and caring. Those with a strong mutualism orientation are less likely to support actions resulting in death or harm to wildlife, more likely to engage in welfare-enhancing behaviors for individual wildlife (e.g., feeding), and more likely to view wildlife in human terms (e.g., Bambi).

PLURALIST. Hold both a mutualism and a utilitarian value orientation toward wildlife. Which of the orientations plays a role is dependent upon the given situation. For certain issues, Pluralists are likely to respond in a manner similar to that of Utilitarians, whereas for other issues they may behave more like Mutualists.

DISTANCED. Do not hold either a utilitarian or a mutualism orientation. As their label suggests, they tend to be less interested in wildlife and wildlife-related issues. The Distanced type is also more likely than the other value types to express fear, or concern for safety, while in the outdoors due to the possibility of negative encounters with wildlife (e.g., risk of being attacked or contracting a disease).

Compared to the other value types, Utilitarians and Pluralists are slightly older on average, more likely to be male; more likely to have lived in the state for a longer period of time; and, more likely to be hunters.

VALUE SHIFT

It is generally believed that there has been a gradual shift away from traditional values toward wildlife that emphasize the use and management of wildlife for human benefit. This trend is purportedly one of the most influential factors shaping wildlife management today. It is believed to be associated, for example, with the pervasive stakeholder conflict inherently found in contemporary wildlife management issues, declining hunting participation, the growth of non-governmental organizations that emphasize “non-traditional views,” and stakeholder intervention in wildlife policy through mechanisms such as ballot initiatives.



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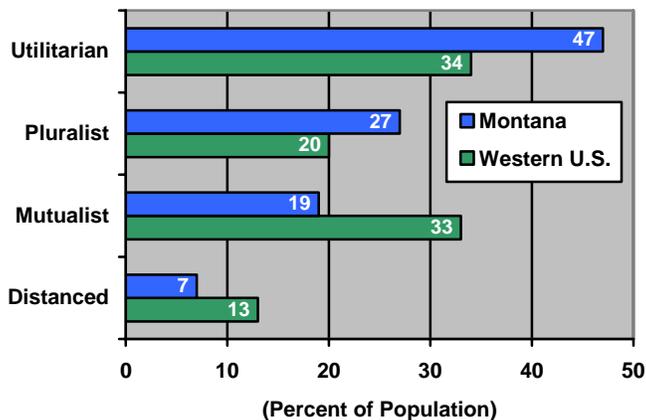


Results from the *Wildlife Values in the West* study provide support for this notion—a gradual shift away from utilitarian value orientations toward wildlife. Study findings also suggest that with sustained population growth and an extension of past trends (i.e., increased urbanization, affluence, and education), we will likely see a continued erosion of utilitarian thought and greater movement toward a mutualism orientation toward wildlife in this country.

WHAT ABOUT MONTANA?

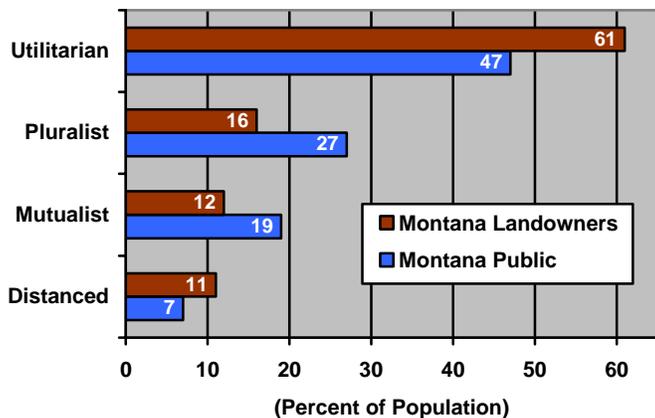
Results from the *Wildlife Values in the West* study demonstrate that Montana (not unlike other rural states such as Alaska, Wyoming, Idaho, North Dakota, and South Dakota) has a high percentage of individuals who can be classified as Utilitarians (Figure 1). In total, nearly three-quarters of Montanans hold Utilitarian or Pluralistic wildlife value orientations.

Figure 1. Wildlife value orientations—Montana compared to the western United States as a whole.



Results from the *Hunting Access Management on Private Lands in Montana* study show that, compared to the Montana public as a whole, an even higher percentage of Montana landowners¹ can be classified as Utilitarians (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Wildlife value orientations—Montana landowners compared to the Montana public as a whole.



¹ The target population for this study was private landowners in Montana who own at least 160 acres.

DISCUSSION

The information presented in this research summary has important implications for wildlife management in Montana. Results from the *Wildlife Values in the West* study suggest that Montana is not necessarily immune from the wildlife value shift that has been occurring elsewhere in the country. As Montana continues to grow and become more developed, we may see a gradual erosion of utilitarian thought in the state. Such a shift would likely present additional challenges for wildlife managers. Deer and elk management provides an excellent example. Right now, hunting is an important source of agency revenue as well as a tool for managing deer and elk populations throughout the state. From the studies referenced in this research summary, we know that nearly three-quarters of Montana residents hold Utilitarian or Pluralistic wildlife value orientations. This translates into a high level of public support for hunting, and Montana also arguably has an adequate supply of hunters for deer and elk management purposes. A gradual shift away from traditional utilitarian values in Montana might change all that.

In the future, FWP intends to continue working with researchers at CSU and other institutions who are leading the effort to better understand wildlife values and implications for wildlife management. It is hoped that both of the studies referenced in this research summary will be replicated in the not so distant future, in an effort to document on-the-ground trends in wildlife value orientations amongst the public in Montana and elsewhere.

REFERENCES FOR THE DETAILED PROJECT REPORTS

- McCoy, C., Teel, T. L., & Lewis, M. S. (2009). *Findings from a research project entitled: "Hunting Access Management on Private Lands in Montana."* (Project Report No. 82). Project Report for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. Fort Collins, CO: Colorado State University, Dept. of Human Dimensions of Natural Resources.
- Teel, T. L., Dayer, A. A., Manfredo, M. J., & Bright, A. D. (2005). *Regional results from the research project entitled: "Wildlife Values in the West."* (Project Report No. 58). Project Report for the Western Assoc. of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Fort Collins, CO: Colorado State University, Department of Human Dimensions of Natural Resources.

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