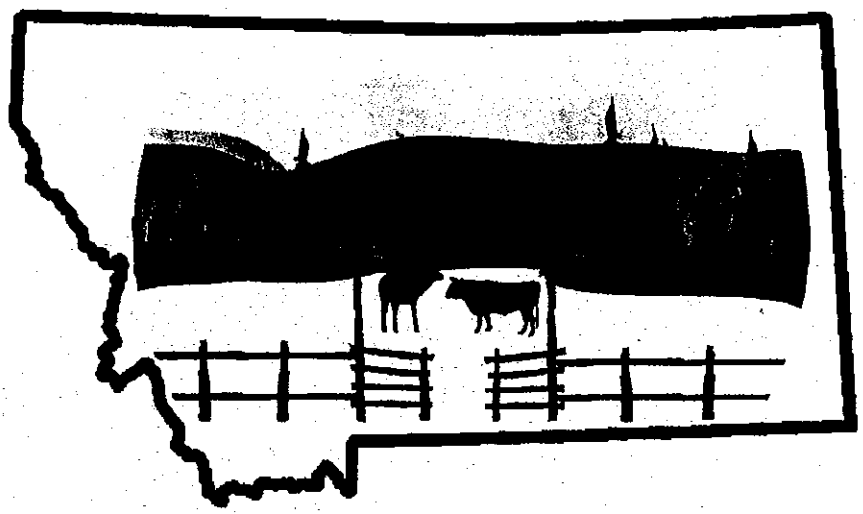
Private Land/Public Wildlife Advisory Council

Report and Recommendations



Presented to
Governor Brian Schweitzer
and the
59th Legislature

January, 2005

BLOCK MANAGEMENT

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Private Land/Public Wildlife Council

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Fishing Access Enhancement Program Report

COUNCIL CHARGE/PURPOSE

In 1995, a review committee (Private Land/Public Wildlife Council) was established in statute to make recommendations to the Governor regarding issues related to private land and public wildlife. The Council's statutory charge is articulated in Montana Code Annotated (MCA) 87-1-269 *(Effective March 2, 2002)* as follows:

"**Report Required - review committee.** (1) The governor shall appoint a committee of persons interested in issues related to hunters, anglers, landowners, and outfitters, including but not limited to the hunting access enhancement program, the fishing access enhancement program, landowner-hunter relations, outfitting industry issues, and other issues related to private lands and public wildlife. The committee must have broad representation of landowners, outfitters, and sportspersons. The department may provide administrative assistance as necessary to assist the review committee.

(2) (a) The review committee shall report to the governor and to the 59th legislature regarding the success of various elements of the hunting access enhancement program, including a report of annual landowner participation, the number of acres annually enrolled in the program, hunter harvest success on enrolled lands, the number of qualified applicants who were denied enrollment because of a shortfall in funding, and an accounting of program expenditures, and make suggestions for funding, modification, or improvement needed to achieve the objectives of the program.

(b) The review committee shall report to the governor and to the 59th legislature regarding the success of the fishing access enhancement program and make suggestions for funding, modification, or improvement needed to achieve the objectives of the program.

3) The director may appoint additional advisory committees that are considered necessary to assist in the implementation of the hunting access enhancement program and the fishing access enhancement program and to advise the commission regarding the development of rules implementing the hunting access enhancement program and the fishing access enhancement program. *(Terminates March 1, 2006 – sec. 6, Ch. 544, L. 1999; sec. 6, Ch. 196, L. 2001.)*"

In July, 2003, Governor Martz appointed 15 Council members to terms ending June 30, 2005, re-affirming the Council's charge as follows:

a) **preserving Montana's hunting heritage;**

b) **providing public hunting access on private and isolated public land;**

c) **reducing landowner impacts related to public hunting access;**

d) **providing tangible incentives to landowners who allow public hunting;**

e) **helping outfitters stabilize their industry and improve their image.**

During the period July 2003 through December 2004, the Council met seven times at various locations throughout the state. On June 15, 2004, the Council presented Draft Recommendations to the public. Upon completion of a 45-day public comment period, during which 69 individuals or organizations submitted formal comments, the Council adopted, through consensus, 11 FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS, which are contained in this report on pages 5-7.

Throughout their work, Council members worked within a framework of "Guiding Principles," which they developed during their initial meetings.

PL/PW Council Guiding Principles

- *We believe that private property rights are fundamental to our liberty and must be protected.*
- *We believe that hunting is an integral part of our heritage and shall be promoted, preserved, and enhanced, and that ongoing efforts to encourage and improve access opportunities for the hunting public are desirable and should be pursued.*
- *We believe that sound management practices, including hunting as a management tool, promote the conservation of habitat and the public's wildlife.*
- *We believe that hunters share responsibility to gain and maintain hunting access through ethical behavior and accountability for their actions.*
- *We believe that improving communication and relationships among landowners, sportsmen and women, outfitters, and FWP is critical to our success.*
- *We believe that ethical behavior among all interested parties will enhance relationships among landowners, sportsmen and women, outfitters, and FWP, and could lead to increased access.*
- *We affirm the economic and social importance of agriculture and hunting to Montana. We also acknowledge changing land ownership patterns and trends in the State and their potential impacts.*
- *We appreciate, support, and recognize landowners that provide public access and hunting whether through a formal cooperative effort or their own volition.*
- *We believe that all landowners enrolled in formal cooperative efforts should be treated according to fair standards.*
- *We recognize the importance of maintaining current access to public land, and where possible, using access enhancement strategies to expand it.*

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND RATIONALE

<u>FINAL RECOMMENDATION #1</u>: Re-authorize existing program by repealing sunset provisions attached to program statutes and assure continuation of a citizens' review committee. ***(Requires legislation)***

Existing program includes the following:

1) statutes authorizing FWP to administer hunter management/hunting access programs;
2) three sources of existing funding for hunting access programs, including but not limited to:
    a. variable-priced outfitter-sponsored B10 and B11 licenses;
    b. resident and nonresident Hunting Access Enhancement Fees;
    c. $55 of the $110 nonresident upland bird license;

Rationale:

- *Existing program has proven popular and successful, based on survey data and landowner, hunter, and department participation.*
- *It is the Council's intent to support FWP to enhance and improve the hunting access programs.*
- *Re-authorization of the current program received strong support from members of the public commenting on Council draft recommendations.*
- *Council members feel that a citizens' review committee should make recommendations for funding, modification, or improvement needed to achieve program objectives. FWP shall provide fiscal analyses of the program to the committee for review and recommendations.*

<u>FINAL RECOMMENDATION #2:</u> Create a "Montana Access Partners" decal, made available through voluntary purchase at an amount of $10 annually, with revenue dedicated to the Hunting Access Enhancement and Fishing Access Enhancement access programs; ***(No legislation required)***

Rationale:

- *Provides affordable opportunity for voluntary funding source by interested individuals;*
- *Provides a visible symbol of support for hunting/fishing access programs;*

<u>FINAL RECOMMENDATION #3:</u> Explore the establishment of a trust fund, providing for voluntary donations with revenue dedicated to the hunting/fishing access programs, to be administered through the FWP Foundation. ***(No legislation required)***

Rationale:

- *Provides an economic incentive for larger contributions by individuals or corporate sponsors through tax and estate planning benefits;*
- *Provides an additional voluntary opportunity for partnership in continuing the success of hunting access programs;*

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND RATIONALE

<u>FINAL RECOMMENDATION #4:</u> Create a Big Game Super Tag program, allowing individuals to purchase unlimited chances for special "super" tags for big game species in a voluntary lottery-type system, which provides for random selection of the permit recipients, with revenue dedicated to the hunting access programs. ***(Requires legislation)***

Rationale:

- *Provides significant funding without a substantial contribution from any one source;*
- *Patterned after successful new program in Idaho;*

<u>FINAL RECOMMENDATION #5:</u> Consider sale of advertising in the Hunting Access Guides as a possible source of revenue for funding the hunting access programs if FWP determines it is economically feasible. ***(No legislation required)***

Rationale:

- *Proposal may allow Department to offset some administrative costs;*
- *FWP is currently authorized to use advertising in Department publications;*

<u>FINAL RECOMMENDATION #6:</u> Allow all cooperators to receive complimentary license AND compensation. ***(Requires legislation)***

Rationale:

- *Provides greater equity in compensation to cooperators;*
- *Provides additional landowner incentive to participate in hunting access programs;*
- *Currently nonresident cooperators are eligible to receive complimentary license OR compensation, but not both;*

<u>FINAL RECOMMENDATION #7:</u> Allow BMA Cooperator to designate immediate family member to receive a complimentary Class AAA Resident Sportsman's License or Class B-10 Nonresident Big Game Combination License in lieu of BMA Cooperator receiving a complimentary license for his or her own use. If Cooperator elects to utilize this option, cost of complimentary license issued would be deducted from total Block Management compensation paid to cooperator. Cooperator may designate resident or nonresident family member to receive license. ***(Requires legislation)***

Rationale:

- *Provides additional incentive for BMA cooperators;*
- *Deducted compensation allows for enrollment of more cooperators;*
- *Provides fair and equitable treatment of resident and nonresident cooperators;*

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND RATIONALE

<u>FINAL RECOMMENDATION #8:</u> Improve and standardize BMA maps, incorporating landowner input for increased accuracy. ***(No legislation required)***

Rationale:

- *Addresses problems with trespass;*
- *Responds to hunter/landowner requests;*

<u>FINAL RECOMMENDATION #9:</u> Hire more game wardens and hunting access technicians, with duties assigned specifically to provide better patrol, management, and enrollment of properties in Block Management. ***(Requires legislation)***

Rationale:

- *Responds to landowner and hunter requests;*
- *Enhances overall program administration and stability;*

<u>FINAL RECOMMENDATION #10:</u> Re-authorize FWP Private Land Fishing Access Program. ***(Requires legislation)***

Rationale:

- *Existing program is successful and has potential to expand fishing access opportunities;*
- *It is the intent of the Council to support FWP in enhancing and improving the fishing access program.*

<u>FINAL RECOMMENDATION #11</u>: Re-authorize the FWP Habitat Montana Program. ***(Requires legislation)***

Rationale:

- *Existing program is successful and has potential to protect additional important wildlife habitat that is seriously threatened;*
- *It is the intent of the Council to support FWP in protecting and preserving important wildlife habitat that is seriously threatened;*

CONCEPTS/DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS *CONSIDERED*, BUT NOT ADOPTED

After reviewing public comments and deliberating, the Council chose to not adopt the following draft recommendations or concepts:

1. DRAFT RECOMMENDATION NOT ADOPTED: FWP should create a new category of license, a Landowner-Sponsored B-10 Elk/Deer Combination License, subject to certain provisions.

Rationale for not adopting:

- *Public comment did not support this recommendation;*

2. DRAFT RECOMMENDATION NOT ADOPTED: Remove restrictions on impact payments for species/season restrictions under certain wildlife management situations.

Rationale for not adopting:

- *Current ARM rules already provide this authority;*

3. DRAFT CONCEPT NOT ADOPTED: Allow nonresident landowners to sponsor hunters for B-11 deer combination licenses. ***(under current law, only resident landowners may sponsor hunters for these licenses)***

Rationale for not adopting:

- *Council members felt that a full review and evaluation of the current system of landowner-sponsored licenses should be conducted before any recommendations to modify or expand the program could be developed;*

Private Land/Public Wildlife Council – Member List – (2003 – 2005)

Darlyne Dascher (Chair)
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Redstone MT, 59527

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863 Middle Burnt Fork Rd.
Stevensville MT, 59870

Don Bothwell
110 Cardiff Avenue
Kalispell MT, 59901

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Bozeman MT, 59771

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Ekalaka MT, 59324

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2024 Upper Dry Gulch Rd.
Ovando MT, 59854

Donna Tate McDonald
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Alder MT, 59710

Rep. Michael Lange
208 Fair Park Drive
Billings MT, 59102

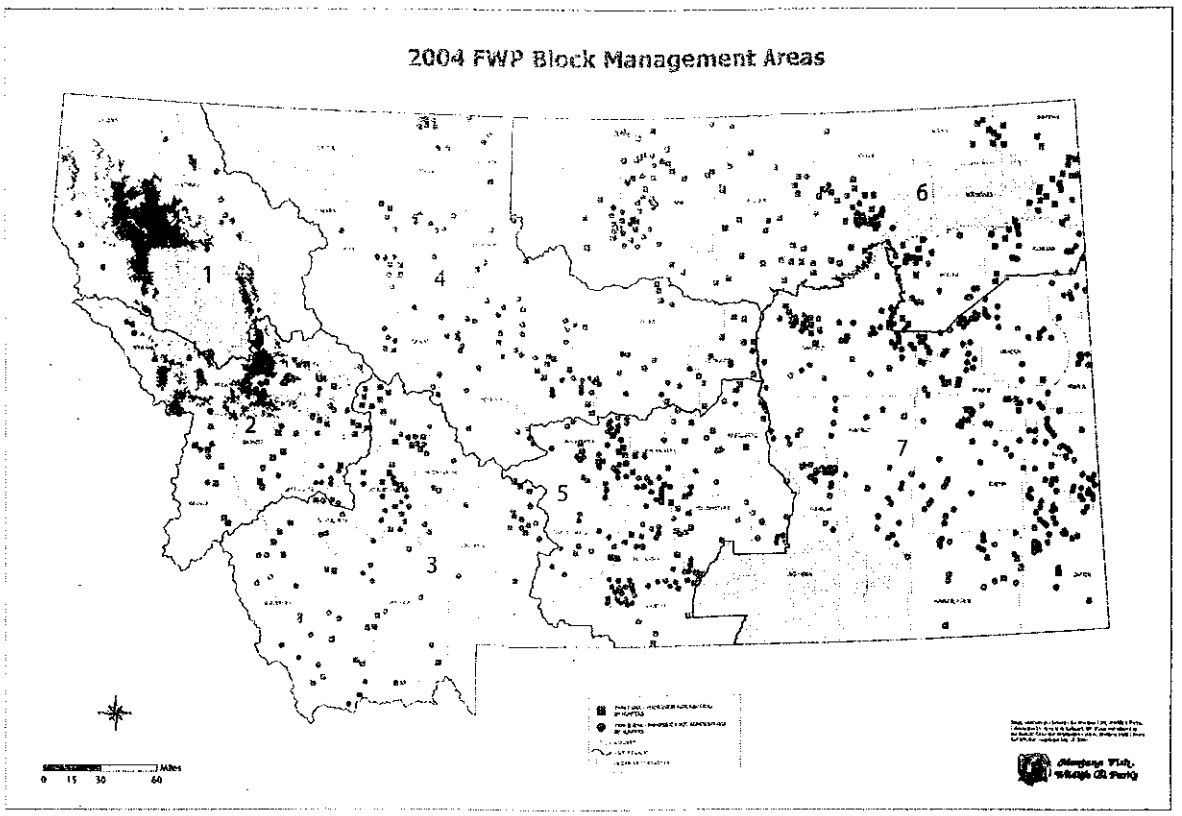
Senator Ken Hansen
P.O. Box 686
Harlem MT, 59526

Dan Walker
3031 Forsythia Blvd
Billings MT, 59102

BLOCK MANAGEMENT HUNTING ACCESS ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM REPORT (1996 – 2004)

- PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION
- PROGRAM FUNDING
- PROGRAM EVALUATION

BLOCK MANAGEMENT



2004 Block Management Program Statistics:

- **1,262 Cooperators; 981 (BMAs); 8,767,805 Acres;**

REGIONAL STATISTICS

R1: 14 Cooperators; 6 BMAs; 794,263 acres (majority is corporate timber land);

R2: 122 Cooperators; 61 BMAs; 312,420 acres;

R3: 100 Cooperators; 89 BMAs; 711,743 acres;

R4: 201 Cooperators; 121 BMAs; 1,437,311 acres;

R5: 204 Cooperators; 174 BMAs; 1,054,370 acres;

R6: 280 Cooperators; 183 BMAs; 1,290,416 acres;

R7: 341 Cooperators; 337 BMAs; 3,167, 281 acres;

BLOCK MANAGEMENT
Implementation through December 2004

PROGRAMS FOR HUNTER MANAGEMENT AND HUNTER ACCESS

< The department may establish within the Block Management Program programs of landowner assistance that encourage public access to private and public lands for the purposes of hunting. **(87-1-265 through 87-1-269 MCA)**

< Participation is voluntary, based on agreements between the landowner and FWP.

< Recreational liability protection (as described in 70-1-201 MCA) is extended to cooperators participating in the program.

< A landowner participating in the program may receive benefits, including compensation up to $12,000 annually, for providing public hunting access to enrolled land.

< Benefits will be provided to offset impacts associated with public hunting access including but not limited to general ranch maintenance, conservation efforts, weed control, fire protection, liability insurance, and road/parking-area maintenance.

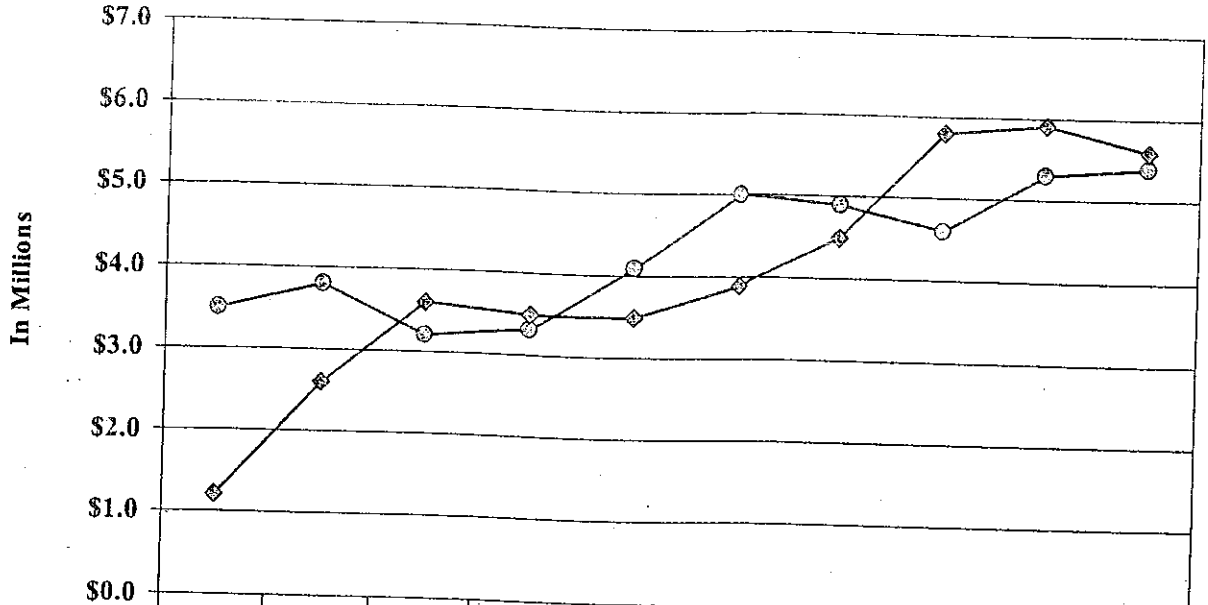
< Enrolled resident landowners may receive a non-transferable resident Sportsman's license.

< Nonresident landowners enrolled in the program may elect to receive a non-transferable nonresident Big Game Combination License in lieu of compensation. Licenses granted in this program will not affect the quota of 11,500 nonresident Big Game Combination Licenses.

2004 Block Management Program - Season Averages

a) average number of acres per cooperator..... 6,961
b) average number of hunter days per cooperator.....325
c) average landowner contract payment.....$3,129
d) average hunter use (resident / nonresident).... 82% res. / 14% nonres.

Hunting Access Enhancement Program
FY1996-2005



	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Revenues	$3.5	$3.8	$3.2	$3.3	$4.1	$5.0	$4.9	$4.6	$5.3	$5.4
Expenditures	$1.2	$2.6	$3.6	$3.5	$3.5	$3.9	$4.5	$5.8	$5.9	$5.6
Ending Balances	$2.3	$3.5	$3.1	$2.9	$3.5	$4.5	$5.0	$3.8	$3.3	$3.1

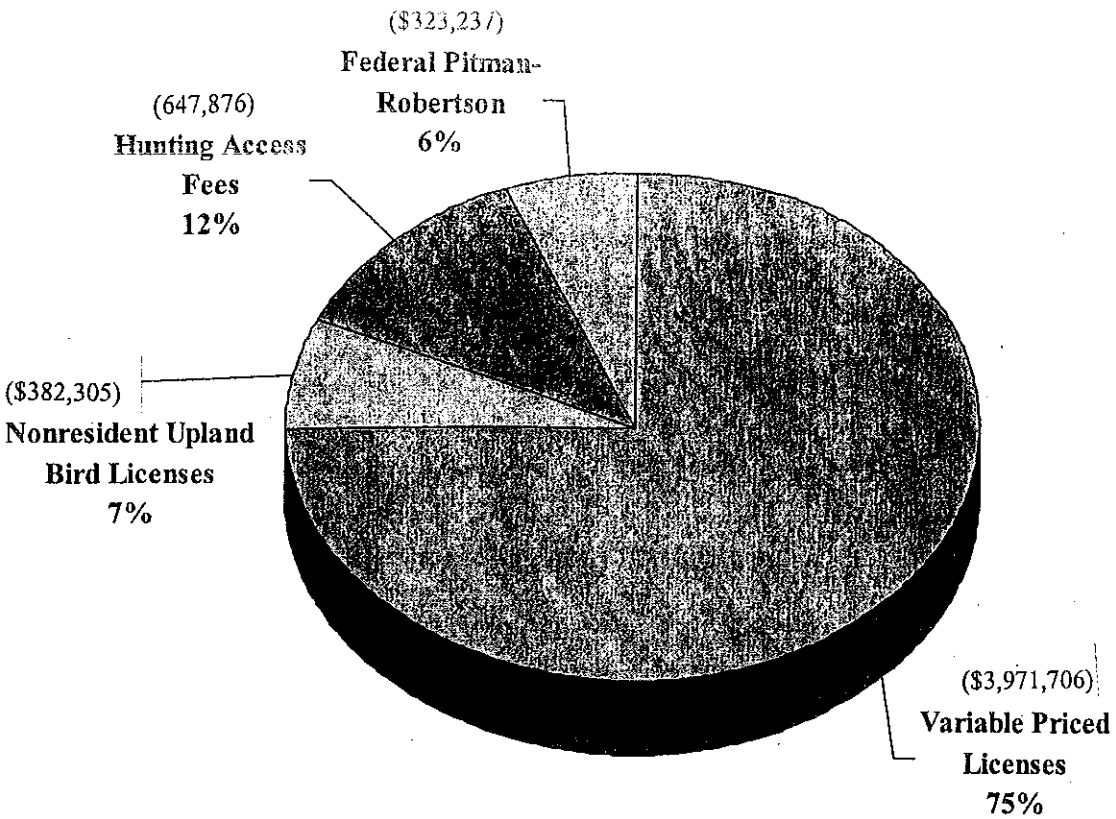
- Amounts include both state and federal money;
- FY 2001 – new revenue from nonresident upland bird license comes in the account;
- FY 2003 – new revenue from hunting access enhancement fee comes into the account, but due to dates implemented, only partial year of revenue generated; decline in nonresident upland bird license sales and undersell of variable-priced licenses results in overall decrease in revenue for this account during this fiscal year;
- FY 2004 – Rebound in nonresident upland bird license sales, sell-out of variable-priced license, and full year of hunting access enhancement fee sales results in increased revenue;

SUMMARY - BLOCK MANAGEMENT (1996 – 2004)

Year	Total Cooperators	Total BMAs	Total Acres	Total Hunter Days
1996	882	796	7,131,119	345,833
1997	937	744	7,545,606	364,090
1998	916	719	7,259,606	297,440
1999	930	720	7,147,023	294,784
2000	1004	766	7,696,500	326,180
2001	1082	857	8,653,420	348,524
2002	1150	921	8,809,758	378,444
2003	1245	986	8,761,893	408,093
2004	1262	981	8,767,387	411,299

Hunting Access Enhancement Program

FY2004 Revenues



Variable-Priced Outfitter-Sponsored Nonresident Big Game Combination Licenses

- A portion of the revenue generated by the sale of variable-priced nonresident hunting licenses set aside for clients of licensed outfitters is used to fund the hunting-access programs.

- Prices are set at market rates to ensure an average annual sale of 5500 Big Game Combination Licenses and 2300 Deer Combination Licenses. The annual average sale is calculated over a 5-year period.

- The FWP Commission sets the variable rate annually based on a citizen advisory group's input.

Nonresident Upland Game Bird License

- Effective 2000 license year, nonresident upland game bird license fee increased to $110, with $55 earmarked hunting access enhancement programs.

Resident/Nonresident Hunting Access Enhancement Fee

- Effective 2002 license year, hunting access enhancement free created ($2 resident/$10 nonresident), with revenue earmarked for hunting access enhancement program.

SUMMARY
Outfitter-Sponsored
Nonresident Variable-Priced License Sales
(1996 – 2004)

< A portion of the revenue generated by the sale of variable-priced nonresident hunting licenses set aside for clients of licensed outfitters is used to fund the hunting-access programs.

< Prices are set at market rates to ensure an average annual sale of 5500 Big Game Combination Licenses and 2300 Deer Combination Licenses. The annual average sale is calculated over a 5-year period.

< The FWP Commission sets the variable rate annually based on a citizen advisory group's input.

B-10 (Big Game Combination) Licenses

Year	Target	Price	Sales at Deadline	Date Sold Out	Net Sales
1996	5,500	$835	5,213	May 6	5,420
1997	5,500	$835	5,127	April 30	5,388
1998	5,500	$835	5,331	May 1	5,372
1999	5,500	$835	5,455	March 16	5,405
2000	5,600	$835	6,209	Deadline (3/15)	5,980
2001	5,500	$975	5,719	Deadline (3/15)	5,539
2002	5,400	$1,100	5,011	41 left on 9/3	5,209
2003	5,600	$1,025	4,801	276 left on 9/3	5,324
2004	5,800	$975	5,321	June 9	5,800

*Net sales reflect refunded licenses that were not re-issued.

B-11 (Deer Combination) Licenses

Year	Target	Price	Sales at Deadline	Date Sold Out	Net Sales
1996	2,300	$515	3,114	Deadline (3/15)	3,085
1997	2,100	$675	2,395	Deadline (3/15)	2,365
1998	2.300	$725	1.994	Deadline (3/15)	1,973
1999	2,000	$745	2,143	Deadline (3/15)	2,112
2000	1,955	$775	2,304	Deadline (3/15)	2,256
2001	2,300	$850	2,183	August 13	2,254
2002	2,565	$775	2,148	201 left on 9/3	2,329
2003	2,300	$775	2,026	September 2	2,255
2004	2,300	$775	2,298	March 16	2,300

*Net sales reflect refunded licenses that were not re-issued.

FY05 PROGRAM – PROJECTED EXPENDITURES:

Landowner Contracts:	$3,939,481
Landowner/Hunter Services:	$1,105,793
Enforcement (5 FTE):	$306,592
Administrative Overhead:	$301,631
TOTAL :	**$5,653,497**

Landowner Contract Payments: Under statutory authority (87-1-267 MCA), "Benefits will be provided to offset potential impacts associated with public hunting access, including but not limited to those associated with general ranch maintenance, conservation efforts, weed control, fire protection, liability insurance, roads, fences, and parking area maintenance." The current system, articulated in 12.4.206 ARM, provides for cooperators to receive a $250 annual enrollment payment, and up to $10 per hunter day in annual impact payments, with optional 5% additional weed management payment. Total annual payment may not exceed $12,000.

Landowner/Hunter Services:

- Approximately 45 seasonal BMA technicians are hired each hunting season to help set up, sign, patrol, and dismantle BMAs;

- Regional program coordinators negotiate contracts, produce informational materials, supervise seasonal staff, and respond to the needs of hunters and landowners.

- Program materials such as signs, sign-in boxes, rosters, permission slips, maps, and tabloids, and personal services and benefits for program staff are funded through program operations budgets. For the 2004 hunting season, nearly 150,000 maps, 34,000 regional BMA tabloids, and over 25,000 BMA signs were printed and distributed.

- Included in this category are expenditures for Access Montana projects (public land access) and Special Access projects (local projects focused on a specific species).

Enforcement (5 FTE):

- A total of 5 full-time warden positions are funded through Hunting Access Enhancement Program sources. This 5 FTE is allocated statewide to game wardens who patrol BMAs for hunter compliance of landowner and FWP rules. Game wardens also assist with BMA contract negotiations, delivery of BMA materials, and landowner/FWP contacts.

Administrative Overhead

- All FWP programs are assessed an administrative overhead charge, which is used to pay for various indirect costs associated with support functions primarily performed by staff in the Administration & Finance and Department Management divisions. Examples of such support functions include accounting, budgeting, property, personnel, administrative support, and data processing services. Administrative overhead charges are assessed on accounts based upon a percentage of overall expenditures.

Weed Management Payments: SB 326 (effective March 1, 2000) authorized FWP to offer up to 5% in additional incentive payments to Block Management Cooperators who agree to use those payments for specific weed management activities on their lands. For FY05, a total of $171,140 was paid specifically for use in weed management activities on BMAs. In past years, of landowners who elected to receive weed management payments:

34% indicated their intent to hire contractors for weed management measures;
86% indicated their intent to purchase herbicide or other chemicals;
6% indicated their intent to donate the payment to a county weed board;
3% indicated their intent to lease or rent livestock for weed control;
4% indicated their intent to implement some type of weed education;

*Some landowners indicated they intended to use the payment for multiple uses.

ENROLLMENT STATUS

Potential new cooperators are identified through various means, including individuals contacting FWP formally and asking to be placed on a waiting list for future enrollment consideration, individuals contacting FWP field staff and discussing possible future enrollment in the program, and FWP identifying potential candidates in high-priority areas or offering high-priority hunting opportunities and making initial contacts to identify potential interest in future enrollment. At the end of the 2003 hunting season, regional program coordinators reported approximately 225 potential new cooperators had indicated interest in enrolling if funds became available.

BLOCK MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Mission, Goals, Enrollment Criteria & Process

Mission Statement

Block Management is a cooperative, adaptable program designed to maintain Montana's hunting heritage and traditions by providing landowners with tangible benefits to encourage public hunting access to private land, promote partnerships between landowners, hunters, and FWP, and help manage wildlife resources and the impacts of public hunting.

Goals

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

1) Program supports state & regional wildlife program objectives.
2) Program supports other FWP wildlife programs.

HUNTER OPPORTUNITY

1) Program maintains current opportunities and expands new opportunities.
2) Hunter pressure is managed at levels satisfactory to landowners and hunters.

LANDOWNER RELATIONS

1) Program recognizes landowner contributions to maintaining wildlife resource.
2) Program establishes long-term positive relationships with hunters/landowners/FWP.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

1) Program is fiscally responsible and accountable.
2) Program maintains a measurable, acceptable level of satisfaction among participants.
3) Ongoing structured program review maintains program adaptability.

PARTICIPANT EDUCATION/OWNERSHIP

1) Program fosters ownership among program participants.
2) Program fosters responsible hunter behavior.
3) Program increases hunter respect for private property and landowner concerns.

ENROLLMENT CRITERIA

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

< Located in high-priority resource and habitat area as defined by management objectives.
< History of game damage problems.
< Opportunity to link with other FWP wildlife programs.

HUNTER OPPORTUNITY

< Size - acreage, type and quality of habitat, number of potential hunters/hunter days.
< Public demand for type of hunting opportunities provided.
< Diversity of hunting opportunities/species available.
< Opportunity to gain access to inaccessible public land.
< Hunter success rate.
< Location/proximity to other block management areas (may be + or -).
< Opportunity to provide unique hunting opportunity.
< Proximity to urban area.
< Lack of BMA restrictions on hunters (species, gender, other).
< Amount of legally-accessible public land nearby.

LANDOWNER RELATIONS

< History in block management program.
< History of public access.
< Opportunity to link with other block management areas.
< Threat of losing public access to commercial hunting activities.
< Presence of outfitting on block management area.
< Opportunity to link with other agencies' programs.
< Potential to enter into a long-term commitment.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

< Landowner's adherence to program requirements.
< Degree of accuracy in reporting hunter use.
< Cost in contract dollars.
< Cost in FWP resources (including personnel).

PARTICIPANT EDUCATION/OWNERSHIP

< Opportunity to develop BMA as cooperative effort between groups of landowners or landowners and hunters.
< Opportunity to utilize BMA as a pilot for something new (wildlife management effort, hunter management system, etc.)

2003 Season
Hunter Comment Cards/Daily Sign-In Coupons

A total of 16,105 hunter comment cards were received for the 2003 hunting season. These cards were voluntarily returned, and answered 3 specific questions.

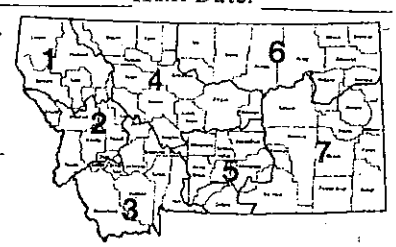
COMMENT CARD SAMPLE

BLOCK MANAGEMENT

BLOCK MANAGEMENT AREA
Harvest Report/Comment Card

BMA Name/Number: Ford-Garfield #69 Hunt Date: _____

BMA Location: 1 2 3 4 (5) 6 7
(Circle one region number)



1. What game species did you hunt? *(circle choice)*
Elk (Deer) *Antelope* *Upland bird* *Other* _____

2. Did you observe this game species? (yes)/ no

3. Did you harvest any game? (yes)/ no

4. Game taken (species & sex): MULE DEER Forked-Horn Buck

5. Please rate your BMA hunt: (Satisfactory) Unsatisfactory

COMMENTS: Mrs Garfield was very helpful in answering my questions. A lot of game on this ranch.

Please return a completed, postage-paid card after each BMA hunt. Information will be used to evaluate the BMA. Thanks!

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Total received: 16,105

Total hunters observing game they were hunting:	**13,081**	**81%**
Total hunters who bagged game:	**6,271**	**39%**
Total hunters who rated BMA experience satisfactory:	**13,219**	**82%**

NOTE: These cards are used to evaluate individual BMAs, monitor regional, area, and program trends, and measure general hunter satisfaction with their BMA experience. Postage-paid hunter comment cards were included in every regional tabloid distributed to hunters. Hunter comment card information was also incorporated into daily sign-in coupons used extensively in FWP regions 4, 5, and 6, at Type I BMAs where hunters administered their own permission.

Summary of Research

Block Management Landowner and Hunter Evaluations: Survey Highlights from 2003 and Comparisons to 1996 Surveys

Alan Charles and Michael S. Lewis

May 2004

RMU Research Summary No. 13

Montana's Block Management Program was established in 1985 amid concerns that public hunting access to private land was diminishing. Administered by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), the program has three main goals:

- To maintain public hunting access to private and isolated public land.
- To help landowners manage public hunting on lands under their control, and provide benefits to offset the impacts of those public hunting activities, like increased road maintenance, noxious weed control, time spent dealing with hunters, etc.
- To help FWP accomplish its mission of managing wildlife resources. In a state where nearly 65 percent of the land is privately owned, FWP depends on public hunting to manage populations of deer, elk, and other game animals.

A total of 1,251 landowners were enrolled in the program in 2003, comprising 8.8 million acres of Block Management Areas (BMAs) across the state. Approximately 80,000 people hunted a BMA in 2003 (which resulted in approximately 400,000 hunter days on all BMAs combined).

To measure the success of the program, FWP periodically conducts landowner and hunter evaluations. Two separate surveys were conducted following the 2003 hunting season:

1. **Landowner Evaluation.** All landowners enrolled in the program in 2003 were sent a survey by mail.
2. **Hunter Evaluation.** A randomly selected sample of 1,250 people who hunted on a BMA(s) in 2003 were sent a survey by mail.

These two surveys were replications of similar surveys conducted in 1996 (Charles, 1997). Hence, for the most part, results obtained from the 2003 surveys are directly comparable to 1996 survey results.

This research summary highlights the key findings from the 2003 landowner and hunter evaluations. Wherever possible, survey results obtained in 2003 are compared to those results obtained in 1996.

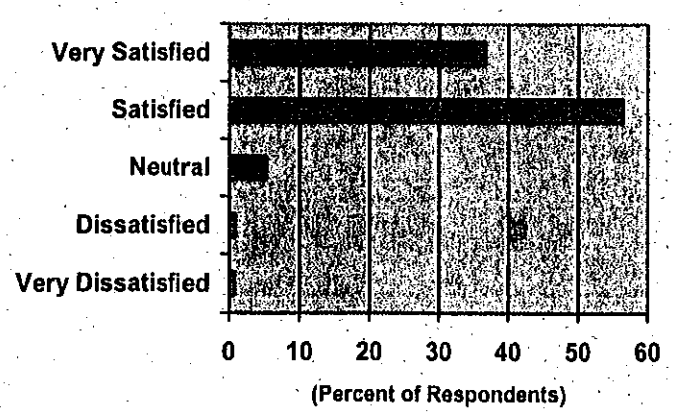
EXCELLENT RESPONSE TO BOTH SURVEYS

Overall, a 73 percent response rate was achieved from the landowner survey. A 64 percent response rate was achieved from the hunter survey. The response rates achieved for both surveys are considered to be very high for a mailback survey of this type.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2003 LANDOWNER EVALUATION

When asked how satisfied they were with the overall Block Management Program, 93 percent of the landowners who responded to the survey reported they were satisfied or very satisfied (see Figure 1). This compares to 80 percent in 1996.

Figure 1. Response to: "How satisfied are you with the overall Block Management Program?" (2003 Landowner Evaluation)



BLOCK MANAGEMENT

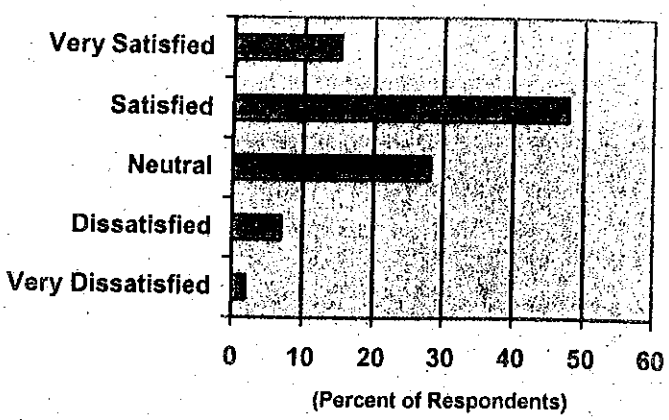
PUBLIC ACCESS • PRIVATE LAND

Most of the landowners (79 percent) reported the Block Management Program is an important or very important way for them to manage game numbers on their BMA(s). Related to this, 63 percent of the respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the results of the program in terms of managing game numbers on their BMA(s) in 2003 (see Figure 2). This compares to 60 percent of the respondents in 1996.

"Block Management helps preserve Montana's hunting heritage and traditions."

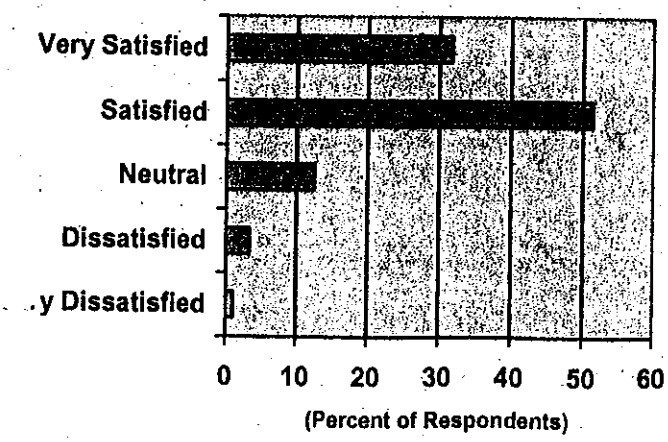
--Jeff Hagener, Director of Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Figure 2. Response to: "How satisfied were you with the results of the Block Management Program in managing game numbers on your BMA(s)?" (2003 Landowner Evaluation)



Almost all of the landowners (90 percent) also indicated that the Block Management Program is an important or very important way for them to manage hunter activities. Related to this, 83 percent of the respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the results of the program in terms of managing hunter activities on their BMA(s) in 2003 (see Figure 3), and 81 percent were satisfied with the number of hunters who hunted on their BMA(s). Furthermore, 91 percent rated hunter behavior on their BMA(s) as being good or very good in 2003. In 1996, 77 percent of the respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the program in terms of managing hunter activities.

Figure 3. Response to: "How satisfied were you with the results of the Block Management Program in terms of managing hunter activities?" (2003 Landowner Evaluation)



Of note, 81 percent of the landowners who completed and returned a survey for the 2003 season reported that they believe hunter behavior has improved or greatly improved as a result of the Block Management Program. This is a five percent increase from 1996.

Also, 64 percent of the landowners reported that their relationship with hunters has improved or greatly improved as a result of their participation in the program. That's a three percent increase from 1996. Less than two percent of the landowners in 2003 reported that their relationship with hunters has deteriorated or greatly deteriorated as a result of the program.

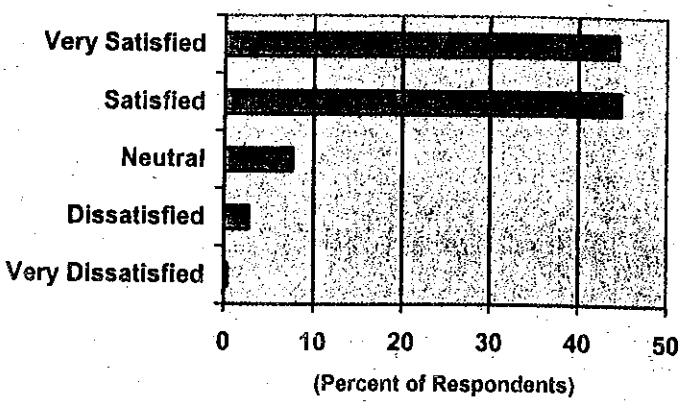
In terms of the compensation they received for enrolling in the program, 79 percent of the landowners responding to the survey reported they were satisfied or very satisfied with the total compensations they received for the 2003 hunting season. Less than seven percent were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. In 1996, 75 percent of the respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their total compensation.

Of the landowners enrolled in 2003 who expressed an opinion, 99 percent said they plan on continuing their participation in the Block Management Program for the 2004 hunting season.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2003 HUNTER EVALUATION

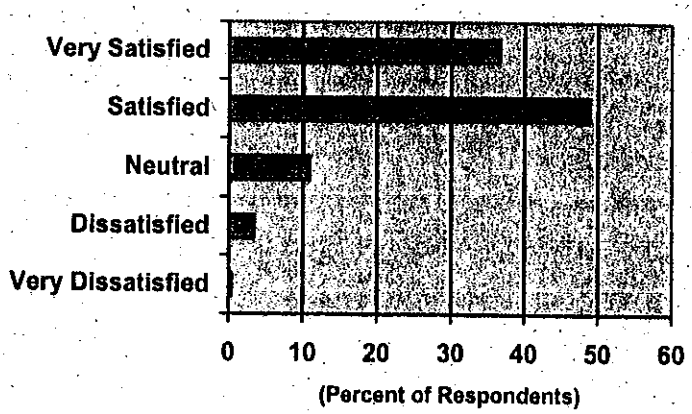
When asked how satisfied they were with the Block Management Program this past fall (2003), 89 percent of the hunters who responded to the survey reported they were satisfied or very satisfied (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Response to: "Overall, how satisfied were you with the Block Management Program this past fall?" (2003 Hunter Evaluation)

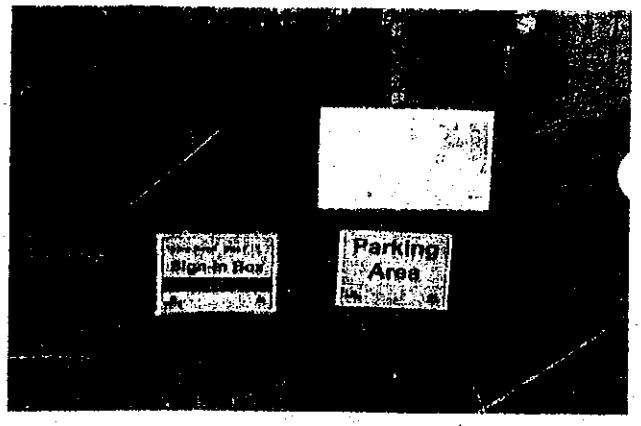


Furthermore, 86 percent of the hunters reported they were satisfied or very satisfied with the hunting opportunities provided by the Block Management Program in 2003 (see Figure 5). Of note, this was nearly a ten percent increase from results obtained in 1996.

Figure 5. Response to: "Overall, how satisfied were you with the hunting opportunities provided by the Block Management Program in 2003?" (2003 Hunter Evaluation)



Of the hunters who responded to the survey in 2003, 84 percent reported they believe that the Block Management Program has improved or greatly improved landowner/hunter relationships. Less than two percent believe that landowner/hunter relationships have been harmed or greatly harmed by the program. In 1996, 70 percent of the hunters reported they believe the program has improved or greatly improved landowner/hunter relationships.

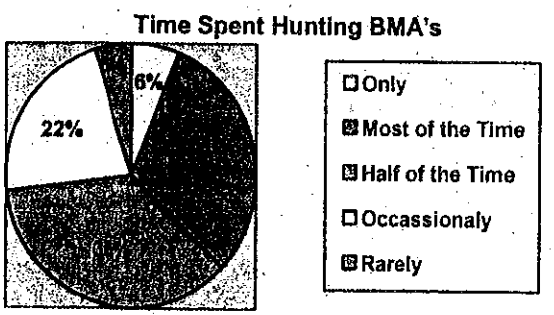


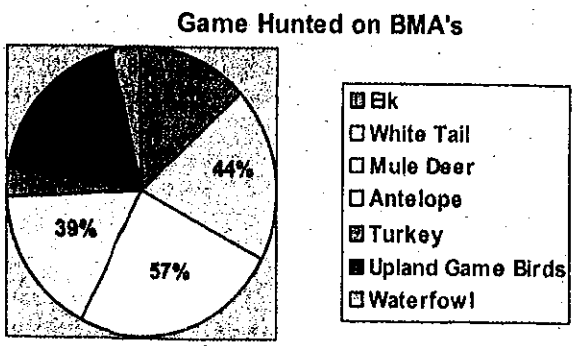
Related to hunting opportunities:

- Sixty-eight percent of the hunters who responded to the survey found game animals on BMAs hunted present in numbers meeting or exceeding their expectations in 2003.
- Seventy-three percent were successful in bagging game on a BMA(s) in 2003.
- Ninety-percent were satisfied or very satisfied with the rules on BMAs hunted in 2003.
- Sixty-four percent were satisfied or very satisfied with the number of hunters encountered on BMAs hunted in 2003.

Hunter profile information (2003 season):

- The average hunter spent 9 days hunting BMAs.
- The average hunter hunted on 4 different BMAs.





Discussion

The Block Management Program is designed to balance the needs of landowners, hunters, and FWP. Landowners receive assistance in managing public hunting activities and benefits to offset the impacts of allowing public hunting. Hunters receive opportunities to hunt on enrolled lands, offered either on a first-come, first-serve basis or through some other means of allocated use. FWP is able to utilize the program as a tool to help achieve wildlife management goals and objectives.

In 1995, the Block Management Program was enhanced through additional funding and authority, allowing it to grow substantially over the next ten years. During this time, FWP staff explored various ways to implement the program locally to accommodate differences in regional wildlife management needs and hunter use activities.

Results of the 2003 Block Management landowner and hunter evaluations, as well as past evaluations, suggest that the program has been a success both from the perspective of landowners enrolled in the program and hunters hunting on BMAs. FWP staff has been able to use the program to effectively manage big game populations, provide public hunting opportunities, and develop effective Department/landowner/hunter relationships.

Under statutory sunset provisions, the program is due to expire March 1, 2006, meaning that the 2005 Legislature must act to either extend or remove the sunset provisions for the program to continue. Based on the high level of interest expressed by hunters and landowners in participating in the program, and given the high levels of satisfaction expressed by both landowners and hunters in the 2003 and other program evaluations, FWP expects to ask the 2005 Legislature to continue the program.

References

Charles, Alan. 1997. *Summary of the 1996 Landowner & Hunter Evaluations.* Field Services Division of FWP. Helena, MT: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

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Highlights of the 1999 BMA Cooperator Program Evaluations

Explanation: A survey containing 18 questions was sent to 916 cooperators on January 1, 1999, with a return deadline of January 25. A total of 534 completed surveys were returned, for a response rate of 58%.

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

*** 79% of landowners surveyed were satisfied with the Block Management Program;

*** 68% of landowners surveyed indicated Block Management was important as a way of managing HUNTER NUMBERS on the farm or ranch;

*** 65% of landowners surveyed indicated Block Management was important as a way of managing GAME on the farm or ranch;

*** 72% of landowner surveyed indicated that *(disregarding any relationship to the computation of incentives payment amount)* the number of hunters using the BMA in 1998 was about right;

*** 68% of landowners surveyed indicated that they were satisfied with how the Block Management Program works to manage HUNTING ACTIVITIES;

*** 77% of landowners surveyed indicated that they were satisfied with the hunter management system currently used on their BMA; nearly 65% of landowners surveyed indicated use of a system where the landowner administered hunter permission;

*** 67% of landowners surveyed indicated they felt that Block Management had improved hunter behavior on their lands;

*** 22% of landowners surveyed felt that Block Management had improved their relationships with neighboring landowners, while 9% felt the program had damaged their relationships with neighboring landowners;

*** 83% of landowners surveyed planned to re-enroll in Block Management, while 15% were unsure at the time of the survey;

*** 46% of surveyed landowners indicated they were interested in providing special hunting opportunities for either youths, seniors, or hunters with disabilities;

Highlights from the 1996 Landowner/Hunter Evaluations

Explanation: Two separate surveys were conducted following the 1996 hunting season. The Landowner Evaluation polled landowners enrolled in the 1996 Block Management Program. The Hunter Evaluation polled hunters who hunted one or more Block Management Areas (BMAs) in 1996. Of a total 881 surveys sent to landowners, 647 (73%) completed surveys were returned. Of a total 1250 surveys sent to hunters who had used BMAs in 1996, 782 (62%) completed surveys were returned.

LANDOWNER EVALUATION

*** 80% of landowners surveyed were satisfied with the Block Management Program.

*** 94% of cooperators said they'd like to continue participating in the program.

*** 74% of surveyed landowners said Block Management was important as a way of managing Hunters on the farm or ranch.

*** 70% of surveyed landowners said Block Management was important as a way of managing GAME numbers on the farm or ranch.

*** Over 75% of surveyed landowners were satisfied with the various payments offered under the incentives portion of the program.

*** 96% of surveyed landowners said the majority of hunters abided by ranch rules.

*** 62% of surveyed landowners felt that the Block Management Program had improved their relationships with hunters

HUNTER EVALUATION

*** 77% of hunters were satisfied with hunting opportunities on BMAs.

*** 94% of hunters felt BMA rules were reasonable.

*** 72% of hunters found the game animals they expected to see on BMAs hunted.

*** Over 67% of hunters were successful in taking game on a BMA.

*** 89% of surveyed hunters were satisfied with obtaining permission by person-to-person contact with the landowner.

*** 87% of surveyed hunters felt BMA landowners were helpful.

*** Over 68% of hunters felt Block Management improved landowner/sportsperson relationships.

Legislative Audit Division

State of Montana

Report to the Legislature

December 1999

Performance Audit

Block Management Program

Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks

This performance audit contains 14 recommendations for improvement of the Block Management Program. Recommendations include:

- Developing goals and objectives to measure program success or outcomes.
- Coordinating with other programs addressing access.
- Re-evaluating the base payment system used to compensate landowners enrolled in the Block Management Program.

Direct comments/inquiries to:
Legislative Audit Division
Room 135, State Capitol
PO Box 201705
Helena MT 59620-1705

97P-10

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Chapter VI - Conclusion

Introduction

Block Management was formally created in 1985, although the program existed in some regions since the 1970s. The program was started in response to landowners' concerns about the number of hunters, damage to their land, and the time it took the landowner to deal with hunters. In 1995 the legislature created the enhanced Block Management Program in response to concerns expressed by landowners, hunters, and outfitters during the 1993 Legislative Session. The enhanced program was designed to reduce conflicts between landowners and hunters by providing tangible benefits to landowners who allowed free public hunting. Compensation was the primary tangible benefit provided landowners.

Some Additional Land was Opened to Public Hunting

One of the goals of the enhanced program was to open more private land for free public hunting. We found over one-third of the landowners enrolled in the program in 1996 were already participating in block management, some since 1975. Many of the regional staff acknowledged the enhanced program caused land that was open to public hunting to remain open. A few staff thought the program opened some land that had limited or no public hunting prior to the enhanced program.

Our survey results of landowners in the program showed the goal of opening land to free public hunting was accomplished to a certain extent. Of the 175 respondents to our survey of 307 landowners in the program, 113 indicated their land was open to public hunting when they enrolled in the program. Survey results show a total of 242,939 acres were opened up to general public hunting that were closed or had limited hunting prior to enrollment.

Program Tangible Benefits

Funding for landowner compensation is derived from market-based outfitter-sponsored non-resident deer and elk combination licenses. Because funding is limited to one source, and the tangible benefits provided are money and one sportsman license, the program has not grown since 1996. Most regions have a waiting list of landowners who are interested in enrolling in the program. Based on survey results and conversations with field staff, some landowners would be willing to enroll in the program and not receive compensation. Instead they would like to receive various hunting

licenses/tags/permits, gates, fences, or weed control. It appears, if the department provided benefits other than compensation more land could be enrolled in the program.

Another alternative to expand the program is to develop an additional funding source. We surveyed a sample of hunters to determine if they would be willing to pay for the Block Management Program. We sent 294 surveys and received 122 responses. Seventy-one said they hunted on a BMA in 1998. Forty-seven of the seventy-one indicated they would be willing to pay for the program if the money is used to enroll more land into the program. Another 20 of the 71 indicated they would not be willing to pay. Four did not answer the question. An additional 42 hunters said they were aware of the program but did not hunt on a BMA in 1998. Twenty-four of the forty-two said they would be willing to pay for the program and nine said they would not be willing to pay for the program. Nine did not answer the question. Nine hunters said they had not heard of the program; six would pay for it and three said they would not pay for the program. Generally it appears hunters would be willing to contribute some amount to enroll more land in the Block Management Program.

Conclusion

Overall, it appears the enhanced Block Management Program opened some previously closed land to free public hunting. In this regard it is meeting one of its goals. If alternative forms of compensation to landowners are created, it appears more land could be enrolled in the program. If hunters contributed to the program, additional land could also be enrolled.

LEGISLATIVE AUDIT DIVISION

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John W. Northey, Legal Counsel

Deputy Legislative Auditors:
Jim Pellegrini, Performance Audit
Tori Hunthausen, IS Audit & Operations
James Gillett, Financial-Compliance Audit

MEMORANDUM

TO: Legislative Audit Committee Members

FROM: Jim Pellegrini, Deputy Legislative Auditor, Performance Audits

DATE: September 2003

RE: Follow-up Performance Audit:
Block Management Program (97P-10)
Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks

INTRODUCTION

We presented our performance audit of the Block Management Program within the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to the Legislative Audit Committee in December 1999. The scope of the audit was to look at hunter access, impact to private land, wildlife management, and landowner/hunter relations. The report contains fourteen recommendations with eighteen specific recommended changes. The focus of the recommendations is establishing measurable goals and criteria, coordinating access with similar programs, improving the compensation component, creating documentation procedures, program information dissemination, and ensuring hunter access.

We requested and received information from FWP personnel regarding progress toward implementation of the recommended changes. Audit staff then interviewed FWP personnel and reviewed recent documents to verify implementation status in each area.

SUMMARY OF FOLLOW-UP RESULTS

The following table shows the status of the recommendations made in the audit.

Recommendation Status	
Implemented	14
Being Implemented	1
Partially Implemented	3
Not Implemented	0

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As the table illustrates, most of the recommendations have been fully implemented. The four recommended changes that have not been fully implemented do not raise concerns from an audit perspective. The *partially implemented* recommendations involve situations in which improvements have been made, but where the process is ongoing; or involve a situation in which information regarding program processes became available after the audit report. A summary of each individual recommendation follows and provides details of our review.

BACKGROUND

FWP formally started the Block Management Program in 1985 to address concerns relating to hunters on private land, land damage, and hunter/landowner relations. There was a concern that too much property would be closed to hunting, creating a negative effect on wildlife management strategies. The intent of the program was to help landowners control hunter activity on their lands. The program was enhanced by the 1995 Legislature to provide tangible benefits to landowners to encourage public access to their land. Funding is provided from outfitter-sponsored non-resident deer or elk combination big game licenses.

Audit Findings

The following summarizes the implementation status from the audit report's fourteen recommendations.

Recommendation #1

We recommend the department:

A. Create specific objectives that relate to the purpose and mission of the program.

B. Establish measurable criteria which relate directly to the goals and objectives, and develop strategies to allow for attaining desired results or outcomes.

Status:

A. Implemented

The department established specific objectives that relate to the purpose and mission of the program. These are published and advertised, and include improved relations between and among landowners/hunters/FWP, reduction of impact on private land, increased access, and coordination to meet overall wildlife management goals.

B. Implemented

Specific goals are created in each of the seven Block Management regions and submitted each year to the Landowner Sportsman Coordinator, who serves as the administrator of the program. The administrator reviews these goals to ensure they fall within the general program criteria. The criteria include:

- newly enrolled properties
- re-enrolled properties
- increased access to private and public land
- herd management of specific species.

Recommendation #2
We recommend the department develop methods to:

A. Coordinate access provided under the Block Management Program, the Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program, and Habitat Montana.

B. Publicize and monitor hunting on conservation easements and the Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program projects.

Status:
A. Implemented
The department modified its publications so that the Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program, Habitat Montana and the Block Management Program all cross reference each program where appropriate. The information on FWP's website also reflects this change. FWP has indicated program administrators are continuing to meet to discuss areas for further collaboration.

B. Implemented
Hunting opportunities on conservation easements and Upland Game Bird projects are advertised in Block Management materials in each of the regions. The monitoring function on conservation easements is done by a private contractor coordinated by FWP. Departmental biologists monitor lands associated with the Upland Game Bird Program.

Recommendation #3
We recommend the department establish an access coordination function.

Status: Implemented
The department created a new position in 2000, the Land Access Coordinator, to report directly to the Landowner Sportsman Coordinator. This position is to work on a wide range of access issues, including coordination between private and public lands. This responsibility is not limited to state lands. It is not uncommon for enrollment of a tract of private land in Block Management to create access to a tract of public land with wildlife management needs. At the regional level, access is coordinated by seasonal employees, titled Hunting Access Technicians, who do much of the groundwork involved in signage and direct hunter assistance.

Recommendation #4
We recommend the department re-evaluate the current base payment system used to compensate landowners enrolled in the Block Management Program.

Status: Implemented
The Block Management Working Group recommended the program consider implementing a multi-year contract and payment system in the 2001 season. The department followed the advice of the Working Group and currently takes information from previous years to establish an average number of hunter days in specific regions/properties. Contracts are signed for the year based on these averages. The landowners are not paid, however, until the completion of the season.

Recommendation #5
We recommend department officials explore options for the Block Management Program to provide benefits to landowners other than money and a single resident sportsman license or non-resident big game combination license.

Status: Implemented
The Block Management Working Group's minutes and correlating departmental documents indicate program officials considered and implemented non-monetary benefits to landowners. These tangible components included repairs to and installation of fence, cattleguards, and related real property improvements. After a trial period, a department evaluation found there was a greater cost associated with purchasing procedures, storage, and increased staff time beyond a simple processing of payment to landowners. The department has subsequently abandoned the idea, and this option is no longer available to landowners.

The department and the Private Land/Public Wildlife Council are considering seeking legislation to allow block management operators to transfer the single resident sportsmen license they receive. This would increase the value and benefit of this block management incentive.

Recommendation #6
We recommend the department develop a system where contracts can be established for terms of more than one year.

Status: Implemented
Beginning with the 2000 season, the department began implementing three-year contracts for certain Block Management Areas (BMA). According to program managers, 15 percent of contracts in block management extend beyond one year.

Recommendation #7
We recommend the department develop a compensation system that rewards landowners for entering into an aggregate Block Management Area.

Status: Being Implemented
Currently the department has implemented trial systems in different regions, including offering cash bonuses, basing compensation on game population figures, and flat rate payments. The Landowner Sportsmen Coordinator will be reviewing the success of these trial systems to develop a program-wide policy.

Recommendation #8
We recommend the department ensure Block Management Coordinators justify and document the enrollment of new landowners or the re-enrollment of current landowners in the Block Management Program.

Status: Implemented
The department uses a scoring sheet to rate all properties for re-enrollment purposes. Scoring categories include wildlife management goals, hunter opportunity, landowner relations, and administrative accountability. Specific scoring criteria are defined for certain categories. For example, a property of 641 to 1,000 acres receives 4 points under the size category, while 2,001 to 5,000 acres receives 8 points. Other categories are more subjective, however multiple department staff score properties and then average the numbers for the final score. The program administrator oversees the entire scoring process.

Recommendation #9
We recommend the department/regions initiate a process to review tabloid and map information to make information more consistent/standard and easier to understand.

Status: Implemented
Prior to the audit, maps were developed at the regional level, creating inconsistencies between regions, and in some cases between different properties within the same region. A review of the current maps shows this problem has been corrected, with all maps now having a similar look, common legends, and common criteria, including recognizable landmarks such as towns or major intersections. A review of the tabloids also showed an improvement in the general quality.

Recommendation #10
We recommend the department ensure the directions on the Block Management Area maps can be followed and the areas are properly signed prior to the hunting season.

Status: Partially Implemented
The status of this recommendation is probably best described as being an *ongoing* phase of implementation. During the audit, we discovered areas where a hunter could experience difficulties in finding a BMA. Department personnel maintain that improvements have been made in signage, including more permanent (metal) signs, an overall increase in the number of signs, and newly created signs showing when someone has left a BMA. In addition, the program administrator cites improvements associated with a directive that Regional Coordinators constantly review signage. The newly created Hunting Access Technicians are also responsible for installing signs. However, the department admits that problems associated with specific properties are typically brought to the department's attention through hunter comment cards, which are not available until after the hunting season.

As mentioned under Recommendation #9, map formats have been standardized. Directions are now included on the back of maps. Based on our review of several examples, it appears improvements have been made in clarifying directions.

Recommendation #11
We recommend the department help promote landowner/sportsman partnerships by developing a process to easily and broadly explain the Block Management Program and how it works in each region.

Status: Implemented
The department developed a brochure designed to promote the Block Management Program to hunters and landowners who know very little or nothing at all about the program. The department printed 10,000 brochures for distribution at retail and public outlets where hunting licenses are sold.

Recommendation #12
We recommend the Block Management Coordinator in each region be responsible for contract administration and sign installation for the Block Management Program.

Status: Implemented
The department indicated and demonstrated through the job classification that the primary responsibility for contract administration rests with the Regional Coordinators. While wardens and biologist may at times assist in the development of the contract, negotiations with landowners, etc., the Regional Coordinators must review and sign off on all contracts for the region. (See comments under Recommendation #10 for information on sign installation.)

Recommendation #13
We recommend the department increase coordination among the regions by:

A. Establishing a process that ensures Block Management Coordinators review other region's annual reports and documentation.

B. Establishing a forum to discuss the various methods for completing the same or similar block management tasks.

Status:
A. and B. Implemented
The Landowner Sportsmen Coordinator sends out annual regional reports to all regions so Regional Coordinators can review one another's reports. In connection with this effort, the Regional Coordinators and the Landowner Sportsmen Coordinator meet twice a year, at season start and season end, to discuss best practices and related operational components within each of the seven regions.

Recommendation #14
We recommend the Block Management Coordinators and Helena staff:

A. Use the same software for contract and permission slip/roster information.

B. Develop a common format for contract and permission slip/roster information so information only needs to be input once and can be used by all the regions and Helena.

Status:

A. and B. Partially Implemented

An Access database was developed by the department for the purpose of standardizing contract information program-wide. Computer hardware and software was updated in each of the regions. We reviewed the operational training manual which provided background information on software and related contract procedures.

Permission slip/roster information is currently not used by program management on a statewide basis. Regional personnel use this information differently than contract information. The program administrator indicated permission slip/roster information does not need to be centralized with Helena staff. While this does not meet the intent of the recommendation, the program has addressed the issue of inputting information more than once. Since the program administrator does not need the information for analysis purposes, personnel in Helena are not duplicating the input procedure in this area.

Access Montana

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Public Access to Public Lands

Program Title:
Access Montana

Program Coordinator:
Alan Charles

Program Authorizing Statute:
MCA 87-1-265 Hunter management and hunting access enhancement program created. The department may establish...programs of landowner assistance that encourage public access to private and public lands for purposes of hunting and may adopt rules to carry out program purposes.

Program Funding:

Source: Portions of license fees funding the Hunting Access Enhancement Program
FY04 Program Expenditures: $56,000

Program Mission: Access Montana coordinates FWP agency activities related to hunting access on public lands. The program works to negotiate and maintain legal public hunting access to public lands, resolve landowner/sportsman conflicts, assist in marking public land boundaries, and disseminate information about hunting access on public lands. Access Montana utilizes a cooperative inter-agency approach for the resolution of landowner/sportsman conflicts related to hunting access on public lands.

Program Goals:

- Coordinate efforts to identify public lands where legal public hunting access currently exists.
- Coordinate efforts to identify public lands hunting access needs and, where necessary, establish legal public hunting access to public lands either where such access does not currently exist or where current access is threatened.
- Reduce landowner/sportsman conflicts related to hunting access on public lands.

Program Objectives:

- Work with regional staff and state and federal land managers to implement boundary marking projects in targeted areas to reduce conflicts and improve hunter dispersion.
- Solicit input from landowners, sportsman, and department staff to identify areas of historic conflict and develop appropriate solutions wherever possible.
- Develop and disseminate directories, maps, and informational brochures to assist the public with information about hunting access to public lands.
- Identify and prioritize areas where hunting access to public lands is needed, but either not available or threatened.
- Participate in state and federal land management agency planning and decision-making processes that affect public land access.
- Work to develop partnerships with local and regional state and federal land management agency personnel responsible for implementing public land access projects.

Project Synopsis - Status Report:

- Munson Creek Access (Thompson Falls) – Joint FWP / USFS trailhead development. Provides critical access for sheep hunting. – Complete - Project Cost: $46,000 – FWP cost share: $23,000.

- Ninepipe Area Recreation Map – Reprint – identifies FWP, USFWS, and Tribal Lands available for hunting and other recreational use in the Ninepipe area. – Complete – Total Project Cost: $1,500 for 5,000 copies – FWP cost share: $1000.

- Flathead Valley Recreational Access Map – depicts legal public access routes to state, federal, and corporate timber lands in the Flathead Valley; produced after extensive research determined legal status of routes in this area – 2,500 maps produced – Total Project Cost: $5,000.

- Montana Prison Ranch map (Deer Lodge) – Provides map of Corrections, and DNRC land located within the prison ranch boundary that are available for archery hunting – Completed – Total Project Cost: $125.

- McCarty Creek Access (Boulder) – Joint FWP / Jefferson County / USFS / DNRC project. Road development and parking area that provides access to large block of Beaverhead Deerlodge Forest. – Completed – Total Project Cost: $11,800 – FWP cost share: $3,000.

- North Hills Access Project (Helena) – Joint FWP / BLM easement and road development. Development of alternative route that provides access to southern end of Sieben BMA, BLM and DNRC lands. Route will provide year-round access to public lands – Completed – Estimated Total Project Cost: $40,000 – FWP cost share: $16,500.

- Quartz Creek Access to Helena National Forest (Clancy) – Long-term agreement whereby FWP provided two cattle guards in exchange for a 5-year agreement to provide access to the Helena National Forest – Completed – Total Project Cost: $2,300.

- Armstrong Ranch Access Corridor and Parking Area (Bozeman – Bridger Moutains) – Long-term agreement that provides an access corridor and fenced parking area for excellent mule deer opportunities in the Gallatin National Forest. Agreement provides year round access for a variety of recreational opportunities – Completed – Total Project Cost: $9,500.

- Public lands signing project (Statewide) – Joint effort with FWP/ BLM/ DNRC to sign BLM and DNRC lands where tracts intersect county roads and in areas of past conflicts. FWP contracted workers and seasonal staff posted over 4,000 signs marking state lands in 2004 – Ongoing – Estimate Project Cost: $7,500/annually.

- Hay Draw Recreational Access Corridor (Broadus) – Joint FWP/BLM project will provide drive in access across DNRC land to access multiple sections of BLM lands. Project involves development of an access road, parking areas, marking of approximately 30 miles of perimeter boundary lines, and agreement to provide patrolling through the hunting season - – Completed –Total project cost: $41,000 – Estimated FWP cost share: $20,500.

- Private Land Ownership Maps – Joint FWP/NRIS project to produce accurate, updated electronic map information, using USGS 100,000 quad map series, that identifies ownership of private land throughout the state – Completed – Total Cost to FWP: $0, other than staff time.

Public Land Access - Problem Identification Form

This form is a tool that sportsmen and landowners can use to report conflicts involving access to state and federal lands. Problems like trespass resulting from inadequate boundary marking, improperly posted or mismarked lands, or other conflicts related to public land access should be reported to the appropriate land management agency. In the event of these or other access conflicts, you should fill out this form and provide it to the **appropriate regional office** of the state or federal land management agency that oversees the property **(see back of form)**. Remember, not all public lands are legally accessible. Public lands may only be accessed via a public right-of-way or with permission from the adjacent landowner. If you are unsure if the lands you are trying to reach are legally accessible, contact your local U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation, or Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks office.

Name:_____ **Date:**_____

Address:_____

City:_____ **State:**_____ **Zip:**_____ **Phone:** _____

1. **Describe the Location:**_____

2. **Name of adjacent landowner** (if known):_____

3. **Legal Description of Location** (Township, Range, & Section if known, or attach a map of the area and indicate the location of conflict):_____

4. **Land Management Authority** (USFS, BLM, USFWS, DNRC, FWP): _____

5. **Access Route** (describe the route used to access this site):_____

6. **Description of Situation** (describe the problem observed – e.g. mismarked lands, trespass, conflict over the right to access, etc):_____

Revised: 6/1/02 White – Land Management Agency Pink – Your Copy

SPECIAL ACCESS PROJECTS

Program Title:
Special Access Projects

Program Coordinator:
Alan Charles

Program Authorizing Statute:
87-1-265 MCA. Hunter management and hunting access enhancement program created. (1) The department may establish...programs of landowner assistance that encourage public access to private and public lands for purposes of hunting...
(3) The department may also develop similar efforts outside the scope of the block management program that are designed to promote public access to private lands for hunting purposes."

Program Funding:
Source: Portions of license fees earmarked for the Hunting Access Enhancement Program
FY 04 Expenditures: $29,290

Program Mission:
The department may initiate Special Access Projects that address species-specific, regional needs that may not lend themselves to involvement either in Block Management or Access Montana. Special Access Projects may also be used to develop pilot projects to address species-specific, regional hunting access issues.

Program Goals:
- Address localized, species-specific hunting access needs in innovative ways;
- Explore new methods for developing hunting access/hunter management agreements;
- Develop pilot projects that may lead to future enrollment in conventional programs;
- Involve localized communities of landowners, hunters, and FWP staff in projects;

Program Objectives:
- Provide regional staff with enough flexibility to develop local projects that can address regional species-specific hunter management/hunter opportunity needs;
- Utilize available funding to develop pilot projects that will aid in the future development and structure of the Hunting Access Enhancement Program;
- Utilize Special Access Projects to meet needs that cannot otherwise be met through existing administrative frameworks of the Block Management and Access Montana programs;
- Develop a wide array of hunting access options from which landowners, hunters, and FWP can choose when developing hunting access agreements or selecting hunting access opportunities;

PROJECT SYNOPSIS – STATUS REPORT

- Northeast Montana (Glasgow) – Individual hired under personal services contract, assigned duties to provide area landowners with information about FWP hunting access programs and discuss potential hunting access agreements focused on upland bird hunting opportunities - Completed - Project Cost: $4,800.

- Southwest Montana (Madison Valley) – Elk Hunt Coordinator hired to assist hunters and landowners in the southern portion of the Madison Valley by coordinating public elk hunting activities – ongoing - Project Cost: $3,000/annually.

- Central Montana (Bear Paw Mountains – Big Sandy) – Elk Hunt Coordinator hired to assist hunters and landowners in the Bear Paw Mountains area by coordinating public elk hunting activities – ongoing - Project Cost: $5,000/annually.

- North Central Montana (Sweet Grass Hills – Shelby) – Elk Hunt Coordinator hired to assist hunters and landowners in the Sweet Grass Hills area by coordinating public elk hunting activities – ongoing - Total Project Cost: $3,500/annually.

- West Central Montana (Helena) – Elkhorn Working Group formed to study issues related to management of elk in the Elkhorn Mountains and make recommendations to the department regarding their efforts - In Progress. Project Cost: $4,500.

- Southwest Montana (Madison Valley) – Madison Valley Working Group formed to study issues related to management of elk in the Madison Valley, along with other wildlife and habitat management issues in that area – ongoing – Project Cost: $4,000.

- West Central Montana (White Sulphur Springs) – Elk Hunt Coordinator hired to assist hunters and landowners in the East Big Belts area during late season hunt by coordinating public elk hunting activities – completed – Project Cost: $5,171.

- Eastern Montana (Billings) – Elk Hunt Coordinator hired to assist hunters and landowners in the Pine Ridge area by coordinating public elk hunting activities – completed – Project Cost: $1,500.

- Eastern Montana (Miles City) – Hunters Against Weeds Car Wash – FWP/Custer Rod & Gun Club joint project offering a free car wash and decal to hunters who produced a valid hunting license during a three-day period including opening day of antelope season – complete – Project Cost: $2,419.

FISHING ACCESS ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

Program Name
Private Land Fishing Access

Program Manager:
Allan Kuser, Fishing Access Program Coordinator

Program Authorizing Statute:
This program was introduced as HB 292 and titled "Fishing Access Enhancement Program". The statutory reference is **87-1-285, 87-1-286, MCA.**

Program Funding

FY 04 Allocation: $ 25,000
FY 04 Expenditure: $25,000

Program Status:
The program is in its fourth year of funding. In 2004, one new landowner was enrolled in the program.

Program Synopsis
The purpose of the program as stated in HB292 is "to provide incentives to landowners who provide access to or across private land for public fishing." House Bill 292 was enacted by the 2001 Legislature on a trial basis with the intention of augmenting the existing FAS acquisition program. The sole purpose of this program is to give practical, tangible assistance to those landowners who allow the public access across their lands in order to fish streams or lakes that otherwise are not accessible.

The PLFA Program differs from the FAS Program in three ways:

1. The funding is specifically earmarked for use on private land.
2. It is not a capital program through which FWP develops facilities on private land, i.e. boat ramps, dam repairs, stream bank stabilization, etc. Compensation provided to the landowner can be used for these things at his or her discretion.
3. It is a stand-alone program that does not incorporate the Lands Section in negotiating deals, the D&C Bureau to design and engineer projects, or the Parks Division to maintain the sites.

FY04 PROJECT SYNOPSIS – STATUS REPORT

1. Sterling Ranch

The Sterling Ranch is located along the Missouri River between Helena and Great Falls. The river reach encompasses over 12 miles of the Missouri River beginning at Holter Dam to downstream below Craig. In the 2001-2002-angler survey conducted by FWP, the river reach

from Holter Dam to Cascade was the most heavily fished river in the state receiving 123,472 angler days.

Access points are staggered sporadically throughout the length of the ranch property. The landowner has historically allowed free public access but the amount of use has increased to the point that the ranch is forced to actively manage for the public use of their property boarding the river. Additional management responsibilities associated with angler use include signing, fencing, installing cattle guards, installing pedestrian passes in the fences, litter control, weed control, etc. FWP has also agreed to evaluate leasing two separate parcels within this corridor for development into FWP managed fishing access sites within the next five years. These two sites receive an extreme amount public use that will require a higher level of development including parking areas, and latrines.

FY03 PROJECT SYNOPSIS – STATUS REPORT

1. Giem Ranches

Giem Ranch is located on the lower Beaverhead River. The site provides 3+ miles of pedestrian access 100 feet along each bank from the centerline of the river. The Department will provide litter patrol and signing. There will be seasonal gate closures. The area has good brown trout fishing as well as providing a unique opportunity to catch Arctic Grayling.

The negotiated fee was $6500 annually for two years for a total of $13,000.

1. Gheny Pond

Gheny Pond is a kids fishing pond located south of Twin Bridges. The pond is located on private land but the local chapter of the American Legion has maintained it. In addition to maintaining the pond the American Legion historically provided liability insurance coverage for the landowner. Through the Agreement FWP will plant fish annually, provide an enforcement presence, and provide a liaison and technical advice as needed. In addition the landowner is afforded the liability restriction under 70-16-302 (1). The landowner will provide fencing around the pond, allow pedestrian access, and excavate material from the pond to enhance fish habitat.

The negotiated fee was $100 yr for a 10-year lease + $5,000 for pond excavation and waste disposal for a total of $6,000.

2. Anglers Roost

Anglers Roost is a privately owned campground and fly shop located on the West Fork of the Bitterroot River south of Darby. The site already contains a parking area and an undeveloped boat launch. Through this Agreement FWP will provide road maintenance material and signing. The landowner will provide day-to-day maintenance of the facilities.

The negotiated fee was $500 a year for one year. The Region is currently evaluating this site as a potential FAS.

3. Haughian Bass Pond

The Haughian Pond is a popular fishing pond located 20 miles north of Miles City. The pond is managed as a self-sustaining largemouth bass and northern pike fishery. It is a 100+ acre pond and deep enough to provide a stable year around fishery. It is also accessible in both winter and summer months. Through the Agreement the Department agrees to manage the fishery including stocking fish, removing undesirable fish, improving spawning habitat, and monitoring fish populations. The landowner agrees to provide year-around access but also retains the right to close the reservoir due to poor road conditions or extreme fire danger.

The negotiated fee was $1500 annually for a ten-year period for a total of $15,000.