

## ***2. Fish & Wildlife Impact Assessment***

### **Purpose and Use**

A *Fish & Wildlife Impact Assessment* (FWIA) is a technical report that identifies the fish and wildlife species and habitats found on and in the vicinity of the proposed subdivision site, evaluates the potential effects of one or more subdivision development designs on these natural resources, and identifies steps that the subdivider can take to reasonably minimize potentially significant adverse impacts. Subdivision applications that are locally required to include an Environmental Assessment (EA) are recommended to include a FWIA as part of the EA. Consultation with local FWP biologists or other biologists may be helpful at the EA stage of project design. FWP biologists are encouraged to review the completed FWIA for accuracy. However, subdividers should not expect FWP to complete the FWIA for them.

### **Recommended Elements**

FWP recommends that a FWIA include the following elements:

1. Be prepared by one or more professionally trained biologists.
2. Identify the following, and map the information where appropriate:
  - a. The project planning area, including the proposed subdivision site *and* a one-half-mile radius around it.
  - b. Existing land uses in the project planning area.
  - c. The species of fish and wildlife, including Species of Concern, that use all or part of the project planning area on a year-round, seasonal, or periodic basis.
  - d. Existing vegetation types, aquatic habitats, and wildlife habitats in the project planning area (e.g., water bodies and their associated riparian habitat, big game winter range, native grassland or native shrub habitats, and areas used by black or grizzly bears).
  - e. Whether, and to what extent, the project planning area functions as part of a larger habitat that supports wildlife throughout the year.
  - f. Areas that currently provide an opportunity for hunting.
  - g. Any applicable standards (e.g., fish and wildlife-related design standards included in local subdivision regulation requirements).
  - h. *Fish & Wildlife Information Checklist*.
3. Where fish and wildlife resources on all or part of the project planning area are unknown, include results of a resource inventory conducted by a professionally trained biologist.

Time inventories of bird Species of Concern to coincide with the nesting and breeding seasons of species known or predicted to occur in the project planning area.<sup>1</sup>

4. Assess the following, taking any applicable fish and wildlife standards into account: Whether, and to what extent, the proposed development design(s) under consideration may:
  - a. Contribute to habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, linkage disturbance, or other degradation in the quality of habitat.
  - b. Contribute to the population decline or displacement of one or more individual fish or wildlife species.
  - c. Impact the opportunity to hunt (e.g., through displacement of big game, creation of conflicts between adjoining land uses, or loss of hunting opportunities on the proposed subdivision site).
  - d. Create or increase the potential for human/bear conflicts within the proposed subdivision.
5. Address whether, and to what extent, the proposed development's potentially significant adverse impacts on "wildlife and wildlife habitat" may be mitigated using appropriate design techniques.

The FWIA may propose additional measures for avoiding, reasonably minimizing, or mitigating the potentially significant adverse impacts of the subdivision on "wildlife and wildlife habitat," both during construction and after full build-out (e.g., building site relocations, housing density reductions).

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**Note:** If a local government chooses to incorporate a FWIA requirement into its EA procedures, it may also wish to specify the geographic areas or other circumstances that automatically exempt a subdivider from the FWIA requirement. Exemption from the FWIA does not relieve the subdivider of the responsibility to address "wildlife and wildlife habitat" in the EA.

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<sup>1</sup>Those conducting or receiving the results of a Species of Concern inventory are encouraged to share the data with the Montana Natural Heritage Program (see Appendix A for contact information).