



## PRIVATE LAND/PUBLIC WILDLIFE ADVISORY COMMITTEE



PRIVATE LAND/  
PUBLIC WILDLIFE  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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### Meeting Minutes

April 22, 2026

YouTube Meeting Recording can be  
found at: <https://fwp.mt.gov/plpw>

Zoom

#### Objectives:

- Understand current status and future plans for technology and FWP access programs
- Review and make recommendations for public access land agreements
- Review 2025 access program statistics

#### Tuesday, December 16, 2025

##### 8:30 a.m. **Welcome and Introductions- PL/PW Chair, Ed Beall**

- PL/PW In-Person: Ed Beall
- PL/PW online: Dale Tribby, Stephanie Prater, Paul Ellis, Craig Jourdonnais, Chris Faber, Cindy Cohan, Dave McNaney, Donna McDonald, Lee Cornwell, Richard Birdsell
- FWP Staff In-Person: Jason Kool, Renee Lemon, Quentin Kujala, Mikal Wilkerson, Alex Scolavino
- FWP Access Staff Online: Katie Iverson, Evan Rodgers, Macy Dugan, Trenton Heisel, Ian Davidson, Cheyanne Parker

##### 8:35 a.m. **Presentation and Discussion on Technology and FWP- Mikal Wilkerson, FWP Chief of Administration and PL/PW Members**

- Mikal Wilkerson
  - When she started (January 2026), she was tasked with looking at the current status of technology and developing a plan to get various technology projects into the pipeline
  - Licensing:
    - They looked at Commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) and internal build options. Currently it is an internal build, and they are looking for better solutions
    - They then looked at other states, what they use, vendors, etc. and decided to go with a COTS solution
    - They put together an RFP, DOA posts it for solicitation for vendors, once they get bids, they rate and vet them, and then a decision is made
    - So far the RFP is about 90% done and it should be to DOA by the end of April
    - In the short-term, we are looking at the mobile app that we currently have
    - In the long term, the COTS will have to include a working app
    - Getting a new system is the priority and it should be rolled out in 2028 because they need time to get it ready and get everyone trained
  - Block Management
    - Licensing is the priority and then if the vendor can also help with Block Management, they will add it on, but if not, Block Management is going to

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- come after the licensing system is taken care of
- There are several companies that have a check in and check out process and a function to send out harvest surveys as well
- COTS solutions are proven, tested, and have a team of experts, but sometimes you have to change your business to match them more
- FWP is considering our needs to address all access options when looking at potential solutions but want to keep an element of flexibility for landowners
- PL/PW Comments
  - Paul Ellis: There has been a lot of talk about harvest reporting. Will that be a potential to be tied into the solutions?
    - Mikal Wilkerson: Yes, harvest survey is the third priority, but if a COTS vendor selected for licensing doesn't do harvest survey, we will have it set up to do an internal build
  - Craig Jourdonnais: Can we learn from what other states are doing to fix our system?
    - Mikal: Other states are using COTS systems, and we don't want to lose our uniqueness, as Montana has long list of requirements. We are going to take time to make sure that any COTS meets our requirements.
  - Stephanie Prater: Would the block mgmt. survey cards also be a part of it?
    - Jason Kool: Yes, we are requesting that be a part of the solution
  - Dale Tribby: One concern is that there is an opening time to make reservations, and they fill up immediately. If that can be incorporated, that is very important
    - Jason Kool: We are seeking to implement a lottery/drawing for those places. However, we don't want to force a landowner to use those systems
    - Mikal: It is very important to listen to business and let business to drive decisions
  - Cindy Cohan: She wants to make sure that bots can't be used
    - Jason: Yes, that is something we will have to look into
  - Ed Beall: Can you describe the RFP process? Is there an RFP for the access program?
    - Mikal: It is a 40–60-page document that identifies the needs for the licensing system, what we expect the vendor to do, how it must interact with our other platforms, and a mobile app
    - There is no separate RFP for Block Management, but they embedded it into the licensing RFP.
    - The best-case scenario is that they have one COTS that works for everything
    - If they don't find what they are looking for, they will put out an RFP or RFI for Block Management specifically to get information about what is available
  - Craig Jourdonnais: Foreign vs domestic costs can be different. Have you

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considered any preferences for local businesses?

- Mikal: There is a cost requirement and an hours requirement so we have to make sure that their customer service/business hours are similar so we have to be able to work with them during our business hours. There is no preference given to Montana in the RFP companies because we are mostly interested in finding a solution that works.

9:21 a.m.

### **Review and make recommendations for public access land agreements- PL/PW members**

- PALA stipulations: you must have the lease where the public could access public land
- FWP received 2 new applications out of region 6. The rest were extensions, renewals, etc.
- Cheyenne Parker: There was an error in a scoring form for one agreement because it was written as a 3-year, but it is listed as a 1-year, so she would like to get it fixed and updated
- Cindy Cohan: Why did the tree cutting amendment get added?
- Cheyenne Parker: It was added because it was happening but is not the intention of the program or where the funding is intended for.
- Region 3- No objections, so they were recommended to approve to the director
- Region 4- No objections, so they were recommended to approve to the director
- Lee Cornwell: Whitmayer Grazing has been a lease for a long time
- Number 23: Lee Cook recommended to ask if landowner would like to do more than one year since he has done many one year agreements; no objections recommended to approve to the director
- Chris Faber: For Brewer, the 10-year agreement is too much and he doesn't believe it's a wise use of funds to pay for public access to land that the public already has access to. Fundamentally don't believe it's a good business decision to give a payment for public access to something that the public already has access to. They are not in Block Management yet, but they are looking to do an application this year.
- Ed Beall: PALA can be combined with Block Management. Block Management opens lands to private land PALA is for opening public lands.
- Alex Scolavino: It is considered a trespass if you enter public land through private land because it is not included in the Block Management agreement.
- Chris Faber: Since there is still access to that public land, I don't think it is worth the cost.
- Stephanie Prater: Since they don't have a Block Management approved, it isn't double dipping yet. Maybe there should be a better timeline so that we can review these better.
- Donna McDonald: It is important to look at all of these and bring up any concerns. Each property is unique and needs to be looked at individually.
- Ed Beall: this is the purpose of the PLPW review and this council gets to make their own recommendations; Maybe this should be a 1-year instead of a 10-year contract. Be good to revisit the collision of Block and PALA or Block and other programs. Look to do that as part of the June meeting recommendations.
- Dale Tribby: this area is very rugged, and you may have legal public access, but it is very hard to use the other access by foot to get to the area this PALA is opening up
- Stephanie Prater: she is also familiar with this area, and it is very challenging terrain. She thinks that it should not be reduced down to 1 year because she sees the value of the area and this access.

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- Cindy Cohan: Is this going to be incorporated into a sign in on the new technology
- Jason Kool: PALAs are just signs and don't require sign ins for accessing public lands.
- Katie Iverson: He was asking for 10 years but would probably be happy with a 5-year agreement
- Craig Jourdonnais: Feels more comfortable with a 3-year agreement given the discussion.
- Brewer PALA: roll call vote for 3 or 5 years: 5 year recommendation passed and will be recommended to approve to the Director

10:17 a.m.      **Break**

10:32 a.m.      **PALA Continued**

- Agreements 25-31: No objections, so they were recommended to the director
- New Agreement 32 AP Anchor Ranch section:
- Donna McDonald: This might promote unexpected trespassing if users can't stay on the trail
- Katie Iverson: This will be walk in only and they have employees on site to watch out for trespassing
- Dave McNaney: questions whether people will use this because it is walk in only
- Stephanie Prater: walking in this area is very feasible. Have you considered Block Management?
- Katie Iverson: for this year they will see how the PALA goes, but they are considering Block Management depending on how this goes
- Donna McDonald: Will there be multiple water/river crossings? Will there be other opportunities for Block Management?
- Stephanie Prater: the water is completely dried up and the area is completely surrounded by AP, and they have their own hunting drawings already
- Agreement 32: No objections, so recommended to approve to the Director
- Agreement 33: AP Bullwhacker: new agreement with American Prairie to allow access on Bullwhacker rd.
- Stephanie Prater: is there any discussion of them putting this in Block Management and is there any way they'd be open to a longer agreement
- Katie Iverson: they are open to Block Management, and they just want to do a 3-year PALA agreement now with the intention to extend it in the future.
- Dale Tribby: Appreciates the year-round access, but was there thought about limiting winter access for wildlife protection?
- Katie Iverson: there is a BLM travel management plan in the area so some routes will close seasonally to address that concern
- Agreement 33: No objections, so recommended to approve to the director
- Agreements 34-38: No objections, so recommended to approve to the director
- General Concerns:
  - o Dale Tribby: we are concerned that people are taking advantage of and using PALA and Block Management. Our hands are tied legislatively, but could that be a recommendation to the legislature?
  - o Craig Jourdonnais: The process for these seems to be more laborious. Is that a barrier to this program?
  - o Jason Kool: Where we are mostly constrained is willing landowners and so the extra

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steps are an issue but not the primary hangup.

11:08 a.m.

### **Presentation on 2025 FWP Access Program Statistics- Jason Kool, FWP Hunting Access Program Manager and PL/PW members**

- Shoutout to the access staff and all agency staff who support the work of these programs! Access staff work so hard and do so much for the programs including over 35,000+ landowner/hunter contacts annually.
- Montana has more than double the private land enrolled in public access programs than any other state (<https://www.onxmaps.com/onx-access-initiatives/private-land-public-access>)
- Access Program Options
  - o They are either access to private lands or access through private lands
  - o Each option is fairly unique and has its own rules
- 2025 Block Management Summary
  - o We are working with more cooperators than ever (1,326)
  - o \$12.5 million paid to cooperators
  - o 6.81 million acres are enrolled
  - o 600,000+ public acres are opened because of agreements (<https://www.onxmaps.com/hunt/blog/block-management-access-bma-opens-600k-acres-landlocked-land>)
  - o Region 6 has the most cooperators, then regions 7, and 4. Regions 2, 5, and 3 are very close, and 1 has the fewest.
  - o Total acres have declined by about 1% per year
  - o Region 7 has had the biggest decrease in acres
  - o Average acre per landowner has declined. This is seen across Montana, not just in this program. (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00267-025-02336-6#:~:text=Results%20showed%2063%25%20of%20private,for%20public%20trust%20wildlife%20management.>)
  - o The total contracted hunter days are going up.
  - o The total BM landowner payments have gone up (mostly due to hunter days and increasing those payments)
  - o Total weed management incentive payments have gone up (we do not audit weed expenditures)
  - o Game Observed, Game Harvested, Hunter Satisfaction, and Hunter Day Residency Data are noted on coupon stubs and comment cards. They get a 7-13% response rate, but that is still thousands of hunters.
- EHA
  - o 31 agreements
    - 47 licenses/ permits issued
    - 13 landowners also participated in BM
    - 423,901 acres (207,938 acres not enrolled in BM)
    - No post-FWC random draw
  - o Revised public hunter sign-up process
  - o Revised post-season survey methodology
  - o Landowner selected public hunters (13/32 responded)
  - o FWP selected public hunters (79/113 responded)

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- Other Access Program Options
  - o Regional Access Projects
    - 42,963 acres- R2
    - 19,210 acres- R4
    - 1,472 acres- R7
  - o Biennial Rule- RMA
    - 3 sites
  - o Access to Public Lands Programs
    - Access Public Lands- 6 Projects
    - Unlocking Public Lands- 3 landowners; 4 tax credits
    - PALA- 38 new/ renew/ update (2026-FY27); 44 active multi-year auto renew
- Long-Term Hunting Access
  - o Case Ranch Assignment of Public Hunting Access Rights
    - Five Valley's Land Trust conservation easement
    - Minimum of 200 hunter days annually
    - Enhances access to more than 65,000 acres of adjacent state and federal lands
  - o Approved by FWC in April 2026
- 2026 Changes from 2025 Legislature
  - o HB 145
    - NR base hunting license price increase (\$15 to \$50)
  - o SB 514
    - Delay NR upland bird season start dates for private land enrolled in FWP access program
  - o SB 148
    - Designate license benefit to person with a physical or developmental disability
  - o SB 441
    - Establish Block Management Enforcement Network
  - o SB 83
    - Commission adoption of private landowner rules under active access agreements
  - o HB 763
    - Establish Block Management Access Corridor access option
- Private Land Fishing Access Agreements
  - o 25 agreements (2025)
    - 20 multi-year
      - Monetary payment (avg annual \$5,100)
      - Non-monetary: stocking
    - Fisheries ARM update
      - Provide program flexibility

11:58 a.m.

**Public Comment**

- Kent Greer: Really appreciates all the work going into the EHA survey work, but the lacking

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part of this program is the reporting. We are only getting a limited portion of participants reporting. Mandatory reporting would be challenging, but could there be mandatory reporting for Block Management or a specific program? How could that structure be implemented?

- Jason Kool: Related to access, we have discussed using digital tools to seek hunter feedback.
- Quentin Kujala: We have defined a pathway to get to harvest survey and it isn't in place, but we are working towards it with licensing and other systems or some requirements
- Kent Greer: Do the landowners seem concerned about mandatory reporting?
  - Jason Kool: the only landowner feedback is that they are frustrated when hunters don't take show up to take advantage of the hunting opportunities being offered
- Kevin Farron: With the Montana Wildlife Federation. It is clear that you are listening to hunter concerns, so kudos to the department.

12:04 p.m.

### June PL/PW Meeting Planning

- Jason Kool: Based on the feedback from previous meetings, it looks like the committee would like to do a field tour. Now it is up to finalize and decide if they would like to go to the Glasgow office and a field tour.
- Dale Tribby: He likes that plan, but will be leaving the state Wednesday morning
- Dave McNaney: June 2<sup>nd</sup> is election day, so if you want to vote, vote early
- Stephanie Prater: She would need a Zoom option because she can't make that long of a trip
- Donna McDonald: she will likely not be able to be there, but can Zoom in
- Dale Tribby: It might be best to see how many people are interested in the field tour before deciding
- Ed Beall: The meeting is the most important aspect and seeing the property could be an opt in and opt out
- Stephanie Prater: Maybe the meeting should be on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> and this trip to Glasgow could be saved for another meeting
- Ed Beall: If the meeting is more centralized, does that change things for people?
- Paul Ellis: He does not like the dates with the election. Can we move the dates to be in late May instead? He also just had back surgery and won't be able to make a long trip like that.
- Jason Kool: He will send out a Doodle Poll to figure out dates and location
- Ed Beall: Everyone seems to be okay with Zoom or in person on June 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. Details were finalized after the meeting and the decision was made to go to Glasgow for the June 1-2 meeting.

12:20 p.m.

### Member Home Reports

- Ed Beall: Cheyenne put on a great landowner dinner and it was great to hear from everyone.
- Lee Cornwell: Glasgow is used to being rejected so they will get over it if we don't meet there. There is an irrigation project and now they can bring water from Glacier Park out to them. They just need a little moisture.
- Stephanie Prater: it was a mild winter and hoping for some moisture. She attended the R4 dinner in Lewistown and it was not as attended as previous years. There is less pressure for turkeys. Shed hunter trespassing is a huge problem that she has been hearing about. Bear

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- management unit closed because they had such a low sub-quota limit of 2 female bears. There are a lot of elk, mule deer, and antelope. Thank you to the department.
- Richard Birdsell: There has been some good moisture in the last week and a half. Things seem to be progressing earlier, but they are in good shape and hopefully they will get more moisture.
  - Craig Jourdonnais: Lots of traveling and are trying to figure out how to expand advanced hunter ed. They are waiting to see how the lack of winter impacts things. They did a big game survey 3 weeks early this year. There are mule deer coming out. Thank you to the agency for all of the information.
  - Chris Faber: They had the mildest winter, which is good for the ungulate population, but didn't allow to get many mountain lions killed. Lots of lions. Other than that, everything is great.
  - Dale Tribby: Turkey season is underway, and it seems to be good so far. Miles City had their Hunters Ed classes, and they were mostly full and went well. There is a field session this summer, but it was all well received and well attended. The fires are a big concern because of the drought. A landowner in 704 was talking to landowners and they were concerned about the increase in elk tags in 702/704/705 and they think it will put too much pressure on already over-hunted public lands in 704/705.
  - Paulk Ellis: Thank you to the department. Your hard work doesn't go unnoticed. He has noticed poor hunter behavior in Block Management. Bozeman has gotten the least amount of moisture that he's ever seen.
  - Cindy Cohan: Thank you for the information during this meeting. Deer, antelope, and other animals look good. The landowner appreciation dinner went well, and all the landowners seemed happy. The one thing that she received complaints about is the computer glitches in the system to get tags.
  - Dave McNaney: He is concerned about increasing technology and how it impacts current regulations. Spring bear season is open, and it took 3 days to fill the quota, and it needs to be higher. Elk are still a problem for some ag producers. They are in good shape if they can get rain.
  - Donna McDonald: In visiting with BMA landowners in the area, they mentioned trespassing and poor hunter behavior. If they cannot get ahold of their game wardens, is there another step that they can take? How can we help them because there is no current second step? She has an idea that will take legislation, but she will bring that forward at another time.
  - Ed Beall: Did our first bowhunter ed class in Helena and it was way over capacity, which was great to see. It was very well done and well attended with a mix of adults and youth. At the R3 dinner, the one comment that he had was that horn hunting is hunting, and they have been seeing a lot of trespassing because of it. Thank you to the department and we will see where to go with the June meeting.

12:37 p.m.

**Adjourn**