

Report to the Montana Legislature

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS



THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL



PHOTO CREDITS LEFT TO RIGHT FROM TOP: SHUTTERSTOCK; THOM BRIDGE; JOHN WARNER; JOHN WARNER; CHRIS MCGOWAN; ERIK PETERSEN; THOM BRIDGE; JOHN WARNER; TOMMY MARTINO; ERIK PETERSEN; THOM BRIDGE; MORGAN JACOBSON;



Montana FWP At A Glance

Director's Office

The Director's Office includes the deputy director, chief of operations, chief of staff, chief financial officer, special projects, the legal unit, human resources, land and water unit, and oversight of FWP division administrators. The chief of operations has oversight of the seven regional supervisors who supervise field staff and manage regional fish, wildlife, parks, and recreation programs in seven regional offices (Kalispell, Missoula, Bozeman, Great Falls, Billings, Glasgow, and Miles City).

Legal Unit

The Legal Unit provides legal services and representation to the department, the Fish and Wildlife Commission, and

the Parks and Recreation Board. The unit litigates civil cases in state and federal court; writes and reviews rules, regulations, and legislation; supports the department's land transactions and water rights; assists in human resource matters; engages with the Montana Environmental Protection Act (MEPA) processes; reviews fulfillment of public record requests; and provides legal advice and policy support to the Director's Office. The unit is made up of six attorneys and two paralegals, each of which is assigned to support a region (or regions) as well as maintain particular areas of expertise. The unit's mission is "to provide customer service and inclusive collaboration while exercising independent judgment, competence, and integrity."

Human Resources Unit

The Human Resources Unit provides guidance and support through hiring, performance management, professional development, classification, compensation, contract administration, collective bargaining, accommodations, leave management, and compliance with state and federal regulations.

Lands and Water Unit

The Lands Program provides services for transactions involving fish and wild-

life habitat, park and recreation lands, fishing access sites, public access rights, and other real property interests; conducts land exchanges, grants of right-of-way and property disposals; provides stewardship of the FWP's conservation easements; provides administration of leases and property tax payment programs; provides information services for FWP's land interests and archival management of the department's real estate records; and oversees production of maps and reports for the public, legislature, and other interested parties.

The Water Resources Program works to protect, restore, and enhance water flow in streams and water levels in lakes and reservoirs to support fish, wildlife, and recreation resources, and to coordinate activities related to these resources in water development projects and water allocation proceedings. Tools employed include water leasing, acquiring and holding water rights and reservations, participating in statewide water rights adjudication, and providing information about Montana's water resources to governmental resource agencies and the public.

Special Projects Unit

The Special Projects Unit (SPU) assists the Director's Office in strategic planning, policy development and implementation, environmental review, public involvement processes, and organizational and employee development. SPU coordinates work groups and facilitates strategic discussions to inform and improve decision-making. It instills an interdisciplinary, cross-divisional/regional, and collaborative approach to serve the needs of the entire department. The unit is responsible for the production of hunting, fishing, boating, and trapping regulation booklets—the most widely used publications FWP produces.



ERIK PETERSEN; TOMMY MARTINO; THOM BRIDGE



Montana FWP Divisional Structure

The divisions in Helena develop priorities under the direction of the Director's Office and in conjunction with FWP's seven administrative regions where programs are implemented at the field level. This work includes managing numerous public processes, including those of the Fish and Wildlife Commission, Parks and Recreation Board, Citizen Advisory Committees, meeting with various interest groups, and thousands of one-on-one contacts with interested citizens.

FWP Administrative Regions

For administrative purposes, FWP splits the state into seven geographic regions. These regions have offices in Kalispell, Missoula, Bozeman, Great Falls, Glasgow, Miles City, and Billings. Additionally, the regions staff other administrative offices around the state to provide convenience for the public and FWP staff. The regions are all led by a regional supervisor and program managers who represent divisional interests within the regions. Regional supervisors report to the chief of operations in Helena and provide a key conduit for feedback from the public around the state. Each region has a citizen advisory committee, which generally meets quarterly to discuss issues facing the department and those of interest to FWP's constituents. Regional supervisors are members of FWP statewide leadership team and work closely with division administrators.

Operations and Financial Services

The Operations and Financial Services Division is responsible for centralized business functions. The division includes design and construction, accounting, purchasing, asset/property management, internal audit support, federal aid administration, and the licensing of all hunters, anglers, and rec-

reational users. It also includes FWP's administrative staff, who are responsible for selling hunting and fishing licenses, coordinating administrative needs, and responding to inquiries from the public.

Wildlife

The Wildlife Division is responsible for the conservation and management of more than 600 Montana birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians and their habitats—legislatively categorized as game animal, nongame wildlife, migratory game bird, upland game bird, furbearers, and threatened and endangered species. The work of the division falls within three major themes: species management (game and nongame), habitat conservation, and wildlife conflict management.

Activities include coordinating, developing, and maintaining management plans; conducting wildlife research activities; monitoring wildlife populations and recommending season structures; conserving and enhancing wildlife habitat; working with landowners; and addressing wildlife conflict through game damage activities and public safety efforts.

Technology Services

The Technology Services Division (TSD) is responsible for technology infrastructure and website frameworks; software development; technology-related oversight and guidance to ensure business alignment; collection, analysis, and dissemination of biological and geographical information via GIS technology; and user support, to ensure consistent and effective use of technology expenditures, products, and services. TSD uses industry best practices, well-trained staff, and in-depth understanding of the agency's business processes to deliver solutions in the most cost-effective and efficient manner possible. FWP's technology program is designed with the state's enterprise principles, sustainable and achievable service levels, and the department's mission in mind.

Parks and Outdoor Recreation

The Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division is responsible for visitor use, recreation management, maintenance, and heritage preservation at state parks, fishing access sites, and wildlife management areas; river recreation management; enhancing access for hunting, fishing, and other types of recreation on public and private lands; shooting range



PHOTO CREDITS FROM LEFT: BRADEN GUNEM; KALON BAUGHAN; PATRICK CLAYTON/ERIC ENGBRETSON UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHY



development; and administration of trail and shooting range grant programs. Primary objectives include keeping sites and access open, clean, and safe; balancing recreational opportunity with conservation and preservation of resources; providing landowners with the help needed to manage public use on their lands; and enhancing local recreation opportunities and infrastructure.

Enforcement

The Enforcement Division is responsible for ensuring compliance with state laws and department and commission regulations aimed at the conservation and protection of game animals, furbearing animals, fish, game birds, and other wildlife species. It engages in complex inter- and intrastate fish and wildlife investigations targeting the unlawful taking and unlawful possession of these resources. It enforces the laws and regulations on lands and waters under the jurisdiction of FWP, such as state parks, fishing access sites, and wildlife management areas, as well as those pertaining to outfitters/guides, boating, snowmobiling, off-highway vehicle safety and registration, and aquatic invasive species (AIS) rules and regulations. Other duties include patrol of and enforcement on state school trust lands,

block management area law enforcement patrols, stream access enforcement, commercial wildlife permitting, hunter education, game damage response, urban wildlife conflict, and assisting other law enforcement agencies.

Communication and Education

FWP's Communication and Education Division, through its Helena office and seven regional communication and education program managers, is responsible for FWP's information and education efforts.

Communication and Education Division staff manage FWP's website, social media platforms, and targeted email delivery systems. They produce and distribute electronic, print, audio, and visual media materials; promote department products, programs, and customer opportunities through targeted marketing campaigns; produce *Montana Outdoors* magazine; coordinate hunter, bowhunter, boat education and safety, and the Becoming an Outdoor Woman programs; coordinate and deliver outdoor recreation and conservation education programs to include archery, angling, aquatic species, and other programs in schools and with partner organizations around the state; coordinate activities at the Montana

WILD Education Center, including hosting external groups who use the meeting facilities, hosting education programs and tours for students statewide, and providing high-quality conservation education displays.

Staff also operate FWP's wild animal rehabilitation center, with particular attention to raptors, working with numerous volunteers and conducting a variety of education programs.

Fisheries

The Fisheries Division manages the state's fishery resources and aquatic ecosystems to meet the public's demand for recreational opportunities and stewardship of aquatic wildlife. Montana's reputation for providing excellent fishing continues to make it a national and international angling destination. The division has a strong focus on habitat protection and enhancement to maintain quality wild fish angling opportunities and protection and enhancement of native species. Quality hatchery-raised fish are used to provide a diversity of angling opportunities where wild fish alone cannot sustain the fisheries. Central to the division are the AIS and Fish Health programs where the focus is prevention and spread of existing AIS or pathogens.



Biennium accomplishments

► MyFWP app

In 2022, FWP launched its new mobile app for hunting and fishing in Montana. The MyFWP app provides a simple and easy way to store and display licenses, permits, and digital carcass tags, known as E-Tags, which can be used in the field without cellular service. Hunters have a choice to carry traditional paper tags or E-Tags. With E-Tags, hunters can digitally validate their harvest similar to notching a paper carcass tag in the field. Even if someone opts for paper carcass tags, they can still use the app to carry and view licenses and permits for the current year and one year prior. FWP does not store any GPS coordinates or other personal information from app users. Moving forward, FWP will explore adding new functions and services to the app. Entering the 2022 general hunting season, more than 23,300 people had opted for about 69,700 E-Tags.

► New Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division

In 2021, FWP leadership adapted the department's structure and created the Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division to meet the demands of diverse and increasing public recreation, to more efficiently use department resources to maintain FWP properties across the state, and to allow the fish and wildlife divisions to focus on species and habitat management. The Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division serves the many users who visit or recreate on FWP or other public and private lands where FWP helps manage use, including at state parks, fishing access sites, wildlife management areas, and block management areas. Under the reorganization, previously disparate position descriptions were standardized and maintenance staff for all FWP proper-

ties were unified to enhance consistency and efficiency.

The new structure supports regional maintenance managers who report to regional supervisors to ensure a consistent approach to maintenance needs across all sites within a region.

► Holistic review of hunting access programs, statutes, and rules

During the past two years, FWP has comprehensively reviewed all 12 of the department's private land hunting access programs' intent, effectiveness, and administration while seeking ways to improve their implementation. This review included Public Access Land Agreements (PALA), Unlocking Public Lands (UPL), Block Management, and Elk Hunting Access Agreements (EHA's, formerly known as 454 agreements). The result was revised application and approval processes for EHA agreements that brought consistency to the program for interested landowners and transparency for the public. The review included working with the Private Land/Public Wildlife Advisory Committee (PLPW) to engage the members, stakeholders, and the public to produce ideas for improving the programs and retaining and enrolling more landowners. It has also resulted in both legislative and rulemaking proposals for improvements.

► Improved collaboration with tribal partners

During the past two years, FWP has worked diligently to improve its relationships with Montana Tribal Nations. This effort has included a variety of projects around the state: FWP staff worked with the Salish Culture Committee on interpretive efforts at Fort Owen State Park and with the Kootenai Culture Committee on Somers Beach State Park. FWP and Blackfeet Nation

biologists are working together to study elk populations and movements on and off the reservation. Captures continue this winter. FWP has added Blackfeet Bison License sales to our system, which will include a link on our website to help advertise the licenses. FWP Parks and Outdoor Recreation staff met with several tribes to promote the opportunities available through the trails grant program. FWP also worked with the Northern Cheyenne Tribe on bear conflict management, which included training for managing human conflicts and working with the public on bear-aware education. The effort included law enforcement and wildlife staff from both agencies.

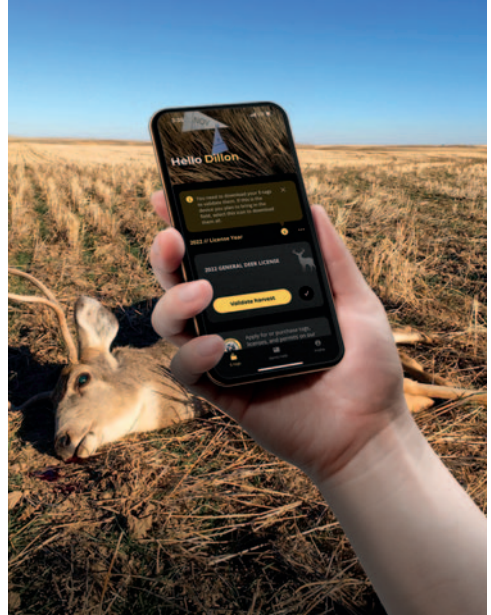
► Transferring administration of Hell Creek Recreation Area to the Little Shell Tribe

In 2021, FWP began working with the Little Shell Tribe to transfer operations at Hell Creek Recreation Area to the tribe. After months of planning and incorporating tribal staff into the operations of the area, the official transfer took place in the spring of 2022. This unique transfer allows Hell Creek visitors to enjoy the same level of services they've come to expect, including the new water system and upgraded fish cleaning station, and opened a new economic development opportunity for the tribe. The transition demonstrates a commitment by FWP to work with partners to provide the best recreational access to people who love the outdoors.

► Lower Yellowstone River access

The Lower Yellowstone River is a wild and remote area that has seen increased interest in the past few years as people look for new areas to recreate. Access in this area is limited, and, building on a grassroots effort, FWP is finding opportunities to increase access through fee title acquisitions as well as easements and other tools.





In 2022, FWP designed and produced the Lower Yellowstone River Access Guide as a tool for people looking to recreate in the area. The access guide was distributed in both online and hard copy formats. In the years to come, FWP’s commitment to expanding recreational opportunities in this region will be a benefit to local communities and businesses as well as the resource itself.

► **Hunter ethics outreach**

Over the past few years, particularly with the increase in outdoor recreation, hunter ethics have become a greater concern. Problems seem particularly acute with private landowners and block management cooperators who are seeing more poor behavior than in the past.

In 2021, FWP launched a small marketing campaign based on the message of respect: “Respect the land. Respect Landowners. Respect Wildlife. Pass it on.” The campaign focused on digital advertising, billboards, and targeted emails. In total, FWP reached about 7 million people with this messaging.

In 2022, FWP worked with several partners including Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, MeatEater, Montana Stockgrowers Association, Montana Wildlife Federation, Montana Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife, and Pheasants Forever to develop a new campaign with a slogan and messaging that all entities could promote. The new campaign focuses on the respon-

sibility of all hunters to be respectful and ethical: “It’s up to us. Respect Access. Protect the Hunt.” The campaign involves previously successful tools, along with the addition of video and audio public service announcements and partner promotions.

► **Water-rights call process development and awareness**

In 2021, Gov. Gianforte asked FWP to formalize its process to make calls on junior instream water rights in dry years. For more than three decades, FWP has utilized instream water rights to benefit aquatic ecosystems and water users, including both agriculture users and recreationists. The process FWP goes through to make a call on junior water rights is complex and involves a rigorous analysis of current and predicted water conditions, habitat impacts, and affected water-rights users. Clearly delineating this process has made it more predictable and transparent to fellow water users, decision makers, and the public.

In 2022, FWP made water-right calls on the following streams: Blackfoot River, Gallatin River, Jefferson River, Shields River, Smith River, and Rock Creek. Each water-rights call was communicated to junior water right holders via a formal letter, and to the public via the FWP website. Memos accompanying the calls explained the analysis done by the department and the im-

pacts the call would have to local fisheries and the aquatic ecosystem.

► **Increased public outreach efforts**

A hallmark of Director Worsch’s tenure is transparency and accountability. To that end, FWP has stepped up its outreach to the public on a variety of fronts.

The most visible and unique efforts are annual listening sessions by the director and his staff at regional offices around the state. These listening sessions occur annually and involve a public meeting where people can talk to the director and staff about any issue they’d like. These listening sessions are instructional for the department, as they identify what concerns or questions are foremost on people’s minds. After the public listening sessions, the director and headquarters staff meet with local FWP employees to improve communication and engage on questions or ideas they may have. These meetings have produced great ideas about how to improve operations and services to the public. FWP has also held virtual and in-person public meetings on elk management, regulations, scoping efforts, recreation management, and many other topics. FWP continues to look for new ways to connect with citizens. An engaged public that knows and understands the issues facing the department is critical to helping FWP manage the amazing fish, wildlife, and recreational resources of Montana. ■

PHOTO CREDITS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: LUKE DURAN; ALLEN M. JONES; TOM DICKSON/LUKE DURAN; JOHN LAMBING; TOM DICKSON





Since 1901, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has served the public by stewarding resources that are central to our identity as Montanans. The department accomplishes this stewardship by balancing various and often competing interests, through inclusion of all points of view, with a foundation of scientific integrity, and a close eye to the values we all share for wildlife and outdoor recreation.

FWP'S MISSION:

Steward the fish, wildlife, parks, and recreational resources for the public, now and into the future.

FWP'S VISION:

Montana is a place where people have abundant opportunities to connect with the world-renowned fish, wildlife, and recreational resources that define our state, and where a responsive and relevant FWP has the resiliency and public support it needs to lead the way in making sure these resources remain an essential part of Montana's culture, economy, and high quality of life.



THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
REPORT TO THE 2023 MONTANA LEGISLATURE

COVER PHOTO: CHRIS AUCH; BACK COVER: LON LAUBER

Produced in-house by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. Copyright ©2023. All rights reserved. This document was printed at state expense. For information on the cost of the publication, call Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at (406) 444-2545.