

## **MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS**

### **Enforcement Division**

#### **OVERVIEW**

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, fur-bearing 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 land, block management area law enforcement patrols, stream access enforcement, commercial wildlife permitting, hunter education, game damage response, urban wildlife activities, and assisting other law enforcement agencies.

#### **ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Made over 229,000 personal contacts in 2019-2020 with the sporting and recreating public.
  - This includes 1,807 hours dedicated to educational activities and community sponsored events such as hunter education, fairs, hunter and angler events, and delivering public presentations.
- Detected and/or investigated over 12,000 fish, wildlife, and parks violations ranging from simple misdemeanor violations to complex felony criminal violations.
  - Over 8,700 citations, 6,100 written warnings, and countless verbal warnings were issued.
  - Investigations resulted in multiple felony level cases.
  - Wardens continued to issue more warnings than citations, seizing on opportunities to educate and inform the public.
- Increased AIS enforcement efforts across the state.
  - Continued to support FWP's AIS program through statewide and targeted enforcement efforts, especially at inspection stations with high occurrences of the public failing to stop as required.
  - FWP wardens issued 402 citations and 565 written warnings for AIS violations.
- Responded to over 7,600 TipMont reports.
  - Continued to expand public awareness of the TipMont program.
  - Increased reporting online at FWP website and with the 1-800-TipMont hotline.
  - Continued use of social media as law enforcement tool for public outreach.
- Successfully completed the Enforcement Division pilot canine program – moving to make permanent.
  - The division has two trained and certified canine-handler teams; one located in Region 3 and the other in Region 5. Teams deployed on 44 article searches and 20 public presentations.
  - Based upon the success of pilot program, we would like to make this a permanent program.
- Successful enforcement equipment replacement.
  - Expended funds allocated by 2019 Legislature to replace aging, obsolete, and unsafe specialized equipment.
- Continued with highly successful cooperative law enforcement efforts with DNRC.
  - Game wardens made 4,628 public contacts on DNRC property and issued 236 citations.
- Continued with technology integration with emphasis on uniformity and officer safety.
  - Improved electronic warden activity tracking system.
  - Began a wider distribution and use of body worn cameras among wardens.
  - Developed and implemented a statewide standardized incident reporting process.
  - Received training in and equipped all wardens' vehicles with Automated External Defibrillators (AED).

- Development and implementation of a Special Investigations Unit.
  - Using existing personnel and FTE, we restructured investigators into a common chain of command to more efficiently prioritize and consistently conduct criminal investigations across the state.
- Implemented Officer Involved Critical Incident Response and Management policy and procedure.

## **CHALLENGES**

- Increased visitation and outdoor recreation.
  - Wardens are spread thin across the state with some warden districts exceeding 2,000 square miles. The amount of increased public recreation and demands on wardens has made meeting the demands of these districts extremely challenging.
  - Conducting proactive enforcement contacts and patrols, an essential public outreach and education tool where visible patrols and public contacts are used to proactively identify and address resource violations, has significantly lessened.
- Parks and fishing access site enforcement.
  - State parks visitation has substantially increased, creating an increased demand for law enforcement presence and response.
  - Violations of public use laws, rules, and other criminal violations (e.g., drugs, alcohol, disorderly conduct, vandalism) increase as visitation increases.
- Aquatic invasive species enforcement.
  - There will continue to be a significant demand for enforcement presence at these sites.
- Large scale investigations/wildlife trafficking.
  - Major cases involving the illicit commercialization and unlawful trafficking of the state's wildlife resources continue to grow.
- License fraud investigations.
  - These are technical, laborious and time-consuming investigative processes, but ones that can generate fines and restitution, as well as general fund money in the form of unpaid back taxes.
- TIPMONT report increases.
  - Call to our TIPMONT line have increased nearly 100%, largely due to AIS and the unprecedented increase in public recreation. This has increased the workload on administrative staff.
- Officer safety.
  - Wardens work alone, often in remote locations, far from back up, and routinely interact with those who are armed.
  - Dependable, reliable radio communication and dispatch services are critical.
  - There is increasing presence of and exposure to non-conservation related enforcement issues (e.g., drugs, alcohol, violent offenders, absconders, warrants).
  - Montana's remote areas can attract anti-government, sovereign citizen supporters that can put wardens at risk during normal patrol operations.
- Training needs.
  - The need for required, more advanced, and specialized training is continually increasing.
  - There is a mounting need for advanced and diverse training to match the demands of a changing world (e.g., communication skills, mental illness, tribal relations, technology).
- Technological Advances.
  - Ongoing appropriations are needed for acquisition, replacement, and updating of evolving technologies (e.g., radio and cellular communications, mobile computers, body and dash cameras) to maintain their usefulness.