



# MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

**Meeting Date:** August 25, 2022

**Agenda Item:** Nongame Tax Check-off Workplan

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 minutes

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**Background:** Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is responsible for managing about 500 wildlife species, the majority of which are nongame wildlife. Eighty percent of residents enjoy non-hunting wildlife recreation, and in a 2001 United States Fish and Wildlife Service survey, 44% of Montanans participated in bird watching, the highest percentage in the country. Nongame conservation and management includes, but is not limited to, developing and implementing species management plans, developing and implementing monitoring techniques for populations of nongame animals, producing credible information on the distribution and status of at risk species to prevent Endangered Species Act (ESA) listings, working to recover listed species, managing survey and inventory data, reporting on that data in professional and public settings, and collaborating with diverse partnerships to use limited resources efficiently to manage and conserve nongame species and their habitats.

The nongame wildlife tax check-off account is a state special revenue fund provided for in 17-2-102, MCA. All money collected under 15-30-2387 and now 4% of the marijuana taxes deposited under 16-12-111 goes into this account. Money in the account must be used by the department for research, management, and education programs for nongame wildlife in Montana. The nongame program uses Montana's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) to prioritize nongame survey, management, and conservation efforts. The SWAP identifies 128 Species of Greatest Conservation Need, as well 13 aquatic and 14 terrestrial Community Types of Greatest Conservation Need. Under the provisions of 87-5-122, MCA, "the FWP Commission shall review and annually approve the nongame wildlife program's projects recommended by the department for funding from the nongame wildlife tax check-off account. The Commission shall provide for public comment during the review and approval process."

The FY23 appropriation for the nongame tax-check off is \$46,384 and the appropriation for the marijuana tax is \$1,082,000. While this is a large increase in funding, the gap between the funds that have been available, and the funds needed to meet program objectives and obligations has significantly limited program success. This gap has resulted in lack of information about many nongame species, making them vulnerable to being petitioned for federal ESA listing, lost opportunities for habitat conservation, and unanswered questions on species presence and population health. The nongame program has had the capacity to focus on only a handful of species and habitat conservation projects at a time. With new funding from marijuana tax revenue, the program will be equipped to tackle a larger portion of the species and their habitats to keep species from needing federal protection and to ensure healthy habitat is available for all species. New funding will increase opportunities to partner with landowners, universities, conservation organizations, and outdoor recreationists.

Proposed use of funding in the nongame account is as follows:

<b>\$445,000</b>	Species and habitat restoration and conservation work, e.g., disease monitoring and management, population augmentation, habitat enhancement in community types of greatest conservation need to keep the maximum number of species from declining and therefore prevent the need for listing, landowner incentive programs to keep working lands available for wildlife.
<b>\$403,384</b>	Inventory and monitoring work on species of greatest conservation need and species in need of inventory as determined through a formal ranking process with a primary objective of preventing the need for ESA listing and minimizing the impact of ESA listings on private landowners, industry, and recreationists.
<b>\$180,000</b>	Research and data analysis that provide information needed to conserve, restore, and enhance populations and habitat for species of greatest conservation need and other nongame wildlife. Graduate research projects could meet these needs.
<b>\$ 50,000</b>	Internship Program. This program provides professional development opportunities for undergraduate students in wildlife biology and related degree programs while increasing capacity of nongame program biologists. Summer interns have become critical to meeting annual survey and inventory goals.
<b>\$ 50,000</b>	K-12 Education and Wildlife Viewing Programs. Work with staff at Montana WILD to design and deliver distance learning programs on nongame species. Increase opportunities for wildlife viewing and outreach projects that encourage more Montanans to appreciate Montana wildlife.
<b>\$1,128,384</b>	Total FY23 appropriation (nongame checkoff + marijuana tax)

The above amounts include costs for additional staff to complete described tasks.

**Public Involvement Process and Results:** Public comment will be solicited for a 4-week period starting June 24, 2022. Public comments will be posted online and provided to commissioners at least two weeks prior to the August commission meeting.

**Alternatives and Analysis:** The recommended work addresses all core objectives of FWP's overall nongame management program. Alternatives to the recommendations could include allocating more or less among these categories or identifying new categories.

**Agency Recommendation and Rationale:** FWP recommends the commission endorse the proposed work for funding with the nongame tax check-off account that includes the marijuana tax revenue.

**Proposed Motion:** I move that the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the proposed Nongame Tax Check-Off Workplan for Fiscal Year 2023 with emphasis on finding ways to minimize impacts of Endangered Species Act listings on landowners, recreationists, and other user groups.