



# MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION FWP PROPOSAL AND INFORMATION SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

**Meeting Date:** Aug. 16, 2024

**Agenda Item:** Nongame Wildlife Account Annual Workplan

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 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. Nongame conservation and management includes, developing and implementing species management plans, monitoring techniques for 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, and collaborating with partners to use limited resources efficiently to manage and conserve nongame species and their habitats.

The nongame wildlife account is a state special revenue fund provided for in 17-2-102, MCA. All money collected under 15-30-2387, MCA, and four percent of the marijuana taxes deposited under 16-12-111, MCA, 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 (SGCN), 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 account. The Commission shall provide for public comment during the review and approval process."

The FY25 appropriation for the nongame wildlife account workplan is \$1,137,375. The nongame program is not proposing substantive changes from the FY24 workplan. The proposed plan will continue using the new funding from marijuana tax revenue to tackle a larger portion of SGCN and their habitats to keep species from needing federal protection and to ensure healthy habitat is available for all species. Building on the success realized in FY24 (see attached list of accomplishments), funding is proposed to continue to increase opportunities to partner with landowners, universities, conservation organizations, and outdoor recreationists.

*(continued – see next page)*

Table 1. Proposed use of funding in the nongame account.

<b>\$454,000</b>	<p>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). Specific projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor bat populations and surveillance for a disease: white-nose syndrome</li> <li>• Habitat enhancement and restoration projects with a focus on wetland – riparian areas and prairie grasslands.</li> <li>• Continue 10-year review of Montana’s State Wildlife Action Plan, a document that guides FWP’s work to manage and conserve SGCN and the habitats they depend on. The plan is required by the USFWS to be eligible for federal funding and is due in 2025.</li> </ul>
<b>\$403,375</b>	<p>Inventory and monitoring work on SGCN 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. Specific projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue surveys for two species petitioned for listing under the ESA in 2022: pygmy rabbit and pinyon jay.</li> <li>• Annual statewide bird monitoring program in collaboration with USFS, BLM, and private landowners provides data on nearly 200 bird species, including three dozen SGCN.</li> <li>• Year three of a 3-year statewide shorebird survey in collaboration with 11 western states.</li> <li>• Range-wide surveys for the Rocky Mountain breeding population of harlequin ducks in collaboration with Idaho, Wyoming, and Alberta.</li> </ul>
<b>\$180,000</b>	<p>Research and data analysis that provide information needed to conserve, restore, and enhance populations and habitat for SGNC and other nongame wildlife. Graduate research projects could meet these needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue establishing a network of Motus stations to track migration and movement of birds and bats equipped with tiny radio transmitters.</li> <li>• Continue to fund two graduate research projects that provide information critical to the effective management of SGCN and the habitats they depend on.</li> </ul>
<b>\$ 50,000</b>	<p>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.</p>
<b>\$ 50,000</b>	<p>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.</p>
<b>\$1,137,375</b>	<p>Total FY24 appropriation (nongame checkoff + marijuana tax)</p>

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

**Analysis and Alternatives:** The recommended work addresses all core objectives of FWP’s overall nongame management program.

Alternative A: The commission may choose to approve the Nongame Wildlife Account Workplan as proposed.

Alternative B: The commission could choose not to approve the workplan as proposed and allocate more or less funding among these categories or identify new categories.

**Agency Recommendation and Rationale:** The department recommends the commission endorse the proposed work for funding with the nongame wildlife account that includes the marijuana tax revenue.

**Proposed Motion:** I move that the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the proposed Nongame Wildlife Account 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.