



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION FWP PROPOSAL AND INFORMATION SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: August 19, 2026

Agenda Item: Nongame Wildlife Account Annual Workplan

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

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, 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, recovering listed species, managing survey and inventory data, reporting in professional and public settings, and collaborating with diverse partnerships to use limited resources efficiently to manage and conserve nongame species and their habitats, and to educate people about their value and the importance of conservation measures.

The nongame wildlife account is established in 87-5-121, MCA as part of the state special revenue fund provided for in 17-2-102, MCA. Funds collected as a voluntary “check-off” donation on individual income tax returns under 15-30-2387, MCA, and 4 percent of the marijuana taxes collected under 16-12-111, MCA, go 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. SWAP identifies Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and the habitat on which they depend. 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 2025 legislature increased spending authority from the Nongame Wildlife Account by approximately \$1.3 million, bringing the Fiscal Year 2027 appropriation to \$2,471,079. The nongame program is proposing to address nongame species and their habitats to limit and reduce the need for federal protection and to ensure healthy habitat is available for all species. The program proposes to implement habitat restoration and enhancement projects that target SGCN and develop a Watchable Wildlife Program to inform people about nongame wildlife management and conservation measures.

Proposed use of funding in the nongame wildlife account is identified in the following table. See the accompanying 2025 Nongame Wildlife Program Accomplishments for progress on previously funded projects.

<p>\$980,079</p>	<p>Species and habitat restoration and conservation work, such as disease monitoring and management, population augmentation, habitat enhancement in habitats 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"> • Monitor bat populations and surveillance for a disease: white-nose syndrome (WNS). Vaccinate bats at two large roosts to improve resistance to the fungus that causes WNS. This is a conservation intervention intended to bolster Montana’s bats and reduce the risk of ESA listing. • Habitat enhancement and restoration projects with a focus on wetland – riparian areas and prairie grasslands. • Reintroduction of northern leopard frogs to western Montana, where they were extirpated in the 1970s. Restoring the species to its full range in Montana will reduce the risk of ESA listing. • Montana’s State Wildlife Action Plan was approved by the USFWS on April 29, 2026. The 2027 workplan includes developing an online dashboard that facilitates the implementation of Montana’s SWAP and identification of Conservation Opportunity Areas to ensure conservation delivery is strategic.
<p>\$953,000</p>	<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. This work will reduce the impact of ESA listings on private landowners, industry, and recreationists. Specific projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue surveys for pinyon jay, petitioned for listing under the ESA in 2022. Continue tracking the migration routes of Wilson’s phalaropes, a shorebird petitioned in 2024, using Motus transmitters. Conduct pollinators surveys to address data deficiencies and develop a long-term monitoring strategy for eight bee species either proposed for ESA listing or are under USFWS review. • Annual statewide bird monitoring program in collaboration with U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and private landowners, provides data on nearly 200 bird species, including 36 SGCN. • Range-wide surveys for the Rocky Mountain breeding population of harlequin ducks in collaboration with other western states. • Surveys to determine distribution/status of at least 106 amphibian, reptile, and mammalian SGCN and 16 species of greatest inventory need.
<p>\$243,000</p>	<p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue establishing a network of Motus stations to track migration and movement of birds and bats equipped with tiny radio transmitters. • Continue to fund three graduate research projects that provide information critical to the effective management of SGCN and the habitats they depend on and inform on-the-ground efforts to conserve the Coeur d’Alene salamanders and the unique habitat features they depend on.
<p>\$ 70,000</p>	<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.</p>
<p>\$225,000</p>	<p>Nongame Wildlife Outreach. Work across divisions with staff from Wildlife, Parks and Outdoor Recreation, Comm-Ed, and Fisheries to collaborate on outreach that targets SGCN and the</p>

	habitats they depend on. We will create and enhance existing opportunities for the public to view wildlife and become engaged in the conservation and management of nongame wildlife. The program will help meet two of five fundamental objectives: (1) increase internal and external support and appreciation for nongame wildlife, and (2) increase the public's access to nongame wildlife.
\$2,471,079	Total Fiscal Year 2027 budget

Public Involvement Process and Results: Public comment will be solicited for a four-week period beginning in July. 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.

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

Alternative B: The commission may choose not to amend the workplan and allocate funding differently among these categories or identify new categories for funding.

Agency Recommendation and Rationale: The department recommends the commission approve the proposed workplan to be implemented using funding from the nongame wildlife account that includes the marijuana tax revenue as presented by the department.

Proposed Motion: I move that the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the proposed Nongame Wildlife Account Workplan for Fiscal Year 2027 with an emphasis on reducing the effects of Endangered Species Act listings on landowners, recreationists, and other user groups.