



MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

Conservation Success Stories Under the Current Montana Funding Situation and

Examples of Priority Projects Under a New Funding Scenario April 2021

The federal Recovering America's Wildlife Act would dedicate up to \$27 million annually to fully implement Montana's State Wildlife Action plan, increase opportunities for wildlife associated recreation and advance wildlife conservation education programs.

Passage of this legislation would benefit all Montanans and provide opportunities for future generations to see amazing wildlife, live surrounded by healthy wildlife habitat and enjoy the outdoors.



The following highlights just a few of the great conservation successes Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and its partners have been able to achieve under past funding scenarios along with ideas for projects that could be priorities for new funding.

Priorities #1-4 are from the 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan.
Priorities #5-6 are from the 2016 Vision and Guide.

Photos (clockwise): birdwatching at Freezeout Lake Wildlife Management Area (Allison Begley), black-footed ferret (US Fish and Wildlife Service), landowner/agency workshop, chestnut-collared longspur, child at Spring Meadow State Park, grizzly bear, sage grouse, pallid sturgeon, western king-bird (Lee Nelson), and pika (Shannon Hilty).

Priority #1: A focus on community types to work at a large scale and address wide-ranging impacts. Large scale habitat conservation and restoration projects that provide long term benefits to habitat, wildlife, and people.

Success Story: Sage Grouse Initiative

- Highly targeted and science-based landscape approach to proactively conserve sage-grouse and sustain the working rangelands that support western ranching economies.
- This innovative partnership of ranchers, agencies, universities, non-profit groups and businesses embraces a common vision – achieving wildlife conservation through sustainable ranching.



- The protection of sage grouse habitat benefits 350 other sagebrush-dependent species, including songbirds like Brewer’s sparrow and green-tailed towhee, as well as game species like pronghorn.

Priority project: Conserving Montana’s Working Lands



- Despite ongoing grassland conversion, Montana still boasts some of the last vestiges of native prairie in the United States. The Working Grasslands Initiative is designed to provide for viable populations of grassland-associated wildlife through voluntary, non-regulatory conservation tools for private landowners with working farms and ranches.
- Wildlife and humans both benefit from natural areas that serve as water filtration systems, wildfire buffers, and flood barriers highlighting the importance of habitat conservation.

Boosting the Montana Economy

- Montana’s focus on conserving rangelands occupied by sage grouse increased the state’s Environmental Quality Incentives Program cost-share funding by 26% in a two-year span, an increase of \$8.7 million. (nrns.usda.gov/)
- Keeping working lands in agricultural production and conserving open space with wildlife friendly infrastructure ensures work for rural Montanans and boosts the local economies of our small communities.



Priority #2: A focus on smaller scale geographic areas in greatest need of conservation.

Success story: Grayling Conservation

- The Big Hole Watershed Committee adopted a drought management plan that called for voluntary curtailments of irrigation water use and angling when the river dropped below target levels.
- USFWS agreements with ranchers provided protection from further regulation should the grayling be listed.
- More than 30 ranching families are involved, and the grayling was found unwarranted for federal listing in 2020.



Priority project: Flathead River Restoration

- Northwest Montana is highly prized for its wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities but is growing rapidly in human population.



- The Rivers to Lake Initiative is a community project to restore and conserve the river and adjacent uplands to secure fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, flood water retention, groundwater recharge, and open space for future generations.
- Successful project implementation will improve habitat for over 50 native terrestrial species, fish habitat for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout, and increase opportunities for wildlife viewing, hunting and fishing.

Boosting the Montana Economy

- Replacing or improving culverts for adequate fish passage requires skilled laborers and heavy equipment operators.
- Wet meadow restoration makes meadows 25% more productive and keeps water on the ranch in the fall when producers and wildlife need it most (nrcs.usda.gov/).



Priority #3: A focus on Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) through broadscale or fine scale actions dependent on the species needs and current status; 1) Protect and enhance existing habitats that benefit SGCN, 2) Restore strategically located habitats for SGCN where habitat no longer exists, 3) Research species ecology, limiting factors, and habitat, and 4) Disease management.

Success story: Trumpeter Swans Restoration

- FWP, the Blackfoot Challenge, the US Fish & Wildlife Service and a host of partners including private landowners have restored trumpeter swans to wetlands in the Blackfoot River watershed through habitat conservation and reintroductions.
- 2011 marked the first-year trumpeter swans successfully nested and fledged young in the Blackfoot watershed in more than 100 years. Blackfoot wetlands are currently hosting record numbers of trumpeter swan pairs with record productivity of over 20 young per year.



Priority project: Conservation of Wetland and High Elevation Species

- Knowing more about the poorly understood northern bog lemming found in wet meadows, fens, or bogs allows for more informed habitat alteration and preventing federal listing that could impact forestry.
- Rapidly changing high elevation habitat is raising concerns for long term persistence of mountain goats. There is a clear need to evaluate ecology, limiting factors, and habitat to inform and develop tools that support conservation and management decisions in native mountain goat habitat.

Boosting the Montana Economy

- Montana's agricultural industry continues to be a primary driver of the state's economy with \$4.6 billion in agricultural production in 2019. Montana is home to 26,800 farms and ranches, which span nearly 60 million acres. (Montana Dept of Agriculture.)
- Private landowner incentive programs promote conservation of critical habitats managed as open range. Open lands provide year-round habitat and room for wildlife to migrate.
- Forest restoration at the FWP Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area, a combination of conifer expansion removal and commercial thinning will support over 30 jobs (FWP, Forestry program)



Priority #4: A focus on short term inventory efforts to determine species status and any need for future conservation work.



Success story: Wind Energy and Golden Eagles

- Conservation partners prioritized golden eagle nest surveys beginning in 2012 finding a greater number of nests than expected.
- Knowing we have a large and well distributed population of nesting golden eagles allows agencies to provide informed management recommendations to developers such as wind energy companies and lessens the risk of the species being listed under federal protections due to a lack of survey information.

Priority project: Learning more about Montana's Species of Greatest Inventory Need

- Minimizing negative impacts of federal Endangered Species Act listings to landowners, recreationists, and other user groups requires knowledge on sensitive species populations and habitats.
- Knowing more about the chimney swift, a small city dwelling bird, allows wildlife managers to manage population for long term persistence while minimizing conflict with homeowners.



Boosting the Montana Economy

- Clean power projects provide extra income to farmers, ranchers, and other private landowners. In 2020, these drought-proof land lease payments totaled \$6.1 million in Montana (cleanpower.org).



- Keeping the forestry and alternative energy sectors healthy is important to Montana's economic sustainability and growth. According to the Montana Bureau of Business and Economic Research (Sorenson et al. 2016), the responsible harvest of a million board-feet of timber equates to roughly 10 direct jobs annually.

Priority #5: A focus on fostering interest and involvement in the resources Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks manages through public outreach and education so that people increasingly value these resources and the experiences they provide.

Success stories: Montana WILD

- Each year Montana WILD staff and volunteers teach more than 5,000 students from over 100 schools from across the state, and an additional 3,000 adults and families from community programs and youth organizations.
- Montana WILD teaches a host of programs on outdoor recreation, field science like bird survey methods, living with wildlife, conserving habitat, and becoming good stewards of our state’s natural resources.



Priority project: Provide Outreach to a More Montanans

- Highlight the day-to-day benefits of conservation practices such as conserving key native wildlife habitats adjacent to sprawling communities and maintaining setbacks for retaining or restoring land along our lakes, rivers and streams.
- Partner with organizations such as the Montana Office of Tourism to create and implement a marketing campaign promoting wildlife viewing.

Boosting the Montana Economy

- Maintaining a conservation minded public to include out of state visitors is important when considering more than 12.4 million out-of-state visitors spent an estimated \$3.7 billion in Montana’s main street stores, restaurants and hotels in 2018, making the tourism industry one of Montana’s largest sectors (Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research).



- Tourists are coming to enjoy Montana’s natural beauty and recreational opportunities but need to know how to responsibly appreciate it. Building, staffing and running a new Montana WILD facility will increase our local and visiting audiences but also put laborers and educators to work.

Priority #6: A focus on 1) Providing diverse opportunities for people to connect with Montana's outdoors to meet the needs of those who use and value the resources we manage, 2) Retaining, recruiting, and reactivating participants in hunting, angling, trapping, state parks visitation, and other outdoor recreation by providing relevant and meaningful opportunities and services.

Success stories: Access to the Outdoors

- FWP provides opportunities for hiking and camping in places where the opportunities to view a diverse variety of wildlife exist.
- There are 89 designated wildlife viewing sites in Montana and 40 Important Bird Areas. Important Bird Areas are great places to bird watch and designated wildlife viewing sites typically support birds, big game, and even large carnivores.
- More than 50,000 Montanans participate annually in some form of fishing event like a Hooked-on Fishing clinic. Volunteers donate more than 25,000 hours to these programs.



Priority Project: Maintain Relationships with Private Landowners



- Maintain and build FWP's private lands access programs that keep lands open for recreation and provide landowners with such things as tax credits, per acre or per hunter payments, technical assistance or hunting licenses or permit as incentive to keep their property open.

Boosting the Montana Economy

- Montana's Outdoor Recreation Industry accounts for \$7.1 billion in consumer spending and more than 71,000 jobs—the 2nd largest sector of the state's economy (Governor's Office of Outdoor Recreation). Montana's tourism industry supports 59,330 jobs and \$1.5 billion in annual salaries (choose.montana.com).
- FWP's access programs contribute roughly \$6 million to local economies through incentive payments to private landowners. In addition, the access program employs nearly 30 people, often in communities where work opportunities are limited.

