

# A Booming Bottom Line

**E**ven though the leaves are down and the grass has turned tan, many Montanans are seeing green this time of year. That's because it's hunting season, and hunting fills cash registers and boosts local economies across this entire state.

According to recent federal and state studies, hunters each year spend several hundred million dollars in Montana. Many purchases are small—\$60 to fill up a truck to hunt pronghorn in Rosebud County, \$17.50 for lunch in Conrad during a pheasant hunt, \$28 for a box of 180-grain elk cartridges—but they add up. In 2006, according to the most recent survey by the U.S. Departments of Commerce and the Interior, 197,000 hunters (145,000 residents and 52,000 nonresidents) spent \$310 million in Montana on hunting-related expenses. A 2010 FWP study found that elk hunters spent the most per day (on average \$380 by nonresidents and \$81 by residents), with upland hunters a close second (\$376 by nonresidents and \$64 by residents).

The spending supports varied occupations such as motel and cafe owners, sporting goods clerks, taxidermists, and outfitters.

All this economic enhancement is great news. But it doesn't come without some costs. FWP must manage the elk, pheasants, mule deer, bighorn sheep, waterfowl, and other game populations that hunters pay so much to pursue. Our agency needs to acquire and improve habitat. Biologists have to monitor populations and set seasons to ensure harvests aren't too high or too low. Game wardens must enforce hunting and trespass laws as well as protect public safety.

Prudently, some of the dollars spent on hunting in Montana are reinvested into the state's wildlife. Hunting license fees and a federal tax on firearms and ammunition provide most of the funding for FWP's Wildlife and Enforcement Bureaus. When you buy an elk or upland game bird license, that money goes to this agency to ensure you have wildlife to hunt, places to hunt them, and a hunting environment that is as

**Hunters spend over \$300 million in Montana each year on hunting-related expenses.**

legal and safe as possible.

Every industry has to reinvest money into what makes it thrive, and that's certainly the case with hunting. That's why Montana must continue funding wildlife management at the level required to keep up with the demand for wildlife by hunters.

Though the hundreds of millions of dol-

lars spent on hunting in Montana is staggering, another aspect of hunting is much harder to tabulate on a spreadsheet. According to Richard Barrett, former economics professor at the University of Montana, the worth someone places on his or her ability to hunt is another type of "revenue" to Montana. It has a value, he says, that needs to be factored into any discussion of Montana's economy and standard of living.

You can say that again. Talk to Montana hunters and they'll tell you hunting is something they couldn't put a price tag on. For many people, chasing deer, elk, and other game is at the core of their identity and one of the main reasons they love living here.

This season, as many of us take to the mountains and prairies in search of game and adventure, a large part of the appeal also is to spend time afield with friends and family. Come to think of it, that could be hunting's most valuable contribution of all.

—Joe Maurier, Montana FWP Director



LUKE DURAN/FWP



PUBLIC-DOMAIN-PHOTOS.COM