

# Getting out

The best way for me to understand the many issues involving Montana's fish, wildlife, and state parks is to get out and experience them firsthand. Since being appointed to this position by the governor, I've been crisscrossing Montana to visit all of FWP's seven regions. What I've seen is amazing.

For instance, a few weeks ago I was in Glasgow and toured Fort Peck Reservoir with biologists who've managed the fisheries there for years. I was blown away by the immensity of the reservoir—which has more shoreline miles than the entire California coast—and the stark grandeur of the surrounding breaks. I was also impressed to learn that Fort Peck is home to 47 native and introduced fish species. More notable was how much pride our crews took in managing the fish populations and the love they have for eastern Montana and its vast and scenic prairies, river breaks, and rangeland.

One inspiring employee I met on that trip was Tyler Had-dix. For years, this FWP fisheries biologist and his colleagues have been working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to modify flows from the dam to provide more natural conditions downstream. If they succeed—and I have every reason to believe they will—that partnership between FWP, the Corps, and others would revive more than 200 miles of the Missouri. That would benefit not only the federally endangered pallid sturgeon, but also the paddlefish, blue sucker, sicklefin chub, and other native fish species, not to mention reestablish the entire riverine ecosystem.

On another trip, I toured Lone Pine State Park, which sits on a mountain overlooking Kalispell and provides wonderful views of the Flathead Valley. That morning I marveled at the number of people walking the park's seven miles of trails before heading to work. FWP regional parks manager Dave Landstrom told me that Lone Pine, like Montana's other urban state parks, provides a place where people learn about history and nature, gather for family picnics, hike and bike trails, and explore the outdoors—within minutes of home.

At Lewis and Clark Caverns State Park, I sat in as assistant park manager Tom Forwood trained interpreters to teach visitors about this famous cave system and the bats and other wildlife that live there—wildlife that can be seen underground and via the park's extensive aboveground trail system.

As I travel across Montana, I visit legislators on their home turf, talk to FWP citizen's advisory committee members, and hear from Montanans concerned about how our work affects their lives and livelihoods. Just as important, I listen to the concerns and witness

the work of our 700-plus employees.

For instance, at a function in Dillon honoring state senator Jeff Welborn, I met Dean Waltee, the local FWP wildlife biologist. Dean shared his thoughts with me on the importance of regularly providing local residents with information on game populations and hunting season recommendations. By giving hunters and landowners science-based information, such as his annual surveys of local elk management units, Dean builds public trust and exemplifies the FWP brand as a responsive, transparent agency attentive to public concerns.

The efforts by Dean—as well as Tyler, Dave, Tom, and other FWP employees—to work with the public and other agencies demonstrate how important it is for all of us who care about Montana's outdoors to pull together.

For Montanans, pulling together means recognizing what we have in common: a desire to connect with and experience the natural world. Maybe it's a rancher stopping to watch migrating sandhill cranes while fixing a gate, or a college student fishing the Gallatin River for the first time, or a family in Great Falls picnicking at the massive spring where Lewis and Clark camped 200-plus years ago. Whatever your outdoor passion, recognize that the outside is in us all. And then use



A bird's-eye view after a storm in northeastern Montana.

that common bond to work together to help FWP and others protect the integrity of what makes Montana, Montana.

For FWP employees, pulling together means looking at the big picture of our agency, beyond regions, divisions, bureaus, or programs. It means less tunnel vision and more of what I call “peripheral vision”—a perspective recognizing the value of *all* employees: accounting and licensing teams, front desk staff, wardens enforcing game laws, biologists and technicians conserving fish and wildlife, and crews managing state parks.

I want that perspective to extend beyond the department itself, so that our employees recognize how their actions affect not only the resources, but also the citizens who created and support this department. We need to see that what we do shapes the quality of life of Montanans and the people who visit our state.

As the FWP director, one way I can help is to broaden my own knowledge of what we do, and to listen: to the employees who do that work, and to the Montanans whose lives we affect.

I'm off to Miles City tomorrow morning.

—Martha Williams, Director, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks