

The Road Ahead:



STRATEGIC PLANS

Updated March 2008



*Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks*

A TIME TO FOCUS

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) is dedicated to serving the people of Montana through conserving the state's fish, wildlife, recreational and cultural resources. A myriad of issues and opportunities influence how this stewardship is carried out. Every few years we revisit our mission and visions for the future; we remind ourselves of our guiding principles and agency goals. Then we evaluate individual programs to prioritize goals and strategies that guide our daily work. And conversely, this evaluation process will ensure that our daily work will be meaningful toward accomplishing our greater goals.

Mission

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, through its employees and citizen Commission, provides for the stewardship of the fish, wildlife, parks and recreational resources of Montana while contributing to the quality of life for present and future generations.

Vision for the 21st Century

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks will provide the leadership necessary to create a commitment in the hearts and minds of people to ensure that, in our second century, and in partnership with many others, we will sustain our diverse fish, wildlife and parks resources and the quality recreational opportunities that are essential to a high quality of life for Montanans and our guests.

Guiding Principles

We understand that serving the people of Montana to achieve this vision is both a privilege and a responsibility. We also understand that we cannot achieve our vision alone. The following principles will guide Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks as we pursue our vision:

We will maintain the long-term viability of Mon-



An FWP game manager transports mountain goats via horseback near Choteau, Montana, in the early 1940s.

tana's natural, cultural and recreational resources.

We will actively involve people in decisions that affect them; help people to participate by providing them with credible and objective information; and, develop programs with a clear understanding of public expectations for MFWP service.

We will serve as an advocate for responsible management and for equitable allocation of public use of the limited resources which we are entrusted to manage.

We will manage fish and wildlife resources with pride in Montana's hunting and angling heritage.

We will create and strengthen working partnerships with individuals, organized groups and other natural, historic and cultural resource management agencies.

We will use innovation and technology to improve our services.

Agency Goals

- Create a work environment where priorities are clear; the decision-making process is efficient and effective; and where employees feel a sense of accountability, value and satisfaction in their achievements and their contributions to the agency mission.
- Provide quality opportunities for public appreciation and enjoyment of fish, wildlife and parks resources.
- Maintain and enhance the health of Montana's natural environment and the vitality of our fish, wildlife and cultural and historic resources through the 21st century.
- Emphasize education, communication and responsible behavior to afford citizens the opportunity to better understand and participate in the decision-making processes that sustain our natural, recreational and cultural resources for future generations.



FWP fisheries technician Matt Baxter shows off a hatchery-reared juvenile pallid sturgeon before releasing it into the Missouri River. Because so few wild pallid sturgeons remain, biologists hope the hatchery fish will survive and, if habitat conditions improve, someday reproduce on their own.



**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

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Cover photos: Makoshika scenic, Darrin Schreder/Wendt; Westslope cutthroat trout, Michael Haring;
Bull elk, Donald M. Jones; Giant Springs State Park, Steve Akre

FISHERIES PROGRAM

Fish and fishing have always played an important role in Montana's culture, economy, and environment. Consequently, Montanans have long recognized the value of maintaining healthy, abundant and diverse fish populations. The statutes that created the department in the late 1800s state that the department shall enforce the fish and game laws for the protection, preservation and propagation of fish.

Over the years Montanans have come to regard the preservation of healthy aquatic environments and fish populations as contributing to their quality of life in Montana. The legislature has provided additional direction and authority to the department for the protection, preservation and management of Montana's aquatic resources through the passage of laws pertaining to streambed and bank and instream flow protection, habitat restoration and management of non-game species for human enjoyment and to ensure their perpetuation.

Today the diversity of fish species, fish population densities, and varied aquatic conditions of Montana's streams and lakes continue to serve as key indicators of the state's environmental, economic, and cultural health. Acknowledging the longstanding significance of these valuable resources, the Fisheries Program of MFWP is firmly committed to playing a strong role in protecting, preserving, managing and restoring our valuable, sustainable fisheries and their habitats.

Trout rivers and streams and un-stocked lakes and reservoirs – These waters are managed as wild trout fisheries. The emphasis of this management philosophy has to be on habitat protection, habitat improvement and limiting illegal introductions of aquatic nuisance species (ANS) including non-native fish species and exotic fish pathogens. The continued involvement of the fisheries staff in the streambed and bank permitting programs is critical. The Future Fisheries program will continue to be an important component of habitat restoration. Although small, only two FTE, the Water Program staff is disproportionately important to maintaining these fisheries. The Water Pollution Control Biologist helps protect the water quality component of habitat.

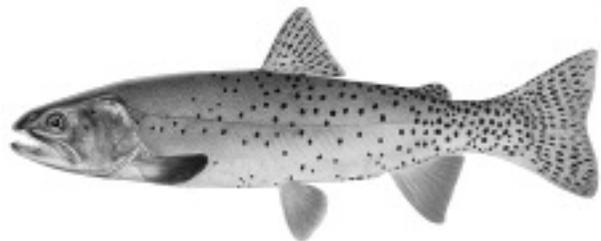
The wild trout management philosophy has been remarkably successful over the past 30 years. Wild trout

fisheries have provided a great economic boon to the state and have proven to be very resilient in the face of threats such as drought and whirling disease. The wild trout management philosophy and waters that support wild trout have strong state and national support from interest groups such as Trout Unlimited. These waters support the bulk of the fishing pressure in the state with the Madison, Missouri, Bitterroot, Clark Fork, Big Horn and Yellowstone rivers leading the way.

These fisheries are facing increasing threats due to on-going drought, increasing water temperatures associated with drought and climate change and ever increasing housing, recreational and energy development pressures. The real challenge to maintaining these world-class fisheries will be protection of riparian habitats, maintaining adequate instream flows, habitat restoration and limiting introductions of aquatic nuisance species and exotic fish pathogens. In order to be successful we must be active and influential in land use decision-making and in water resource allocation decisions, particularly the adjudication of water rights.

The fisheries program must become more involved in identifying and selecting properties to be protected through Habitat Montana, State Wildlife Grants and other funding sources. We need to be working with land trusts on the national and local level to protect riparian habitats.

Stocked fisheries – In general these are warm and cold-water lakes and reservoirs that do not support sufficient reproduction of all the managed species to provide a fishery. These fisheries rank second only to the wild trout waters for supporting angler days. The lakes and reservoirs that top the list are Canyon Ferry Reservoir, Georgetown Lake, Ft Peck Reservoir, Hebgen and



Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout

Holter reservoirs. These lakes and reservoirs provide angling opportunities for yellow perch, trout, walleye, large and smallmouth bass, northern pike, lake trout, kokanee and Chinook salmon among other species.

Community ponds are an important component of stocked fisheries. The division has been advocating for the development of community ponds and stocking these ponds with increasing emphasis over the past ten years. Community ponds are great places for kids to learn to fish and for families to spend time together. These ponds require larger fish from the hatchery system thus putting a strain on that system, but they are the top priority for these fish.

There are three primary factors limiting these fisheries: (1.) the ability of the hatchery system to provide all the fish requested, of the appropriate sizes, by the biologists, (2.) illegal introductions of fish species and (3.) sufficient water. The addition of the Ft Peck Hatchery allows us to meet most requests for warm-water fish across the state. However the coldwater hatcheries have been stretched to their limits because of the need to raise larger fish not only for the community ponds, but also because of the need to raise and stock larger trout into lakes and reservoirs that support predatory game fish such as walleye.

We have documented over 500 illegal fish introductions. Nearly 90 percent of these were warm or cool-water fish stocked in lakes, ponds and reservoirs. Very often these species reduce or eliminate the existing fishery and after a few years become stunted so that no sustainable fishery exists. Fish, Wildlife and Parks must then decide whether to manage the illegally introduced species, abandon management of the water body or rehabilitate it with a toxicant and restock. This can become a continuing cycle that costs a great deal of time and money. Finally, water is as important to fish in these waters as in our rivers and streams. Rising lake

elevations in the spring are important to production of game and forage fish. Adequate water levels are also necessary for public access.

Aquatic nuisance species probably represent more of a threat to these fisheries than Montana's other fisheries. Montana has been fortunate that zebra mussel and other ANS have not yet been found in the state. Realistically however, it is probably a matter of time before they arrive. Out-of-state anglers trailering their boats to Ft Peck and other waters and the use of illegal baits are likely future sources of ANS. Once ANS are found in Montana, in-state boaters can become vectors for their dispersal. Whirling disease will continue to affect wild trout populations and the threat of VHS to a number of fish species is very real.

The Ft Peck hatchery funding issue must be resolved soon. We believe we can fund the hatchery at a reduced level and keep it operational through fiscal year 2011 with the current funding mechanism. The funding shortfall must be addressed by the 2009 legislature in order to ensure there is no break in funding.

Warmwater rivers and streams and unstocked lakes and reservoirs – These waters are managed much as the trout waters described above. These waters provide great angling opportunities for fish such as shovelnose sturgeon, channel catfish, sauger and smallmouth bass. The challenges facing these fisheries are much the same as those facing the trout waters, with energy development potentially a greater threat to eastern river fisheries. Another challenge with these fisheries is the general lack of knowledge regarding warmwater fish diseases and the potential for their importation, along with other ANS, into Montana waters.

In general these fisheries are underutilized. There are certainly exceptions such as paddlefish, but fishing pressure on these waters is generally low. In the past these waters/fisheries have not received a great deal of attention, but over the past 5-10 years the fisheries program has allocated additional staff to and increased emphasis on these largely eastern rivers. This work has led to significant initiatives to provide fish passage around several large diversion structures on the Yellowstone and Tongue rivers. Protecting our instream flow rights, continuing to work on habitat issues and becoming successful and influential players in energy development land use decisions will be the key to maintaining these fisheries.



Sauger

Program Element: Fisheries Management

Overview:

The fish management element of the fisheries program has the central purpose of managing the state's fisheries to protect, enhance, and restore populations of native and sports species of fish. This is accomplished by managing for self-sustaining wild fisheries and the responsible use of hatchery-raised fish while providing a diversity of quality angling opportunities.

Native fish include sport species such as sauger, cutthroat trout, bull trout, and paddlefish, as well as nongame species such as sicklefin chubs and sculpins. Examples of important nonnative fish include rainbow trout, brown trout, walleye and northern pike. Pursuing this goal entails a wide variety of activities. Generally speaking, these activities may be classified as monitoring the life cycles of different fish populations and their habitats, regulating harvest of native and nonnative fish, and implementing strategies to maintain sufficiently healthy and genetically diverse fish populations to satisfy the fishing opportunities the public desires as well as protect Montana's native fish fauna.

Current Environment, Issues and Opportunities:

The charge to manage both native and nonnative species of fish appears to many people as a dual and conflicting role. Some feel that native fish should be given highest priority in all waters; whereas, others feel sportfishing opportunities, including management of nonnative species, should be of highest priority. Issues such as these regarding management of native fish, how to prioritize resources for natives vs. nonnatives, warm vs. coldwater fish, and how many of each species are enough, are presenting an increasing challenge to fisheries managers.

The listing of bull trout and white and pallid sturgeon under the Endangered Species Act, the potential listing of fluvial Arctic grayling and cutthroat trout, and demands from some angler groups for increasing fishing opportunities for warm-water species issues will present an even greater challenge for managers. Managers must balance the biological needs of native fish with the social and political demands for recreational fisheries and fishing opportunities.

The hatchery system is responsible for stocking fish

in lakes and reservoirs that provide much of the state's angling opportunity. The state has a large capital investment in the hatchery system and there is a need to maintain the infrastructure. The cleanup of PCB contamination at Big Springs Hatchery is almost complete, but additional work remains to be done. There is a need for most of the hatcheries to upgrade effluent facilities to meet new water quality discharge permit requirements. There is also the need to address the operation and maintenance funding shortfall at the new Ft. Peck Multispecies hatchery.

Goals:

- Provide a diversity of quality angling opportunities through management of self-sustaining wild fisheries and the responsible use of hatchery-reared fish.
- Protect, maintain, and restore native fish populations, life cycles, and genetic diversity and continue to provide angling opportunities whenever possible.

Strategic Priorities:

- Review field sampling strategies to assure information supports management objectives.
- Develop sterile rainbow and walleye; explore use for stocking and private hatchery egg supply.
- Complete fish management plans for sport fish, native fish, warm water fish, and species of concern.
- Resolve funding issues and limits on operations at Fort Peck Hatchery.
- Sell the Flathead Lake Salmon Hatchery and develop Rose Creek hatchery.
- Determine the extent of our cleanup responsibilities at Big Spring Creek and undertake the cleanup.
- Explore the possibility of raising and selling baitfish to private bait dealers.
- Integrate the goals of the Statewide Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy into the daily activities of management biologists.
- Institutionalize the corporate memory of our hatchery managers, most of whom are near retirement, before they retire.
- Obtain permanent funding for a fish geneticist position.

- Utilize funding available through the State Wildlife Grant to support native fish management.
- Gather information about fish species distribution and ecological relationships in eastern Montana prairie streams.
- Establish a fisheries research program to address pressing management questions. For example this funding could be used to evaluate the use of sterile walleye and trout in our fish stocking program.
- Enhance funding for warm water fisheries.
- Implement the Aquatic Nuisance Species plan.
- Seek funding to cover the cost for the removal of illegally stocked fish.
- Develop, expand and improve hatchery effluent systems at all state hatcheries to meet state water quality standards.
- Develop additional community fishing ponds.

Program Element: Fisheries Habitat Conservation

Overview:

The habitat element focuses on protecting and improving the crucial components of good aquatic ecosystems, namely: the physical features of streambeds, rivers, lakes, and reservoirs, water quality; and water quantity. Generally speaking, fish thrive in diverse, healthy aquatic ecosystems. Good fish habitat consists of three essential elements:

1. physical habitat features (landscape features such as streambeds and banks, riparian areas, and cover) to provide a favorable environment for fish and other aquatic life to carry out all essential phases of their life cycles;
2. water quality suitable to sustain healthy populations of fish and other aquatic life; and
3. water in sufficient quantity to provide adequate flows in streams throughout the year and to maintain water levels in lakes and reservoirs that sustain healthy aquatic communities.

Current Environment, Issues and Opportunities:

The three habitat elements listed above require maintenance of a functioning floodplain as well as judicious

land management practices throughout the watershed—including upland areas.

Montana’s habitat protection and restoration program is necessary for two reasons. First, fish habitats have been degraded in hundreds, if not thousands, of miles of Montana rivers and streams and in some lakes because of land-management practices and other human activities. Equally important, current and projected human uses of the environment have the potential for degrading existing habitats even further. Finally, we have the ability, technology, and obligation to protect and restore these habitats wherever possible.

The re-authorization of Habitat Montana and the implementation of the State Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Strategy provide new opportunities to protect important aquatic and riparian habitats.

The Fisheries Program must become more actively involved in identifying and selecting properties for protection of aquatic and riparian habitats via the Habitat Montana and SWG programs.

Goals:

- Preserve and protect aquatic habitats.
- Restore and enhance degraded habitats.
- Restore and maintain adequate water flow in streams and satisfactory water levels in lakes and reservoirs.

Strategic Priorities:

- Include aquatic and riparian habitats in the Habitat Montana program.
- Participate in water-allocation decisions, including adjudications, new water permits and legislative planning.
- Seek funding and staff necessary to monitor the affects of coal bed methane development on fish populations in affected drainages.
- Evaluate the potential cumulative landscape impacts of the proliferation of private ponds on illegally introduced aquatic species; water availability; aquatic nuisance species and thermal and nutrient issues.
- Review the effectiveness of fish habitat protection and restoration programs.
- Secure additional funding for the Future Fisheries program



Program Element: Fishing Access

Overview:

The essential mission of the Fishing Access Program is to provide the public with access to Montana's streams, lakes, and reservoirs. These public Fishing Access Sites (FAS) are located throughout the state and provide fishing opportunities for all of Montana's sportfish species.

Current Environment, Issues and Opportunities:

The number of Fishing Access Sites has grown from a relatively few sites in the 1960's and early 1970's to over 300 today. Many of the sites were acquired as donations or at a very minimal cost to the department. As land values have increased over the past two decades, the cost of suitable FAS have increased as well. Land values are expected to remain at the current or higher levels, and future site acquisition costs will reflect that market trend. The Department will continue to work with other state agencies and private landowners to maintain access to state waters and continue to explore opportunities to acquire additional access to state waters.

The majority of the funding for the FAS site acquisition is generated from angler license dollars. The

funding base includes \$1 from each resident fishing license and \$5 from each nonresident fishing license earmarked to fund the FAS program, as well as about \$1,000,000 in general license revenue annually.

Key components of the program involve two primary areas of focus, the acquisition of new sites and the ongoing operation and maintenance (O&M) activities for existing sites. The potential sites are identified by regional fisheries staff while the O&M is the purview of parks division staff. Sites are acquired as suitable land purchase, easement, or lease opportunities become available. Depending upon the location of the site (urban or rural), the amount of use, adjacent landowners, and expectations of the public, O&M responsibilities range from minimal to significant at individual sites. Typical maintenance activities may include: fencing, vandalism repairs, signs, weed control, latrine pumping, camping fee collection, road/parking areas maintenance, landowner relations, and conflict resolution.

More immediately, maintenance and enforcement budgets are being stretched to provide needed services to current sites because of increased use, more stringent environmental standards, inadequate funding and increased demands by the public for added services.

The complexity of these conditions suggests to some that the acquisition of new access or development of existing sites must be linked to the availability of funds for maintenance, development, and enforcement. Others believe that suitable sites should be purchased as they become available or the opportunity may be lost forever.

The 2003 legislature created the Private Land Fishing Access program. This program is modeled on the Block Management Program. It provides landowners compensation for impacts associated with providing anglers access to fishing waters. The funding for the program was cut from \$50,000 to \$25,000 during the 2005 session.

Goals:

- Maintain the existing levels of public access for fishing and related incidental recreational activities on state waters.
- Increase the levels of public access for fishing and related recreation on select state waters.
- Maintain and manage the Fishing Access Site Program to assure continued opportunities for public use.
- Protect the public's safety and enjoyment of water recreation through education and enforcement of regulations.

Strategic Priorities:

- Complete a Fishing Access Site needs assessment.
- Increase funding for FAS acquisition, operations, maintenance and enforcement.
- Integrate river-recreation management with FAS management.
- Seek the resources necessary to meet the program needs based upon the results of the assessment
- Increase funding for the PLFA program to at least \$50,000/year.
- Decrease vandalism of FAS facilities and conflicts with neighbors.
- Increase FAS program staffing and funding to address workloads and improve management systems.
- Increase FAS revenues to improve operations funding over and above license revenue generation.
- Increase summer maintenance staff presence at FAS sites as part of meeting program goals.
- Finalize and implement maintenance standards for

FAS program by end of 2007.

- Explore alternatives to implementing a zero-tolerance week policy including the cost/benefit of spraying completed by in-house staff instead of through contract.

Program Element: Aquatic Education

Overview:

The Aquatic Education Program was developed to offer public opportunities for learning about the responsible use of the state's fisheries, waters, and other aquatic resources. A special component of the program is the integration of aquatic-related topics into Montana school curricula, including the sport of fishing among both young people and adults.

Current Environment, Issues and Opportunities

Although it sponsors a variety of educational activities, the program has two fundamental purposes: to integrate aquatic education into school curricula across the state and to promote the sport of fishing among both young people and adults.

The need for an aquatic education program has often been demonstrated to anglers, department staff, and fishing clubs. Over the years, a good deal of evidence suggests that some members of the public have unwittingly engaged in practices that significantly misuse or abuse the state's aquatic resources, and thus, threaten their fu-



ture for recreational activities. In an effort to preserve these irreplaceable resources, the Aquatic Education Program has initiated a variety of activities designed to enhance the public understanding of the state's fisheries and water-quality issues and thereby cultivate informed, ethical behavior among those using these resources. The benefits to be derived from these educational activities include promoting a better understanding and enjoyment of Montana's aquatic environment, improved angling skills, and improved water safety.

Goals:

- Provide a variety of aquatic education and public information opportunities about Montana's fisheries and regulations.
- Provide aquatic education and information about Montana's fisheries to schools and teachers.
- Develop, refine, and expand family fishing opportunities.
- Provide education and public information opportunities about important regulations and the problems with illegal introductions.
- Continue to carry out FWP's native species information and education plan.
- Conduct aquatic education and fisheries management training for MFWP staff.

Strategic Priorities:

- Use community-pond program for education and recreation programs.
- Develop an aquatic habitat information and education campaign.
- Enhance the native fish campaign.
- Assess angler license purchasing patterns and initiate steps to increase purchase fidelity.
- Develop an aquatic habitat information and education campaign similar to what has been done for native fish.

Program Element: Law Enforcement

Overview:

In general the enforcement of regulations is not as critical to fish populations as habitat issues. There are specific instances such as regulations to protect species of concern, where enforcement is very important. Perhaps the highest priority enforcement activity should be the

investigation and prosecution of persons involved in illegal introductions of fish and the importation of aquatic nuisance species.

Law enforcement is essential for ensuring compliance with department rules, regulations and state laws designed to protect and enhance the state's fisheries. Direct contact with visitors and recreational users is the primary method used to encourage compliance. In depth investigations are also used to address more complex issues. Law enforcement must prioritize work and resources across each Program, often with conflicting needs. This is accomplished through implementation of Warden District Resource Plans (WDR), which are developed within the broad guidelines and direction set out in this and other approved Department planning documents. Issues and developing priorities not covered by these documents are encouraged to be identified and advanced through the WDR planning process for consideration and identification of emerging issues. Planning for flexibility to respond to rapidly developing issues is a high priority.

Current Environment, Issues and Opportunities:

The department's programmatic EIS and Six-Year Operating Plan for the Fisheries Program identified Native Species Management, Urban Fisheries, and Illegal Introductions as major emphasis areas for new work over the next three biennia. In addition, the plan stated "resolving recreation conflict on the Beaverhead and Big Hole rivers will be at an emphasis area..." However, as the Fisheries Program advances needed regulations that attempt to lessen recreational conflict, consideration needs to be made on the resulting effects on resources. While new regulations, restrictions and rules may be necessary to address issues, the result produces significant long-term efforts that draw on law enforcement resources. For example, in recent years MFWP has greatly increased the number of Fishing Access Sites and initiated camping fees at many of those sites, creating new priorities of enforcing FAS regulations and fee compliance. Also, species reintroductions and regulations to address river use conflict must be met with increased law enforcement resources, either new or redirected.

The Fisheries and Law Enforcement Divisions have long suspected out of state hatcheries were illegally bringing fish into the state for stocking in private ponds. A recent investigation provided proof of such

activity. Further investigation revealed the illegal introduction resulted in the introduction of whirling disease into a previously clean stream as well. This case illustrates the importance of conducting similar investigations statewide.

The illegal introduction of fish to public waters is also a continuing problem, particularly in western Montana. Once these illegal introductions are made, the damage is done. An initiative with the goal of stopping these actions before they happen could be very helpful in stopping the spread of non-native species that pose a threat to both angling opportunity and native fish species.

The fisheries division recently hired an aquatic nuisance species coordinator and began implementing the ANS plan. An important aspect of the plan is eliminating or limiting the importation of ANS species ranging from aquatic plants to zebra mussels and even baitfish. One component of this effort could be the establishment of check stations at key entry points and times, for example, on lake access routes a week before a large fishing tournament.

There has been concern for many years that the paddlefish caviar program could provide cover for paddlefish poaching operations. Paddlefish poaching has been a problem in several lower Missouri River states. Given the dire status of paddlefish, and the potential for significant illegal commercial gain, investigations into poaching of this species are a high priority. Similarly, bull trout poaching has been identified as a problem and efforts to stop this activity through enforcement and education should be continued.

As the Outfitting industry becomes more regulated, through such mechanisms as moratoriums, increased regulations and restrictions, and demand for their services steadily increases, illegal outfitting and guiding is expected to increase. In addition, river use conflicts may be expected to increase due to the increasing restrictive environment of this activity coupled with increasing interest and participation in a variety of water-based activities that often have conflicting use-values.

Goals:

- Decrease vandalism of FAS facilities and conflicts with neighbors. Proactively work to limit the illegal introduction of fish into the private ponds and public waters. Work with the ANS coordina-

tor to develop strategies to intercept and stop the introduction of aquatic nuisance species into Montana waters.

- Decrease vandalism of FAS facilities and conflicts with neighbors. Monitor and encourage public compliance with laws, rules and regulations through education and enforcement efforts accomplished through personal contact, public presentations, patrols, inspections, and check stations.
- Respond in a timely and effective manner to complaints, concerns and reports of known or suspected violations from landowners, sportspeople, the general public and department personnel. Respond as necessary to public safety, access and river recreation issues.
- Investigate fisheries violations and prepare cases to lead to successful prosecutions, integrating innovative investigative methodology and technology with time-proven investigative skills and abilities. Fully utilize and enhance interagency and jurisdictional cooperation.
- Seek creative solutions in order to increase efficiency and effectiveness of existing FTE, and augment resources to successfully address initiatives.

Strategic Priorities:

- Enhance enforcement patrols at FASs.
- Develop techniques to deter illegal introductions into Montana streams and lakes.
- Increase emphasis on illegal outfitting on rivers and river recreation conflict.
- Provide enhanced and more effective and responsive law enforcement in regards to T&E species through fiscal inclusion in developing strategies, or replace redirected resources with federal funding.
- Enhance the TIP-MONT program through exploration of alternative funding and personnel solutions to be more responsive to an expanding program and an engaged public.
- Increase efficiency and effectiveness through new law enforcement technologies; seek funding and mutual solutions to enhance telecommunications and information management.
- Detect and aggressively investigate unlawful commercialization of resources, with emphasis on illegal markets in paddlefish and shovelnose sturgeon caviar.

WILDLIFE PROGRAM

The Wildlife Program is responsible for conservation and management of Montana's 600+ birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians and their habitat. MFWP's Wildlife Program is coordinated at the statewide level and implemented through seven administrative regions. As per 87-1-201, MCA program activities related to the Wildlife Program include coordination and planning, monitoring the status of wildlife and habitats, conserving and enhancing wildlife habitat, providing opportunity for public enjoyment of wildlife through hunting, trapping, and viewing; enforcing laws and regulations that protect wildlife, and providing public education about wildlife management and recreation. The Wildlife Division is comprised of 103 FTE assigned to habitat (17.34 FTE); Research (7.34 FTE); Technical Services (19.65 FTE), and Wildlife Management (59.10 FTE). Specific responsibilities include:

- Complete annual harvest surveys.
- Collect biological information to monitor status and trends of selected wildlife populations.
- Make recommendations on hunting and trapping seasons and regulations.
- Carry out wildlife habitat protection, enhancement and maintenance projects.
- Conduct research projects to assist staff in management decisions.
- Submit comments on non-departmental projects that are focused on potential implications to wildlife habitat.

The factors that currently influence our operating environment will continue, including increases in the cost of delivering the present level of services. A growing human population and anticipated increased demand for services and opportunities to enjoy Montana's wildlife resources will place additional pressure on our wildlife program. There will be an increased demand for new services that go beyond the traditional activities of hunting and trapping. Additional resources will be required to address the needs of species to prevent listing and to de-list species that have met recovery targets under the federal Endangered Species Act. These activities will impact management, recreational opportunity, and land use for species that are listed.

In order to ensure the future of healthy wildlife populations, the existing relationship between Montanans, other interests, and MFWP must continue to be strengthened. MFWP believes that wildlife must be managed comprehensively in order to benefit entire systems. As such, programs must be encouraged that explore new funding and management opportunities that will address the needs of all wildlife and related habitats, including those species that are and are not hunted.

Program Priorities

- Focus more resources towards habitat conservation.
- Provide recreational opportunity to enjoy wildlife, through hunting, trapping, and viewing.
- Better integrate nongame and the Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy into the more traditional wildlife management program.
- Provide more focus on securing access where access is becoming limiting or is needed to help meet management objectives.
- Discourage commercialization of wildlife, and increase enforcement efforts against illegal commercialization.

Program Element: Wildlife Habitat Conservation

Overview:

Habitat conservation (protection, enhancement, restoration) is one of the most important functions of the wildlife program because of the long-term benefits to vegetative communities and multiple wildlife species. Habitat conservation includes acquisition of fee title lands, conservation easements, leases, and enhancement or restoration of both private and government-owned lands. Habitat conservation also includes reviewing potential land-use projects and providing technical review and assistance to help minimize impacts. MFWP currently conserves over 688,800 acres through conservation easements, fee titles and leases. In addition, MFWP provides technical assistance to private landowners and federal land managers to identify and conserve ecologically important wildlife habi-

tats. Through the Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy, MFWP has identified the habitats that are in the greatest need of conservation that will benefit a wide array of native wildlife species.

Current Environment, Issues and Opportunities:

Under the Habitat Montana and Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement programs, MFWP continues to deliver its habitat conservation and enhancement efforts. The Habitat Montana program includes House Bill 526, Wildlife Trust Mitigation, Wetland Legacy, Upland Game Bird Habitat Conservation Program, and the Moose and Sheep License Auction Program. MFWP also takes advantage of different federal habitat conservation programs including Forest Legacy, North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA), State Wildlife Grants (SWG), Section 6 HCP Acquisition Funds, and Landowner Incentive Program (LIP). In addition, Habitat Montana has many opportunities to partner with state and federal agencies, non-government organizations, and private landowners. Many of these funding sources are also available for restoration of important habitat components. In addition, there is opportunity to partner with the Future Fisheries Habitat Improvement Program to restore important riparian and wetland habitat.

MFWP offers technical assistance to local, state, and federal agencies, as well as private landowners through field biologists, program managers, and vegetation and range management specialists.



MFWP emphasizes habitat conservation and maintenance of healthy populations of all species native to Montana while recognizing that managing for state and federally listed threatened and endangered species may decrease recreational opportunities and may restrict land management decisions, at least for the short term. However, habitat conservation efforts for threatened and endangered species may produce new and expanded opportunities in the long term.

Energy development will continue at an accelerated pace in the eastern two-thirds of the State. Coal bed methane and wind energy development will place added pressure on wildlife. Rural subdivision will also continue to accelerate and impact winter range and riparian areas in the western half of the State.

Twelve species of noxious weeds that threaten wildlife habitats are either established or spreading in Montana. MFWP believes weed control is accomplished through various techniques such as chemical spray, biological control and planned grazing systems. To date MFWP has established 95 grazing systems that cover 550,000 acres.

Goals:

- Perpetuate and protect wildlife and the habitats on which they depend at the ecosystem level.
- Ensure adequate habitat is available to keep common species common, to enable recreational opportunity, and to provide critical habitat components for all species.
- Manage habitat on MFWP lands, especially Wildlife Management Areas, conservation easements, and leases, to benefit the health and species diversity of the plant communities and all associated wildlife species.
- Cooperatively conserve and enhance habitats on private, state and federal lands.
- Increase coordination and cooperation with Fisheries towards conservation and management of riparian and wetland habitats.

Strategic Priorities:

- Identify and emphasize highest priority habitats for conservation.
- Leverage Habitat Montana with other programs to better manage all wildlife.
- Work with the energy industry to coordinate development.

- Work with local governments to ensure rural subdivision plans minimize impacts to wildlife.
- Expand efforts to benefit vegetation communities of special concern on private and public lands.
- Increase emphasis on habitat restoration and management. Work with Fisheries Division's Future Fisheries Improvement Program to identify and restore high priority riparian and wetland habitat.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of habitat conservation and enhancement projects in terms of desired vegetation community response and wildlife population trends.
- Emphasize private landowner technical assistance to resolve or mitigate wildlife impacts and maintain or enhance wildlife habitat.
- Increase emphasis on Upland Game Bird habitat to enhance, conserve, and/or protect habitat for upland game birds. Ensure the UGBHEP is administered according to established guidelines and rules, and increase the transparency and accountability of the UGBHEP. Monitor and evaluate impacts of program.
- Complete operations review of existing WMAs and implement recommended changes.

Long-Term Challenges:

- Cost of real estate is increasing at exponential rates, making conservation of habitat increasingly more difficult.
- Predictable, long-term funding for habitat conservation and management is needed to ensure adequate resources are available.
- Residential development and energy development are leading to fragmentation of habitat at an unprecedented pace.
- Long-term warming trends (e.g., climate change), if they continue as predicted, will alter and impact existing vegetation communities, resulting in changing species distribution and status as a result of changing habitat conditions.
- Ensure wildlife populations are managed to prevent long-term herbivory impacts on grassland and shrub communities. Securing adequate access for recreational hunting and wildlife management before it becomes unavailable due to leasing or purchase by individuals who won't allow public hunting.
- Protection of Conservation Easements will become increasingly difficult as landowners change and new owners unfamiliar with easement terms acquire the property and its encumbrances.
- Implement habitat conservation initiatives (Lost



Trail, Blackfoot, Rocky Mountain Front, Milk River) to conserve important blocks of habitat.

Program Element: Wildlife Management

Overview:

Wildlife Management represents the largest program element of the Wildlife Program. The goal of this element is to manage wildlife and habitats to achieve sustainable populations that provide related recreational activities. This includes but is not limited to, hunting and trapping seasons and quotas, species re-introductions, relocation of species, and habitat management. Twenty-four percent of Montanans hunt, the highest percentage in the nation, and about 42,835 nonresidents travel to Montana to hunt each year. Eighty percent of residents enjoy non-hunting wildlife recreation and in a 2001 United States Fish and Wildlife Service survey, 44 percent of Montanans participated in bird watching, also the highest percentage in the country. When managing wildlife populations, MFWP must also take into consideration the needs of landowners as well as urban dwellers.

Current Environment, Issues, Opportunities:

Because MFWP's funding is largely based on the sale of state hunting licenses and matching federal Pittman-Roberts dollars, MFWP has traditionally focused its wildlife management programs on game species. As a result, populations of many big game and furbearer species, as well as certain upland game bird and migratory game birds, have increased in recent decades. Much of MFWP's available staff and funding resources are directed towards management and monitoring of wildlife game species, including completing annual surveys, developing harvest regulations, and monitoring harvest of big game, upland game, furbearer, waterfowl, and migratory bird species. Management of grizzly bears, wolves, and bison consume a disproportionate amount of time and resources due to the high visibility and high public interest in these species.

Increasing attention is being directed towards the many species that are not hunted or fished, especially raptors, songbirds, small mammals, amphibians, and bats. Primary emphasis currently is being directed towards simply documenting distribution of different nongame

species for which very little information is known, and generating baseline information on status. Conservation and management of habitat provides the greatest opportunity to protect and conserve nongame wildlife.

Some species have declined to the point where the State of Montana has been forced to cede decision authority to the federal government due to a lack of funding for management. Often, MFWP is required to assist in the recovery of these species without the benefit of additional non-sportsman related funding to complete the job. Currently there are 4 federally listed wildlife species in Montana, including lynx, black-footed ferrets, piping plovers, and least terns. Grizzly bears and wolves are delisted but their status is being litigated. There are several other wildlife species that have been or are being reviewed for federal listing including prairie dogs, wolverine, and sage grouse. FWP has developed conservation agreements and management plans for these and other species to direct and coordinate conservation efforts, and do so in a collaborative fashion.

Funding for management of non-game and threatened and endangered species is somewhat controversial. Some suggest that non-game and threatened and endangered species be given a higher management priority, while others would rather that license dollars spent for managing these species be limited. In addition to concerns about impacts to their recreational opportunities, livelihood, and lifestyles, some people prefer that MFWP not involve itself in management of wildlife protected by the federal Endangered Species Act.

MFWP has expanded populations of harvestable species to unoccupied habitats through trapping and relocation of wild, free-ranging animals to establish new populations for hunting and other compatible outdoor recreation. Because most big game species now occupy much of their historical range, use of population augmentation or introductions are limited. MFWP has also been directly involved in efforts to re-establish black-footed ferrets and extend the distribution of nesting trumpeter swans through the release of captive-bred animals. With the exception of these two species, MFWP uses wild-trapped animals for releases to optimize survival, maintain genetics, and minimize the risk of transmitting disease to wild populations.

Disease is becoming a much larger component of Montana's wildlife program, including chronic wasting disease, avian influenza, West Nile virus, and burcel-

losis. The diseases themselves, or actions to minimize or eliminate the disease vectors could severely impact some of Montana's wildlife species, as well as affect desirability or availability of game species, which in turn could affect license sales and management opportunities. Disease issues are increasing and the opportunity for global and regional disease outbreaks is a reality.

Continuing research is needed to better understand many of Montana's native species, to evaluate or improve specific management techniques, and to better understand impacts to wildlife from land and recreational uses. Roughly 90 percent of research expenditures fund in-house research while the remaining ten percent supports contract research through universities and research foundations.

Increasingly, Montanans and others are demanding to be involved in MFWP management decisions. As a consequence, MFWP is facing expanded responsibility and a need to define, coordinate, and justify management decisions.

MFWP seeks to prevent and minimize human/wildlife conflicts by protecting habitat and responding to wildlife conflicts when personal injury, depredation, property damage, or humane considerations are involved. Management of wildlife/human conflicts on the urban interface needs a more programmatic approach that stresses preventative measures rather than repeated case-by-case responses. During FY 2005, 433 game damage complaints were documented statewide and MFWP expended about \$351,953 for game damage assistance that year.

MFWP issues permits for activities such as salvage permits (FY05-15), bird banding (FY05-14), education displays (FY05-3), and rehabilitation (FY05-4).

MFWP issues commercial licenses to operate alternative livestock ranches (59 as of 12/05), game bird farms (82 as of 12/05), fur farms (20 as of 12/05), shooting preserves (99 as of 12/05), and zoos and menageries (26 as of 12/05). Proponents of such commercial endeavors contend that these facilities provide a means of diversifying agricultural uses, but others remain concerned by the potential for spread of disease, genetic pollution, and inhumane exploitation.

Goals:

- Manage wildlife populations at levels that balance the biological needs and capabilities of wildlife

with wildlife-related recreation and the tolerance of private landowners.

- Implement research to better evaluate the effectiveness of management prescriptions (species or habitat). Expand our knowledge of management techniques, wildlife biology and ecological relationships, wildlife distribution and upgrade and refine population survey protocols for important wildlife species.
- Re-establish or augment populations of native species to habitats from which they have been extirpated or reduced.
- Minimize property damage and threats to human safety in urban areas.
- Monitor commercial facilities to minimize: a) loss of public recreation involving native wildlife species; b) loss of habitat of native species to introduced exotic species; c) hybridization of native species with exotic species; and, d) introduction of disease or parasites to native species.
- Proactively address the needs of wildlife and their related habitats, including those that are not hunted or fished, in order to prevent further listings under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

Strategic Priorities:

- Align big game population objectives and hunting-season recommendations.
- Focus management on the five-week general gun season and simplify regulations.
- Enhance population surveys to meet management objectives.
- Integrate game and nongame programs to manage more comprehensively.
- Implement the Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy priorities for species and habitats.
- Prioritize research to address management needs.
- Tailor the Hunting Access Enhancement Program, including Block Management, Hunter Access and Access Montana Programs, to assist in desired harvest distribution and quality recreational activities. Priorities would depend on population status, season types, hunter demand, and landowner needs.
- Expand efforts at the community level to address public safety and nuisance wildlife issues at both the suburban/wild land interface and within resi-

dential areas, and identify alternative funding sources to accomplish these tasks. Work proactively to reduce the need to react to nuisance wildlife issues, especially bears.

- Continue to address game damage proactively and responsibly through hunting strategies and crop protection measures.
- Develop disease monitoring and management plans with specific action protocols.
- Integrate management of wolves into the traditional wildlife management program, including establishing a monitoring and harvest structure after delisting.
- Adjust elk regulations and management actions to bring elk populations to objective levels identified in the elk management plan.
- Develop criteria and process for evaluating and assisting with implementation of Urban Wildlife plans. Work with cities to develop and implement urban wildlife plans.
- Develop and implement a bison conservation plan for Montana, with emphasis on utilizing brucellosis-free bison resulting from the bison quarantine feasibility study.
- Assume management of the Montana portion of the Greater Yellowstone Area grizzly bears, and continue monitoring of the NCDE grizzly bear population in conjunction with approved, collaboratively developed conservation strategies.
- Develop and implement an upland game bird management plan.
- Streamline Regulation Setting (Commission) processes to increase efficiency and reduce workload associated with season/quota setting.

Long-Term Challenges:

- Wildlife management is becoming increasingly complex and diverse. Maintaining current level of services will be difficult without additional staff and resources.
- There is a nationwide trend of reduced hunter participation. A reduction of hunter numbers results in reduced revenue, reduced ability to manage wildlife game species, and a reduction of political clout for conservation. Efforts are needed to recruit and retain hunters.
- Residential development and energy development

are leading to fragmentation of habitat at an unprecedented pace, with a resulting negative impact to wildlife populations and reduced area available to wildlife and hunters.

- Securing adequate access for recreational hunting and wildlife management before it becomes unavailable due to leasing or purchase by individuals who won't allow public hunting.
- Wildlife diseases (e.g., CWD, AI) may result in detrimental impacts to wildlife populations and reduced interest in harvesting game animals by hunters.
- Long-term warming trends (e.g., climate change), if they continue as predicted, will impact species distribution and status as a result of changing habitat conditions.
- Secure, predictable funding sources are needed to ensure conservation and management of wildlife populations and habitat.
- A large turn-over of staff is expected due to retirement. The resulting loss of institutional knowledge will be significant. Methods to capture institutional knowledge and history are needed to prevent that loss.
- An increasing emphasis on trophy wildlife and the potential for commercialization of trophy wildlife impacts all aspects of wildlife management.



Program Element: Access

Overview:

Access, especially for hunting but also for wildlife viewing, is a very important component of wildlife management. Large areas of land are becoming off limits to Montana hunters as it is converted from traditional agriculture and forestry to smaller ranchettes and subdivisions, is being posted against hunting and trespassing, or is being leased for exclusive use by a small number of hunters. A reduction in access is of concern because it limits hunting opportunity for Montana hunters and impacts management of game species in areas where they are inaccessible to hunters. MFWP is dedicated to managing access to provide outdoor recreation opportunities for consumptive and non-consumptive purposes to residents and nonresidents.

Current Environment, Issues, Opportunities:

Montana residents support MFWP's active involvement in managing access to provide hunting opportunity and regulate harvest of wildlife. Opportunity for wildlife-related recreation other than hunting currently exists on land managed by MFWP and other public land, but expansion of such access to include private land would require development of a new funding source.

The 2005 Legislature reauthorized the Hunting Access Enhancement Program, which includes Block Management, Access Montana, and Special Access Projects.

The Hunting Access Enhancement Program has three components, Block Management, Access Montana, and Special Access Projects. Block Management is a private lands access program which has grown from approximately 4 million acres enrolled in 1995 to 8.8



million acres and more than 1,315 landowners during the 2004 hunting season. Access Montana focuses on hunter access to public lands while the Special Access Project focus on regional, species specific access. Some level of hunter access is included under the Habitat Montana program. MFWP currently has 113 Wildlife Management Areas that are available for both consumptive and non-consumptive purposes with some restrictions. The Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program involves habitat enhancement, pheasant releasing, and public hunting opportunities on private lands. In 2005, there were 531 active habitat contracts totaling over 630,400 acres available for hunting and there were 93 pheasant release projects providing an estimated 8,607 hunter-days of access.

The hunting population in Montana (24 percent of the state's residents in 2005) is diverse, and some groups have special needs. For instance, in 2005, MFWP certified 1,529 persons with disabilities who may obtain certain licenses at reduced fees and are exempt from some off-road and vehicle use restrictions.

Goals:

- Provide hunters/trappers with satisfactory levels of diverse opportunity and other outdoor recreationists with appropriate opportunity to enjoy Montana's wildlife and other resources.
- Maintain the integrity of land under MFWP easement, lease, or purchase for the purposes intended through regulating recreational use at levels consistent with sustaining such use.
- Provide hunter access to private lands to meet big game population objectives, to minimize crop damage and help satisfy recreational opportunities.
- Provide trappers access to public and private lands to meet furbearer population objectives.
- Offer special opportunities to enjoy wildlife-related activities to groups and individuals.
- Improve landowner, sportsman, and Department relationships.

Strategic Priorities:

- Maintain or enhance FWP's access programs to ensure access to private and public lands
- Use Block Management to not only gain access to private lands, but also to address game management issues.



- Develop strategies to minimize loss of quality co-operators in the Block Mgmt Program.
- Encourage and facilitate the use of community problem-solving at the local level to resolve hunting access and other wildlife management issues.
- Offer some groups of hunters, persons with disabilities, youth and senior citizens, some privileges not offered to the general hunter population. Encourage landowners to allow access for persons with disabilities, youth, and senior citizens, on their own volition or with volunteer and financial help from private organizations.
- Improve access compliance through identification and posting of public access points.
- The PL/PW Council will emphasize working with new landowners to retain traditional access.
- Identify issues with Block Management Program and develop strategies to minimize the loss of co-operators.

Long-Term Challenges:

- Changing demographics, increasing population, increasing land values, and changing land uses will result in less access for Montana hunters.
- Additional resources will be necessary to maintain

the current level of access on private lands.

- Large contiguous blocks of forested lands in NW Montana may become inaccessible to the public when/if they are sold by Plum Creek Timber Company.
- Economic value and interest in trophy wildlife is resulting in more lands becoming off-limits to the public hunter by landowners who favor high-paying trophy hunters.

Program Element: Wildlife Education

Overview:

Currently, MFWP has numerous programs to inform the public about wildlife, habitats, and the role of hunting and trapping. Hunter and Trapper Education programs teach youth about Montana's hunting heritage, hunter ethics, and the role of hunting in wildlife management. Living with Wildlife instructs residents and visitors about coexisting with wildlife. Education Trunks, Project Wild, and Project Wet allow teachers and youth-group leaders the opportunity to educate children about Montana's wildlife and habitats.

Current Environment, Issues, Opportunities:

Throughout the state, MFWP staff delivers education programs and tours to school groups and other organizations. Every year MFWP delivers content and skill level workshops to educators reaching over 100 instructors who, in-turn, reach over 2,500 children with habitat and general wildlife information. Through publications, outdoor news reports, and documentaries MFWP provides the public with an opportunity to learn about Montana's wildlife and habitats. MFWP cooperates with federal, state, local governments and private organizations to develop and deliver education programs for children, educators, and the general public.

Every year, an average of 10,000 individuals enroll in hunter and bow hunter education classes statewide. MFWP needs to continue to maintain hunter opportunities through information and education and regulations that promote the ethical use of Montana's wildlife resources.

While Montana continues to enjoy a high rate of hunter participation, hunter retention and recruitment are a looming issue. Nationwide, the number of people participating in hunting is declining. Efforts to recruit new hunters, retain existing hunters, and bring back lapsed hunters are needed to prevent this decline.

As Montanans and other continue to interact with wildlife, from motor vehicle collisions to attracting birds into backyards, and as land once available for wildlife is developed and subdivided, the potential for human/wildlife conflict increases. It will continue to be necessary for MFWP to offer information and education programs to help people learn to live with wildlife and how to avoid potential wildlife conflicts.

Goals:

- Enhance the stewardship of public and private lands, and their wildlife inhabitants through education.
- Provide wildlife-oriented information and educational opportunities to meet hunting and non-hunting public needs and to address changing social conditions.
- Offer education and information programs to help people learn to live with wildlife and reduce wildlife/human conflicts.
- Maintain/enhance public support for FWP and FWP's management programs.

- Work with wildlife division and other units to improve hunter recruitment and retention.

Strategic Priorities:

- Develop an educational program to increase awareness of non-hunting, wildlife-related recreational opportunities on land managed by FWP.
- Develop an outreach program to create a vision of the role Montanans can play in restoring and conserving wildlife and their habitats.
- Develop information programs on habitats in the most need of conservation as identified in the CFWCS.
- Increase efforts to inform persons with a disability, youth and senior citizens of opportunities available.
- Assist in the efforts to facilitate community problem-solving efforts specific to elk management at the local level by providing public information about ongoing efforts, such as the Devil's Kitchen and Bear Paws working group.
- Continue to publicize methods for urban residents to address nuisance wildlife and related safety issues.
- Provide information for the public to assist in identifying unlawful commercialization of wildlife resources.
- Increase emphasis in the area of information related to illegal outfitting with the intent of increasing public assistance in the curtailing of the activity.
- Utilize Hunter Education to expand information and education programs to encourage good landowner-sportsman relationships that emphasize protection of land and wildlife resources.
- Develop and implement a hunter recruitment and retention program, with initial emphasis on lapsed hunters.

Long-Term Challenges:

- Youth are participating less in outdoor activities, and are therefore less knowledgeable and less interested in wildlife and wildlife activities.
- Alternative methods for delivering hunter education and other wildlife education efforts will be needed, especially methods involving internet and other remote access.

Program Element: Law Enforcement

Overview:

Law enforcement is essential for ensuring compliance with department rules, regulations and state laws designed to protect and enhance the state's wildlife resources. Direct contact with visitors and recreational users is the primary method used to encourage compliance. In-depth investigations are also used to address more complex issues. However, law enforcement must prioritize work and resources across each Program, often with conflicting needs. This is accomplished through implementation of Warden District Resource Plans, which are developed within the broad guidelines and direction set out in this and other approved Department planning documents. Issues and developing priorities not covered by these documents are encouraged to be identified and advanced through the WDR planning process for consideration and identification of emerging issues. Planning for flexibility to respond to rapidly developing issues is a high priority.

Current Environment, Issues and Opportunities:

As wildlife resource crimes and criminals become more

sophisticated, their investigation becomes more technical and time-consuming. Recent successful investigations of large-scale poaching rings demonstrate the extent of resource damage that is inflicted by these criminals and documents the amount of law enforcement hours and resources needed to take such an investigation to a successful conclusion. This draws heavily on law enforcement resources, and impedes the ability of district wardens to perform random and routine patrols, the foundation of violation deterrence and detection, and cornerstone of voluntary compliance with laws, rules and regulations. The ability to detect and aggressively investigate unlawful commercialization of resources is a wildlife law enforcement priority and will entail redirection and/or new resources directed to this effort.

Furthermore, the listing, delisting, reintroduction and relocation of species creates new areas of emphasis requiring law enforcement response to ensure compliance, to detect and deter criminal activity, and to respond to public concerns and complaints. Current funding strategies available for non-game and T&E management do not necessarily provide resources for strictly law enforcement-related activity.

In general, game populations have increased and de-



velopment on the urban-rural interface and formally wild areas has also increased, resulting in increased human/wildlife interaction. Response to game damage complaints, nuisance wildlife and dangerous wildlife/human conflicts, while needed, necessary and mandated, also redirects resources from other duties and responsibilities.

As the outfitting industry becomes more regulated, through such mechanisms as moratoriums, increased regulations and restrictions, and demand for their services steadily increases, illegal outfitting and guiding is expected to increase.

Goals:

- Monitor and encourage public compliance with laws, rules and regulations through education and enforcement efforts accomplished through personal contact, public presentations, patrols, inspections and check stations.
- Respond in a timely and effective manner to complaints, concerns and reports of known or suspected violations from landowners, sportspersons, the general public and Department personnel.
- Respond as necessary and within policy to public safety issues regarding human/wildlife encounters, such as wolves, bears (black and grizzly) and mountain lions.
- Investigate wildlife violations and prepare cases to lead to successful prosecutions, integrating innovative investigative methodology and technology with time-proven investigative skills and abilities. Fully utilize and enhance interagency and jurisdictional cooperation.

Strategic Priorities:

- Increase visibility of enforcement during high use periods.
- Reduce illegal use of OHV's and related user conflicts.
- Increase emphasis in the arena of illegal outfitting and guiding.
- Detect and aggressively investigate unlawful commercialization of wildlife resources, such as large-scale poaching rings, illegal commercial sale of game animals and illegal markets for wildlife products
- Provide enhanced and more effective and respon-

sive law enforcement in regards to non-game and T&E species. Enhance the TIP-MONT program through alternative funding and personnel solutions to be more responsive to an expanding program and an engaged public.

- Encourage voluntary compliance, reduce common violations, and increase ethical behavior through personal contact and the use of traditional and electronic media to explain complex regulations.

Long-Term Challenges:

- Increasing value of wildlife, especially trophy wildlife, will increase the motivation for illegal take and commercialization of wildlife.
- Loss of veteran officers and maintaining an adequately trained staff
- Increasing volume and diversity of responsibilities (game damage, recreation, urban wildlife, boat safety, etc.) takes away from emphasis on wildlife enforcement issues.

PARKS AND RECREATION PROGRAM

The Parks and Recreation Program goal is to conserve and manage a representative diversity of the state's cultural, historical and recreational amenities, help facilitate sustainable economic development through tourism, and provides resource education and interpretation.

The Legislature has granted Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks the authority to plan for and manage a state park system and numerous community-based recreational programs to provide a variety of safe and enjoyable recreational experiences. These programs are all administered through and funded by the Parks and Recreation Program.

As Montana's population increases, it is anticipated that Montana's Parks and Recreation Program will provide even greater benefits to citizens and visitors than they have historically. Urban and water-based recreational demands are expected to increase statewide, and the associated Parks programs will remain flexible to address these needs.

Fiscal

Funding introduced in 2004 is helping the program progressively update an aging infrastructure. Staff increases are helping with maintenance, managing resources, and visitor services, but continue to lag behind other state park systems. The Legislature infused the program with a one-time \$10 million appropriation to purchase public access for state parks or fishing access sites over the next two years. Long-term development, operation, maintenance and staffing of these sites will be a challenge. State Parks will promote activities that fiscally support the program.

Social/demographics

Nation-wide, there is growing concern that youth are not spending time in the outdoors as the overwhelming use of technology-related entertainment is usually indoors. State Parks is challenged with preserving Montana's outdoor heritage by enticing youth into the outdoors. Fuel prices continue to reach record highs each year, which may influence recreation use patterns and methods. Visitation over the last 5 years shows in-

creasing use by Montana residents and an overall number of visits to State Parks. Services and facilities will reflect the needs of local users and those amenities necessary for longer visits. Survey results at water-based parks indicate visitors desire amenities such as electricity, showers, improved roads and boating facilities. Planning efforts involve a wide variety of constituents to ensure that multiple perspectives are understood and management plans are developed openly.

Legislative

As illustrated by the acquisition and staffing appropriations made by the 2007 Legislature, public access managed by the Division is highly supported. Communication with legislators locally and on a state-wide level will continue to educate constituents about the management challenges, while building support and trust through good service and open management. As the State Parks Futures Committee II recognized in 2003, the Division is understaffed and unable to maximize the quality of visitors' experiences, resource and visitor protections and must continue to seek resources for paid staff, volunteers, partnerships, commercial and entrepreneurial opportunities (Recommendation 11, pg 9). From a national level, Land and Water Conservation Fund and Recreational Trails Program support are important to communities providing outdoor activities across the state.

Resources – Cultural, Natural and Physical

State Parks is continually challenged to maintain and improve facilities with low levels of staff. Existing funding is allowing progress on the multi-million dollar maintenance backlog that formed over many years, though much work remains. Visitor use patterns and levels require management to maintain resources for future generations as well as today's visitor. Visitation in state parks, growing OHV sales, and RV sales trends all point to different demands than traditional recreational activities. These changes require the agency to balance resource management and stewardship more effectively

while meeting public needs. A new cultural resources specialist will provide expertise and consistency for the many historic and archeological sites in the system.

Summer and winter, motorized and non-motorized trail use, and open space activities are in high demand. The Division must oversee a clear process to distribute federal and state funds for these community uses.

An aggressive weed control program is vital to the health and quality of the program. Additional emphasis will be placed here.

Program Priorities

- Balance the maintenance of the system with new amenities for the public.
- Provide more access and state parks in key areas of the state.
- Promote operational efficiency and funding stability.
- Improve appearance of parks and fishing access sites as a basic service expectation.

Program Element: State Parks

Overview:

Montana State Parks conserve cultural, natural, and recreational resources and provide for their use and enjoyment. In addition, the state park system works to contribute to Montanan's quality of life and the economy. The tourism industry is an important economic partner.

Current Environment, Issues, and Opportunities:

An aging infrastructure and demand for new services coupled with limited funding and staffing, continue to challenge the park system in comparison with other systems throughout the country. Despite those challenges, new funding is in place and the system is well positioned to make improvements in the areas of interpretation, maintenance, cultural site management, planning, and facility improvements.

Visitor surveys show a high level of support for what state parks provides, how they provide it, and how effectively they work as a partner with communities, interest groups, and federal agencies. Today, Montana State Parks are seen as professionally managed, educational, and fun to visit. Our challenge is to maintain that status—and improve it for generations to come.



In addition, there is strong support for acquiring new lands before prices escalate out of reach. New parks and fishing access sites will be added to the system offering public access to special places. Access to water resources is in high demand. Montana's geographically diverse landscape also offers unique recreational opportunities for public access.

Goals:

- Increase revenues while addressing visitor needs to adequately staff and operate system.
- Develop and refine programs and facilities to address public and staff safety.
- Increase political and community support for state parks as significant contributors to a community's quality of live and viability.
- Expand, develop and maintain state park sites and facilities to fully meet users needs.
- Protect and interpret natural, cultural and historic resources within State Parks.
- Exceed visitor expectations for a positive experience, including recreation and education at State Parks.

- Work with other agencies and communities to share resources to improve recreation in Montana and reduce overlap of government services where appropriate and supported by additional funds.

Strategic Priorities:

- Improve facilities and service through policy, standards, tracking and reporting.
- Improve pace and effectiveness of capital development processes.
- Provide new recreational opportunities via Access Montana.
- Refine park security and public safety with trained staff in safe work environments.
- Review park ranger program.
- Complete planning processes relating to managing cultural resources, interpretation and development.
- Enhance visitor and staff safety.
- Continue to develop and implement Parks outreach plans to increase awareness of the opportunities provided to Montanans and nonresidents and increase participation in State Parks programs by park guests.
- Focus educational and interpretive programs offered at key state parks and update existing programs and displays.
- Pursue a viable campground reservation system to enhance use of campsites and overall system, and meet guest expectations.

- Further develop maintenance and resource management systems to improve long-term viability.
- Monitor and address visitor comments on maintenance issues and facility and safety concerns as soon as possible. Perform system-wide survey.
- Increase use of community groups, service organizations, volunteers and other means to expand facility and maintenance program effectiveness statewide by 5%.
- Implement management plans for heritage sites such as Rosebud and Bannack by end of 2008 to improve building maintenance, improve adjacent landowner relationships, stabilize buildings, etc.
- Work with other agencies to form mineral development plans that eliminate or minimize impacts from energy development on park resources, particularly cultural resources.

Program Element:
Land and Water Conservation Fund

Overview:

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act of 1965 established a federal grants program encouraging a full partnership between national, state, and local governments in planning and funding outdoor recreation projects. The program has two sides: the state side and the federal side. The state side of LWCF, which in Montana is administered by MFWP, allows states to as-



sist their political subdivisions (cities, towns, counties) by providing grants for acquisitions and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities. Since 1965, Montana has received over \$34 million in LWCF assistance for outdoor recreation projects.

Current Environment, Issues, and Opportunities:

The current LWCF Coordinator is also Chief of the Parks Recreation Bureau in the State Parks Division, which encompasses several outdoor recreation grants programs. These include the LWCF, Recreational Trails program(federal), and the Snowmobile, Off Highway Vehicle, and Motor Boat Facility Grant programs (state). The key challenge is to ensure that the Parks Division continues to provide professional-level administration of the LWCF Program, while ensuring that local communities have an opportunity to apply for LWCF funding and that the long term requirements of the program are protected.

Finally, MFWP should be prepared to assume a more aggressive role in recreation issues that fall outside of its more widely recognized responsibilities (e.g., state parks, FAS system, trails). Aside from the LWCF program, there appears to be demand for more involve-

ment in local and statewide recreation issues. The importance of state-local cooperative recreation projects is likely to increase.

Goals:

- Continue to contribute to the long-term recreation benefits for Montana communities through administration of the LWCF program.
- Administer the LWCF Program in partnership with regional FWP offices.
- Enhance collaborative relationships with cities and communities around Montana.

Strategic Priorities:

- Communicate the value and benefits of the LWCF program to officials and communities.
- Monitor and administer the LWCF grants, with all 2005 grants closed out by end of calendar year 2008.
- Actively support continued funding of LWCF grants with federal elected officials and parks professionals.
- Invite all Montana communities to become actively involved in the LWCF program.



- Effectively communicate the value and benefits of the LWCF program to the public, Montana’s congressional delegation, and other appropriate groups.

Program Element: Statewide Trails Programs

Overview:

MFWP administers three trails grant programs: the federally funded Recreational Trails Program (RTP), Snowmobile Program and the Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Program, both state funded.

The Recreational Trails Program provides grants for development, rehabilitation and maintenance of recreational trails statewide. The Snowmobile Program provides grants and funds equipment for snowmobile trail grooming and maintenance, law enforcement and safety education. The OHV Program provides grants for maintenance and rehabilitation of OHV trails and ethics education.

Current Environment, Issues, and Opportunities:

The 2001 State Trails Plan provides general direction for satisfying future trails needs and for addressing trails issues. In addition, the Montana Outdoor Recreation Trail Use Study (2005-6) provides trends about who uses trails in Montana, how they are used, what expectations and preferences users hold, and how use may be affected by other trail users. A very similar study was first conducted in 1993.

Goals:

- Develop effective methods to educate users on ethics and behavior.
- Continue to manage recreation conflicts and resource impacts.
- Find means to increase trail use opportunities and funding.
- Utilize grant programs to encourage a diversity of recreational trail opportunities in a manner that meets the needs of trail users, minimizes trails conflicts and protects resources.
- Provide statewide leadership regarding education, information, safety, enforcement, and technical support for trails.
- Cooperate internally and with other agencies, or-

ganizations, and individuals on current key trails-related issues.

Strategic Priorities:

- Resolve grooming, conflict, and trail-impact, and Montana Environmental Policy Act issues.
- Manage and revise the trail-grant process. Provide timely and effective service to user groups.
- Work with the communities surrounding major snowmobile opportunities, Travel Montana, local chambers of commerce, and snowmobile organizations to ensure that out-of-state snowmobilers are aware of recreational trail opportunities within Montana and the nonresident temporary use snowmobile permit requirement.
- Continue to promote quality snowmobile trail riding experiences.
- Promote urban trail opportunities and encourage communities and local governments to apply for grants.
- Provide education opportunities for agencies and the public concerning trail design, management, maintenance, and funding.
- Work with the Department of Transportation, other governmental agencies, and private groups to develop a plan for trail use of rail line right-of-ways focusing on those most likely to be abandoned.
- Make all Montana communities and qualifying private clubs/organizations aware of the grant funding opportunities available through MFWP.
- Conduct surveys to monitor use and trends

Program Element: Recreation Education

Overview:

MFWP is the state’s designated agency for outdoor recreation. MFWP manages safety, education, and information aspects of several recreation programs, including the Snowmobile Program, and Off-highway Vehicle Program.

Current Environment, Issues, and Opportunities:

Changes in outdoor recreation and MFWP’s operating environment continue to present challenges. For example, as snowmobiles become more powerful, snow-

mobilers can more easily access dangerous avalanche terrain; as the population demographics shift to more-single parent families, there is a greater demand for non-traditional, outdoor-skills education; and as Montana's population increases, more conflicts occur between diverse natural-resource recreation users.

Montana has seen a 48% increase in snowmobiling registrations in the state from fiscal year 2002 to 2007. MFWP works closely with the three avalanche advisory centers in Montana by providing grant money and assistance in developing avalanche informational materials. Montana recorded the highest number of snowmobile deaths due to avalanches in the United States during the winter of 2001-2002.

Goals:

- Generate awareness through education and information programs of recreational safety issues and responsible outdoor recreation for trails users, including OHV and snowmobile riders, motorboat enthusiasts and other related recreationists.
- Make MFWP sites key locations for sharing recreation information, trail safety awareness and information on the responsible use of outdoor resources.
- Administer the snowmobile trails program to maintain good communication and cooperation with snowmobile users as well as resource groups.

Strategic Priorities:

- Target OHV education programs to decrease resource damage, noxious weeds and trail conflicts among OHV riders and other trail users.
- Continue to provide statewide groomer operator training to snowmobile clubs each year to assure equipment is being properly used and maintained.
- Stay abreast of snowmobile issues in Yellowstone.
- Share information on recreation, trail awareness and information on the responsible use of outdoor resources at MFWP locations, as a primary channel for reaching the public.
- Continue seasonal media efforts to generate general awareness of the issues related to OHV and snowmobile trail use and safety, and motorboat and general water recreation safety.
- Assist in developing educational motor-trail guides for eastern Montana.



- Develop a sign program educating motorboat users at Region 6 sites of boating etiquette, safety and accident prevention.
- Increase avalanche awareness among snowmobilers to decrease the number of snowmobile-related avalanche accidents.
- Replace snowmobile-grooming equipment as scheduled and agreed upon with Snowmobile Advisory Committee and various local clubs.

**Program Element:
Water-Based Recreation**

Overview:

MFWP is charged in statute with managing the social, biological and safety aspects of Montana's waterways. Traditionally, MFWP concentrated its efforts on providing access to waters for fishing. Recently, MFWP has taken steps to not only provide access to waterways, but to also try to maintain or improve the quality of recreation on rivers, streams and lakes in Montana.

Current Environment, Issues, and Opportunities:

MFWP's actions are driven by the public's concerns about Montana rivers, conflicts between diverse user

groups or surrounding neighbors, and a concern for the safety of the users. In recent years, these challenges have become more complex due to the increasing number of people recreating on some of the popular waters, the change in land-ownership patterns next to state waters, and the economic importance of uses of these waters to Montana businesses.

Some of the more challenging issues surrounding water-based recreation have to do with conflicts between different types of recreation activities, such as: motorized and non-motorized use, floating vs. wade angling, and commercially guided vs. private users. Protection of the natural resources, quality experiences and related businesses on and along waters is vitally important. Progress has been made through development of commercial use rules, planning efforts and a greater dialogue.

Goals:

- Providing a full spectrum of water-based recreation opportunities while minimizing social conflicts.
- Protecting natural resources in and along rivers, lakes and streams, and minimize the impacts that water-based recreation has on the resources.
- Providing and protecting public access opportunities to the state's waters.
- Coordinating with local and federal agencies responsible for water-based recreation planning and management.
- Monitor water based recreation trends and management techniques to provide management systems as well as proactive management techniques.
- Evaluate water based recreation issues and seek methods of integrating management as part of Parks Division FAS and park management programs.

Strategic Priorities:

- Complete management plans to address safety, resource impacts and visitors management on the Blackfoot, Madison and Smith rivers.
- Improve permit program on Blackfoot and Smith rivers in cooperation with U.S. Forest Service and BLM.
- Continue to work with individual local interest groups to develop management direction for individual river segments or corridors.

- Integrate recreation management principles into FAS management

Program Element: Law Enforcement

Overview:

Law enforcement is essential for protecting visitors and promoting safety with recreational users and staff while ensuring compliance with department rules, regulations and state laws designed to protect and enhance state park resources. Direct contact with visitors and recreational users is the primary method used to encourage compliance. In-depth investigations are also used to address more complex issues. However, law enforcement must prioritize work and resources across each Program, often with conflicting needs. This is accomplished through implementation of Warden District Resource Plans (WDR), which are developed within the broad guidelines and direction set out in this and other approved Department planning documents. Issues and developing priorities not covered by these documents are encouraged to be identified and advanced through the WDR planning process for consideration and identification of emerging issues. Planning for flexibility to respond to rapidly developing issues is a high priority.

Current Environment, Issues, and Opportunities:

The department's strategic and Six-Year Operating Plans for the Parks Program identified resource and visitor protection, maintenance of facilities and improved visitor services as major emphasis areas over the next three biennia. Due to funding source considerations and restrictions, law enforcement's ability to provide services specifically for park site issues will largely be determined by the ability to secure funding for law enforcement activity regarding park site, visitor and resource protection.

Nevertheless, abuse and vandalism to park resources are growing concerns that not only directly degrades the resource, but also negatively impacts the experience of the lawful visitor. We anticipate that visitation will increase, placing vandalism and other improper or destructive behavior and activities at a higher level of prominence, requiring increased law enforcement presence and response.

Currently, state law does not extend authority to

FWP enforcement personnel to enforce the illegal use of intoxicants by minors, even on properties owned or controlled by FWP. Much of the vandalism and property damage occurring on FWP properties can be attributed directly or indirectly to the behavior of minors in possession of intoxicating substances. FWP needs to address this issue by seeking authority to enforce appropriate laws, even if limited only to FWP properties.

Goals:

- Monitor and encourage public compliance with laws, rules and regulations through education and enforcement efforts accomplished through personal contact, public presentations, and scheduled and random patrols.
- Respond in a timely and effective manner to complaints, concerns and reports of known or suspected violations from visitors, recreationists, the general public, and department personnel. Respond as necessary to public safety, visitor and recreationist conflicts and issues.
- Investigate park and recreation violations and prepare cases to lead to successful prosecutions, integrating innovative investigative methodology and technology with time-proven investigative skills and abilities. Fully utilize and enhance intra-agency, interagency and jurisdictional cooperation.

Strategic Priorities:

- Enforce new nonresident snowmobile registration fees.
- Increase officer presence and involvement at selected parks.
- Develop legislative authority to address Minors in Possession of intoxicating substances (MIP).
- Increase public awareness of 1-800-TIP-MONT as a tool to help reduce vandalism and other violations.
- Develop and implement programmatic solutions to address park site and recreational issues on a site- and event-specific basis through Warden District Planning, concentrating on urban and water based recreation sites.
- Plan and implement snowmobile enforcement patrols to focus compliance on the new nonresident snowmobile registration requirements and wilderness encroachment rules.
- Seek to increase state or alternative funding to match with additional federal funding available under the State Recreational Boating Program administered by the U.S. Coast Guard.
- Develop legislation and an enforcement strategy for Boating Under the Influence of alcohol and drugs.
- Enhance the ex-officio program in a manner that maintains the proficiency and ability of staff to assist in the enforcement of laws per department policy.



AGENCY MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

To successfully accomplish our mission, MFWP must effectively use its human, physical and fiscal resources. With more than 1000 seasonal and full-time employees located in seven administrative regions and the Helena headquarters, the Department's challenge is to provide consistent agency policy and direction while providing the flexibility for successful implementation of programs across organizational boundaries. The Department must recruit, train and develop hundreds of employees each year and provide adequate offices, vehicles, equipment and supplies for employees to perform their duties. As a self-funded agency, MFWP must manage revenue and expenditures with a long-term view.

Program Element: Agency Direction

Overview:

Montana's Constitution and statutes provide the foundation for MFWP. A five member Commission appointed by the Governor provides policy direction, approves all land matters, and sets regulations and fees. A Director, appointed by the Governor, provides leadership and oversees day-to-day management of the agency.

Strategic direction for the fish, wildlife, parks and agency management programs is provided by a planning process that involves all affected divisions and encourages public involvement.

Current Environment, Issues, and Opportunities:

Hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation, as well as the conservation and enhancement of the resources that support these activities, are vitally important to the people and economy of Montana. This insures broad public interest in all aspects of MFWP's programs. At the same time, the expanding nature of public interests in fish, wildlife and outdoor resources, and the increasing diversity of values associated with those resources create often-conflicting demands on the agency. Increased public scrutiny and involvement in MFWP's business continues to elevate the level of de-

bate on many of the agency's actions or decisions. MFWP must effectively involve diverse interests in decision-making to develop sustainable policies.

Montanan's quality of life and economic prosperity is a function of three key elements: healthy landscapes, abundant fish and wildlife and public access to these resources.. Rapid population and economic growth in western counties and steady population and economic decline in eastern counties create conflicting social and resource policy demands associated with maintaining landscapes, populations and access. The increasing political influence of urban areas and new residents further complicates resource management.

The public and legislature demand MFWP use available resources efficiently and effectively. Given the breadth of programs administered by the agency and a decentralized organizational structure, MFWP must use a comprehensive and strategic management system to plan, implement, evaluate and adapt activities. The agency must also demonstrate accountability to the public it serves in general and the legislature in particular.

Goals:

- Develop policies that provide for the stewardship of Montana's fish, wildlife and parks resources while maintaining our hunting and angling heritage, and outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Provide leadership that embraces the diversity of values regarding fish, wildlife, and recreation and incorporate these public expectations into the recreational opportunities provided by the agency.
- Demonstrate responsible use of agency resources and accountability to the people of Montana.

Strategic Priorities:

- Increase efficiency and accountability of agency programs.
- Improve public outreach to include others in the planning how best to manage resources for a variety of recreational opportunities.
- Develop new partnerships and collaborative agreements with local government entities that integrate information from the Montana Challenge project into their decision processes.

Program Element: Finances

Overview:

The MFWP budget is among the most complex in state government with 60 separate funding sources, some of which are interest-bearing accounts, and most are earmarked for specific purposes. MFWP must obtain legislative appropriations to spend any of the funds available to the agency from these sources, and approval is required from either the MFWP Commission, or the Legislature to change fee schedules.

The Department is funded primarily through user-fees and dedicated federal funds. As a largely self-funded agency, MFWP must carefully project anticipated revenues and federal apportionments, and balance program costs with revenue.

Current Environment, Issues, Opportunities:

The Department relies heavily on revenues from hunting and fishing licenses for funding the Fisheries, Wildlife and Agency Management programs; nearly 2/3 of licensing revenues is derived from nonresident sales. In 2007, the legislature authorized use of general funds for the Fisheries and Wildlife programs for the first time to match federal State Wildlife Grants.

In recent years, FWP has also relied heavily on annual, congressional line item appropriations to fund work on wolves and grizzly bears. Continuation of these line item appropriations is uncertain, given federal deficits and changes in the federal budget process. To mitigate the risk of over reliance on license revenues and special congressional appropriations, the MFWP funding base needs to be diversified by pursuing a broad range of funds including foundations, federal programs, private sources or reauthorization of state general funds to support programs not related to hunting or fishing.

The Parks program is funded primarily through a \$4.00 optional registration fee on light vehicles along with coal tax trust interest, bed tax, and motorboat fuel tax currently funds the Parks program. Security of funding for the parks program continues to be important to FWP's ability to address growing demands for natural, cultural, and recreational resource protection in state parks. The 2007 legislature also appropriated \$10 million to MFWP for acquisition of additional state parks and fishing access sites to increase public access to outdoor recreation.

Historically, MFWP has relied on legislative action to raise license fees by a significant percentage every 10 to 15 years. The current administration and legislature directed MFWP to transition to an approach of modest license increases over shorter intervals to provide a more stable financial environment for MFWP operations, enable more precise revenue forecasting, and reduce the need for large fee increases. In addition, the administration directed MFWP to manage expenditures so as to avoid the need to raise fees prior to the 2011 legislative session. Combined, this direction means that expenditure growth must be significantly constrained over the next 5 years.

The USFWS is performing a five-year audit cycle for all states, and plans to audit Montana in the Fall of 2007. The audit will cover the last two completed fiscal years (FY06 & FY07), and will include a combination finance and programmatic audit of the Department. Hosting the audit team and complying with the findings will add workload to fiscal staff.

Goals:

- Manage an operations budget and a capital program exceeding \$80 million annually within legislative authority limits and generally accepted fiscal management practices.
- Balance program expenditures with license revenue and federal apportionments to maintain a stable, long-term program and service delivery that recognizes that there will be infrequent fee adjustments.
- Maintain a diverse "portfolio" of revenue streams to enhance funding stability for all programs.
- Ensure accountability in how funds are spent to maintain eligibility for federal aid, and to sustain political support for the MFWP user-fee funding base.

Strategic Priorities:

- Actively encourage and document accountability of MFWP programs with staff and external interested parties.
- Promote dedicated congressional funds for SWG programs.
- Develop marketing efforts that increase the yearly purchase of licenses.
- Identify politically viable alternatives to license

funds as match for SWG.

- Continue to pursue new sources of revenue such as funding from foundations and non-profit organizations, while maximizing traditional federal and state-special fund sources.
- Create a fee structure more closely indexed to cost of living increases and inflation and approved program growth.
- Reduce reliance on Congressional “line item” appropriations.

Program Element: Human Resources

Overview:

MFWP accomplishes its mission through the collective efforts of over 1000 employees: laborers, technicians, biologists, wardens, park managers, accountants, attorneys, managers, and administrators to name a few primary occupations. Recruiting, developing, training, motivating, compensating and managing the workforce are complex and continually evolving tasks. Attracting and retaining a highly qualified and motivated workforce is essential to the Department’s ability to accomplish its goals and objectives.

Current Environment, Issues, Opportunities:

MFWP’s operating environment is changing rapidly. Natural resource policy issues are complex and contentious, while state and federal regulations related to human resources are extremely detailed.

To fulfill the MFWP mission both field staff and managers need to be skilled in negotiating, facilitation, collaboration, and communication with our constituents and appointed and elected officials.

Despite some progress, MFWP’s workforce remains disproportionately white, male, and middle-aged. The public MFWP serves represents a much broader spectrum of views, values and experiences, necessitating the Department to transition to a workforce that is more diversified in education, skills, background and experience.

Like many agencies in Montana State Government, a large number of MFWP employees are at or near retirement eligibility. Of the more than 600 FTE in the Department, in the next five years over 150 will have either met the criteria for full retirement, or be eligible

for early retirement.

Initiated in 2002, the Department’s internal Leadership and Management Development Program (LMDP) is an example of ongoing career development at MFWP. This program provides opportunities for 25 employees to learn from experts in multiple disciplines about leading and managing in a state agency.

Public employment has become an area of vast complexity with new case law emerging frequently. There are numerous federal/state statutes and regulations regarding the hiring of and work environment for state employees. Examples include the American’s with Disabilities Act, the Family and Medical Leave Act, Equal Employment Opportunity and the Civil Rights Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act, and numerous additional requirements for fairness and equality in the workplace. All require diligence and precision from both the HR staff and MFWP managers.

Goals:

- Create a workforce where employees feel a sense of accountability, value and satisfaction in their achievements and their contribution to the agency mission.
- Diversify the knowledge, skills and abilities of the workforce to meet the changing demands of the public and the challenges on the ground.
- Develop the leadership and management skills of the workforce in anticipation of significant turnover at upper management levels in the next 5 years.

Strategic Priorities:

- Develop fair and usable competency and results-based pay components within budget constraints under the Broadband Pay Plan utilizing the MFWP performance agreement/review process and ensuring managers receive appropriate training.
- Establish procedures to address pay inequities so that these can be corrected as funding becomes available.
- Prepare employees for managerial positions through MFWP Career Development Program, workforce planning, job analysis, and reevaluating and updating Job Profiles.
- Emphasize new skill sets to ensure that public expectations of agency expertise are an integral part of the hiring and development processes.

- Expand the recruitment process to reach the broadest spectrum of applicants.

Program Element: Information Services

Overview:

All of MFWP's programs involve the use of Information Services (IS). The decentralized nature of the Department's operations requires a significant investment in stand-alone and portable computer systems along with major agency offices connected through the statewide area network.

Services provided include:

- mainframe, mid-tier, and personal computers support to more than 600 users;
- local area network (LAN) and wide area network (WAN) services;
- hardware and software purchasing, configuration and deployment;
- application development, maintenance and support;
- large system automation projects;
- Agency-wide Geographic Information System (GIS) efforts;
- and management of the public web-site providing electronic access to pertinent business information and services.

In addition to the hardware, software and computer expertise, MFWP must maintain comprehensive data management systems, policies, and controls to ensure the technology is applied in ways that are relevant and add value to natural resource decision-making and communication with the public.

Current Environment, Issues and Opportunities:

With the decentralized nature of the agency and expanse of the state, the IS environment for MFWP is broad and challenging. User support encompasses:

- 15+ MFWP offices containing LAN infrastructure;
- 400+ users and associated complexities;
- 400 + private business locations with ALS computer equipment;
- and 300+ private homes and/or vehicles with computer equipment in regular use by MFWP

employees such as biologists and wardens.

Expansion of the IS industry and increasing agency dependence on information services to meet MFWP goals far exceeds IS staff capacity to meet needs. The decentralized nature of MFWP operations is severely tested when security breaches, such as viruses or outages, affect the state network. With a recent reorganization and additional staff authorized by the 2005 legislature, IS staff's ability to respond to central users as well as remote regions of Montana has improved, providing better services to MFWP and our customers. Even though statewide coverage and service has improved, the agency still must rely upon contracted services.

The MFWP IS organization was recently changed to a centrally managed structure which should better lend itself to an enterprise approach to IS, also following the state's recommended IS model. MFWP technical staff and services will move toward a more networked and organizationally connected model with standardized data structures, hardware, or software. This poses short-term challenges, but should result in better strategic planning for IS, as well as minimizing duplicative efforts.

The agency continues to operate on a four-year replacement cycle for computer hardware.

Computers with access to the Internet and electronic mail are on nearly every employee's desk. Data management systems are available to staff for data input and analysis. Standardization of how these data are collected, stored, analyzed, or presented are not currently in place within or between regional staff. Access to these data, therefore, can be difficult, as well as inconsistent from region to region.

The agency has been collecting data on fish and wildlife populations, visitor statistics, enforcement citations, license sales, harvest surveys, land parcels, fish stocking, and landowner/game conflicts since its creation. These data have generally been collected at the regional level and traditionally provided to the public through written reports, direct interaction with the MFWP Commission, or other public meetings. As the public's demand and sophistication, and magnitude of issues increase, there is a greater need for these data to be readily available in a format that can be understood and interpreted by a wide variety of users within the agency as well as the public.

The MFWP web site now serves e-government information and services to millions of visitors annually. GIS, relational databases and the Internet are tools being used to move toward more centralized accessibility of the data collected and managed by the agency. Through the MFWP public and internal website, more information can be directly accessed by our staff and customers. As the MFWP website has moved to database driven applications, many of the databases that have been developed for one purpose are now being served on the website. Our customers heavily rely on the Internet. Currently, our site receives between 100,000 – 150,000 visitors each month. Our ability to utilize an internal website for communication, data entry and reporting, and information visualization can provide solutions to many of these challenges, but only if appropriate staffing levels exist.

A standard and centralized request processing procedure, intended to reduce confusion among MFWP employees and minimize duplication of effort and inappropriate platform development selection, was put in place in 2004.

Goals:

- Provide technology support agency-wide to meet all MFWP goals by successfully supporting MFWP software program applications for the agency's field staff and program managers.
- Ensure MFWP computer systems and equipment (1500+ items) are replaced according to the state's established replacement cycles in order to provide access and information to users and allow communications via Summitnet and the Internet.
- Provide subject matter expertise and guidance to MFWP program areas seeking automation of existing processes including how projects can be contracted for development and/or maintenance support.
- Provide more efficient systems and shared resources to assist in effective delivery of data and information.
- Ensure MFWP IS infrastructure and applications remain active and free of viruses or other forms of compromise.
- Examine and secure viable long-term funding solutions for mission-critical systems, such as the ALS, GIS and the MFWP web-site.

Strategic Priorities:

- Enhance security and continuity of operations across all mission critical areas.
- Develop standard approaches to field data collection analysis, data storage, data dissemination, and reporting.
- Complete transition of ALS operations and support from contract to state system.
- Analyze options for effective operations and continual improvement of all its systems.
- Purchase, configure, deploy and support technology according to state policy and MFWP need.
- Review MFWP IS functions and organizational structure to best provide IS services within the agency to meet resource and user requirements, including: third party software version control, virus patch management, and state of Montana IS direction.
- Review the existing IS strategic plan, document recommendations on changes and additions, and make updates on an ongoing basis.
- Assess database and application development, application deployment methods, and staffing, and determine or recommend effective long-term direction.

Program Element: Licensing

Overview:

Sales of hunting and fishing licenses account for more than half of the MFWP annual \$60 million budget and are the financial foundation for most of the Department's programs. The Licensing Bureau carries out the hunting and fishing licensing policy of the agency, and many licensing activities are established in statute (MCA) and require either MFWP Commission or legislative action to change. Compared to other western states the cost of resident licenses in Montana is among the lowest in the nation, while demand for certain types of licenses requires special applications and permit drawings that number close to 200,000 annually. The number of licensed hunters and anglers in Montana is disproportionate to the state's population, as 1.3 million licenses are sold to more than 450,000 individuals annually.

Current Environment, Issues and Opportunities:

Licensing operations of a general nature in Montana are performed at all MFWP regional and area offices and by approximately 400 business providers. Special licensing involves limited-quota licenses issued through a random drawing process where individuals submit an application by a deadline for a given species and drawings are conducted for the limited number of permits to be issued. Miscellaneous licensing involves low volume, but specialized licenses, such as taxidermy and bird preserve operations.

Licensing functions are highly visible to the public and few operations within the Department receive the level of scrutiny, or account for more public contact than the licensing of big game hunting. With the automated license system transition in its second year, MFWP continues to upgrade automated processes to meet public expectations. Procedural changes are underway with the drawing process to maximize the automated system's features while improving timeliness to applicants.

Annually, the Department handles and returns millions of dollars to unsuccessful license applicants. This requires establishing and implementing internal controls and safeguards for funds collected, retained, and refunded. Biannually, the Legislative Audit Division audits the systems that handle the accounting for these funds.

Sales commissions are paid to providers (businesses that sell licenses) at the rate of \$.50 per license issued. With the advent of the automated licensing system (ALS), there is a growing debate about how to address the issue of commissions currently paid license providers.

Goals:

- Implement licensing operations to provide quality opportunities for public appreciation and enjoyment of fish, wildlife and parks resources.
- Implement new types of hunting and fishing licenses as determined by Legislative and MFWP Commission action.
- Perform special drawings and notify applicants of results within a few days of the MFWP Commission setting final quotas for high interest big game species, such as: moose, sheep, goat, deer, elk and antelope.

- Ensure ALS and Internet Licensing systems remain operational and effectively implement licensing program changes.
- Conduct special license drawings according to schedule and by regulation; produce licenses correctly for successful applicants; and, generate refunds for unsuccessful applicants.

Strategic Priorities:

- Accelerate the transition from a paper-based licensing and permit system to a fully automated process that provides timely sales, improved accuracy, and increased availability of information for program specialists, enforcement personnel and the public.
- During 2006, Convert data entry of the special permit applications from a contracted service to internal process.
- Move the drawings for special licenses and permits earlier in the calendar year, e.g. moose, sheep and goat drawings by mid-June and deer, elk, and antelope no later than the first week in August.
- Provide increased opportunity for the public to purchase licenses and apply for drawings by implementing license sales and special permit applications over the Internet.
- Expand license sales and applications on the Internet.

Program Element: Physical Property**Overview:**

MFWP owns or leases offices in six different office buildings located in Helena, as well as seven Regional offices and four Area offices scattered throughout the state. MFWP maintains an internal fleet of highway vehicles, trailers, boats, other light and heavy equipment, fixed wing aircraft and helicopters. In addition, MFWP maintains millions of dollars worth of other physical property from uniforms, to office furnishings, tools, equipment and firearms. All of the Department's property must be acquired, accounted for, maintained in safe working order, periodically inventoried, and disposed of when no longer needed. Both the Montana Code Annotated and the Administrative Rules of Montana contain specific rules and regulations on property

management. In addition the Department maintains a current Purchasing Manual to guide property management.

Current Environment, Issues and Opportunities:

With increasing vehicle costs and changing needs of the Department, the types of vehicles in the MFWP fleet have evolved from a basic configuration to now include many mission-specific or optional features. Public concerns are increasing about the vehicles driven by MFWP employees, and Department Management now reviews and updates the configuration of all newly purchased vehicles for both operational need and cost-benefit.

The existing MFWP Helena Headquarters building is too small for current staff. Distributing staff in multiple locations in the capital city area increases costs and reduces efficiency and effectiveness of staff coordination.

Outside of Helena, many field staff such as wardens and biologists work from their homes, rather than from an office environment. While offering convenience in proximity to the fieldwork, this arrangement strains the family environment and limits public access to MFWP field staff.

Available storage space and security of property at the Helena headquarters and at some regional headquarters is inadequate to prevent weather-related damage or theft. Capital projects, such as construction of new office or storage buildings, have not competed well over the past several biennia; and MFWP, like many other state agencies, has few projects in the planning stage to mitigate lack of adequate office space in the headquarters and regional office locations.

Goals:

- To ensure MFWP employees have the necessary equipment, vehicles, tools and other property to complete their tasks in a safe and cost effective manner.
- To balance availability of funding with needs for property replacement.
- To ensure accountability of use of property to avoid injury, damage to property or loss of public support for the agency and its mission.
- To maintain the Department's fixed assets in accordance with law, regulation and generally ac-

cepted accounting principles.

- To increase the fuel efficiency and cost effectiveness of the FWP motor pool.

Strategic Priorities:

- Explore options to co-locate Helena staff by expanding the existing headquarters or developing options for new office space.
- Increase energy efficiency of operations.
- Increase the number of area offices so that communities distant from a regional office have opportunities for improved contact with MFWP staff.
- Enhance shops and/or security facilities at several regional offices.

Program Element: Safety

Overview:

The MFWP Safety Program is managed on a department-wide basis to provide MFWP employees with a safe and secure work environment. Due to the decentralized organizational structure of MFWP there is a departmental safety manager in the headquarters, and a safety committee made up of representatives from each of the divisions and the seven MFWP regions. At the next level are Regional Safety Committees focused on the operations specific to each region's work environment. To be successful, the MFWP Safety Program requires a combination of communication, education, incentives, and documentation. The current MFWP safety policy calls for all duty related accidents and injuries to be reported as soon as possible, but not later than 72 hours from occurrence, with additional timelines for notification to the State Fund and to perform an investigation. Improvement in meeting these requirements would enhance the safety program while making progress toward achieving the goals outlined below.

Current Environment, Issues and Opportunities:

From FY 2002 to FY 2003 the incidence of injured MFWP employees increased by nearly 10%, and the cost of worker's compensation premiums increased by nearly 50%. The majority of injuries to MFWP personnel occur in operations in the field and a material percentage of those injuries involve seasonal or tempo-

rary workers.

Lost work time could be reduced and funds could be saved with more timely reporting of accidents and injuries and additional involvement by supervisors in encouraging the early return to work, or working part-time assignments by MFWP employees who have been injured.

Continue to update the MFWP Safety Policy with focus on protective equipment, health screenings, first aid and CPR training, hazard identification, and physical fitness.

Goals:

- Limit the instances of workplace injuries and reduce the cost of lost workdays and worker's compensation claims for injured employees.
- Reduce the number of workplace accidents resulting in employee injuries by 10% annually.
- Reduce annual workers compensation claims costs by 10% annually through an aggressive program of injury reporting, timely visits of injured personnel to medical practitioners, early return to work, and creative application of modified work assignments to accommodate short-term or less than full-time return to work opportunities.
- Provide incentives and awards/recognition for MFWP employees who set positive safety examples and achieve results, such as reducing the numbers and costs of accidents/injuries.

Strategic Priorities:

- Initiate mandatory annual safety training within the field focused programs for all temporary and seasonal employees.
- Perform annual fire and evacuation drills in each MFWP Regional Office and the Helena Headquarters to enhance employee awareness of safety and security.

