

# Region 6 Update



Baker, MT Sept. 19, 2023

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# Outline

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- R6 Strategic Plan- Key points
- Habitat Projects Summary
- Habitat Projects Breakdown
- Monitoring Status
- R6 Game Bird Status Update
- Questions

# Region 6 Strategic Plan



- Reviews game bird status in Region by species
- 3 Focus Areas
  - Milk River, Northeast Corner, Sage-grouse Habitat
- 1-3 goals for each area
  - Long term conservation or habitat enhancement depending on area
- Approaches listed to achieve area goals



# R6 Strategic Plan- Northeastern MT

## Habitat enhancement projects, pheasant winter cover

- Build off BMAs, CRP, and past projects
  - Goal of 50% of projects on existing access or habitat areas
- Increase nesting cover and winter cover
- Food plots to reduce emergency supplemental winter feeding
- Re-enroll shelterbelts with HMLs
- Monitor projects to ensure compliance

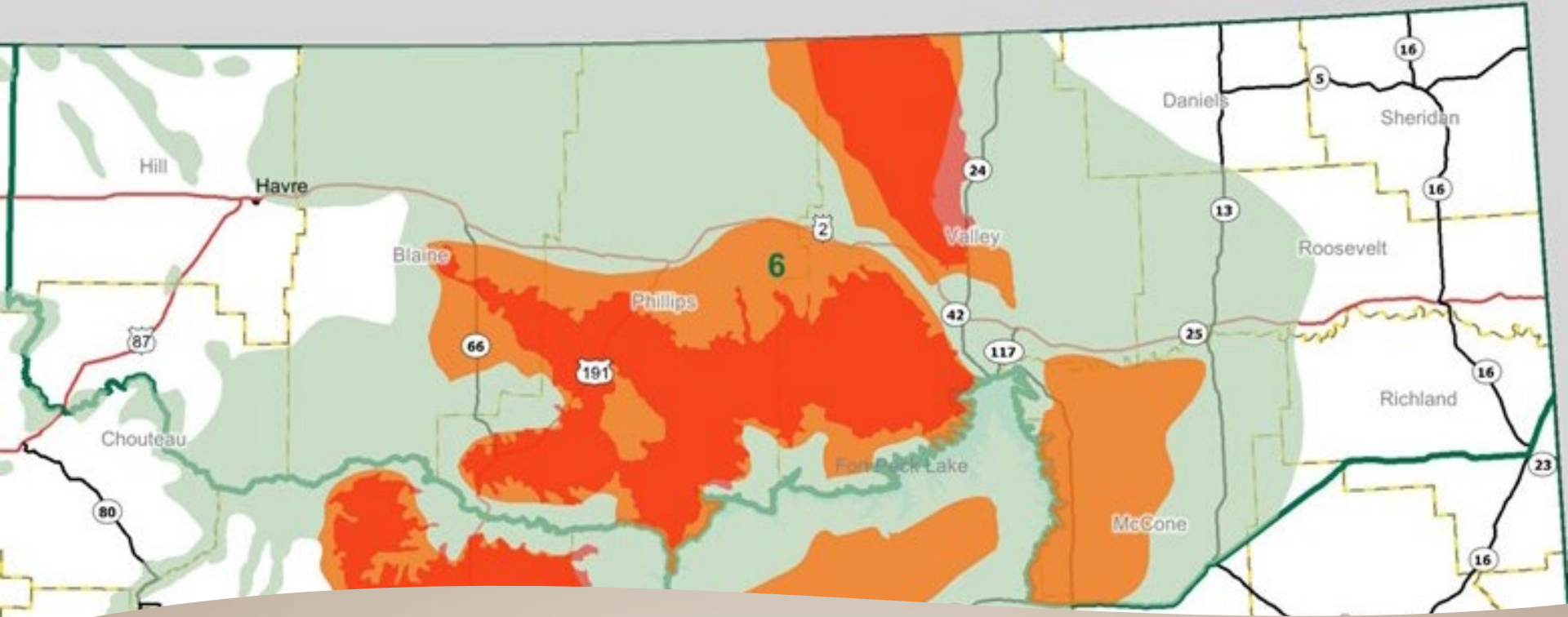


# R6 Strategic Plan- Milk River Valley

- Long term conservation and restoration
  - Use public lands as cornerstones
  - partnerships
  - conservation easements







# R6 Strategic Plan- Sage-grouse Habitat

- Sagebrush protection, enhancement and restoration
  - Silver sagebrush corridors to AB and SK and Valley County creeks
  - Work with partners
  - Promote use and benefits of grazing systems; conservation easements, & 30-year leases



# Habitat Project Summary

## **45 New or Renewed Habitat Projects**

- 1 Nesting Cover + 2 Pollinator Plots on HMLs
- 14 Open Fields
- 15 CRP Lease (e.g. Open Fields on BMAs)
- 5 HML (some include additional practices)
- 2 Grass stand enhancement (disk & interseed)
- 3 Wildlife Friendly Practices
- 5 Food plots (renewals)



# Habitat Projects Cumulative

## Region 6 Totals

- 199 UGBEP Projects
- 64,180 Habitat Acres
- 88,809 Access Acres (UGBEP Only)
  - 44,048 BMA acres impacted
  - 5,149 Public Land acres impacted

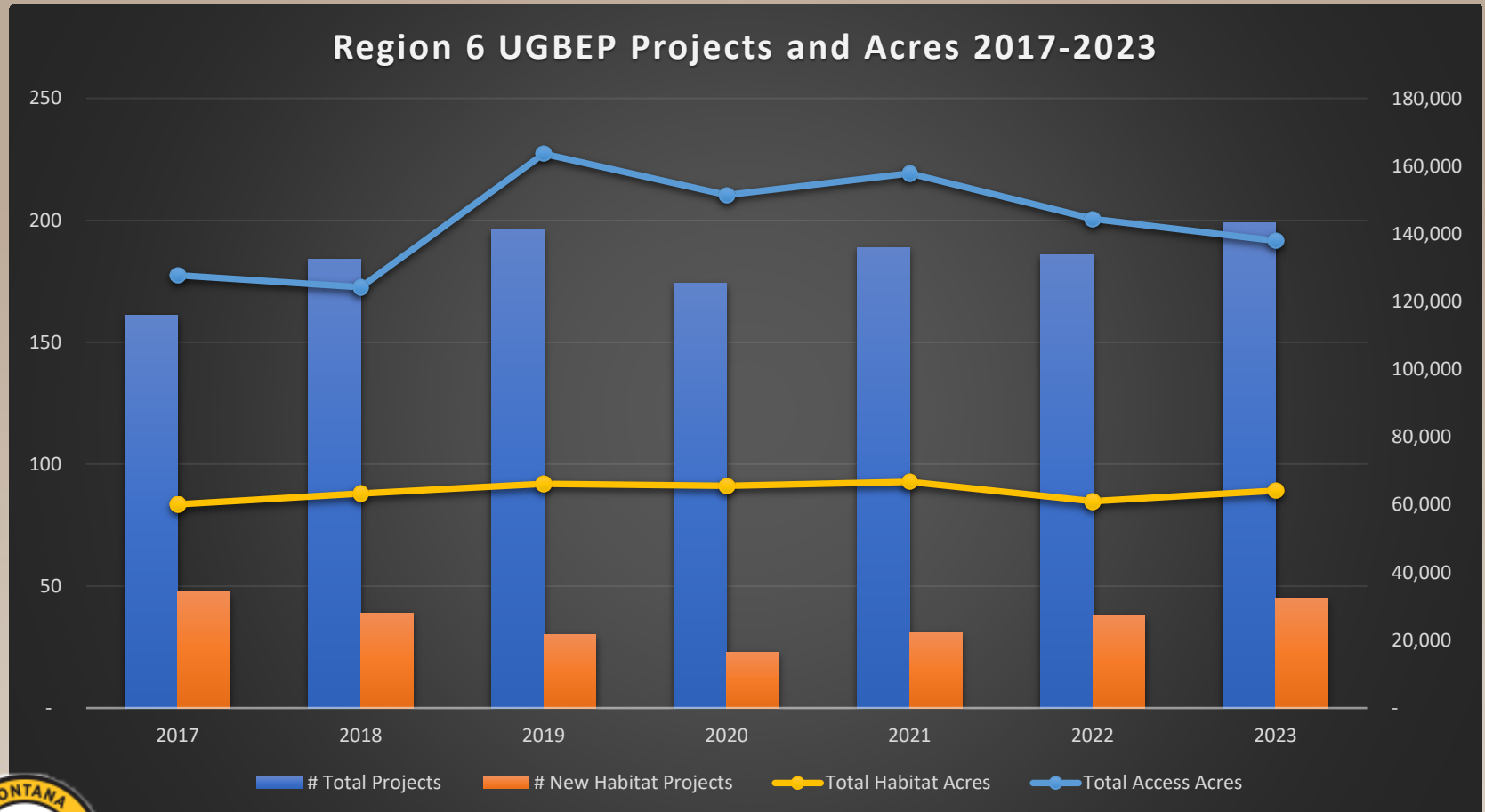
## Project Type Breakdown

- 3 Cons. Easements
- 6 30-yr Cons. Leases
- 4 Grazing Systems
- 23 Nesting Cover
- 18 Food Plots/Cover Crop
- 9 Shelterbelts
- 15 CRP Lease
- 26 Habitat Mgmt. Lease
- 97 Open Fields





# Habitat Projects Summary

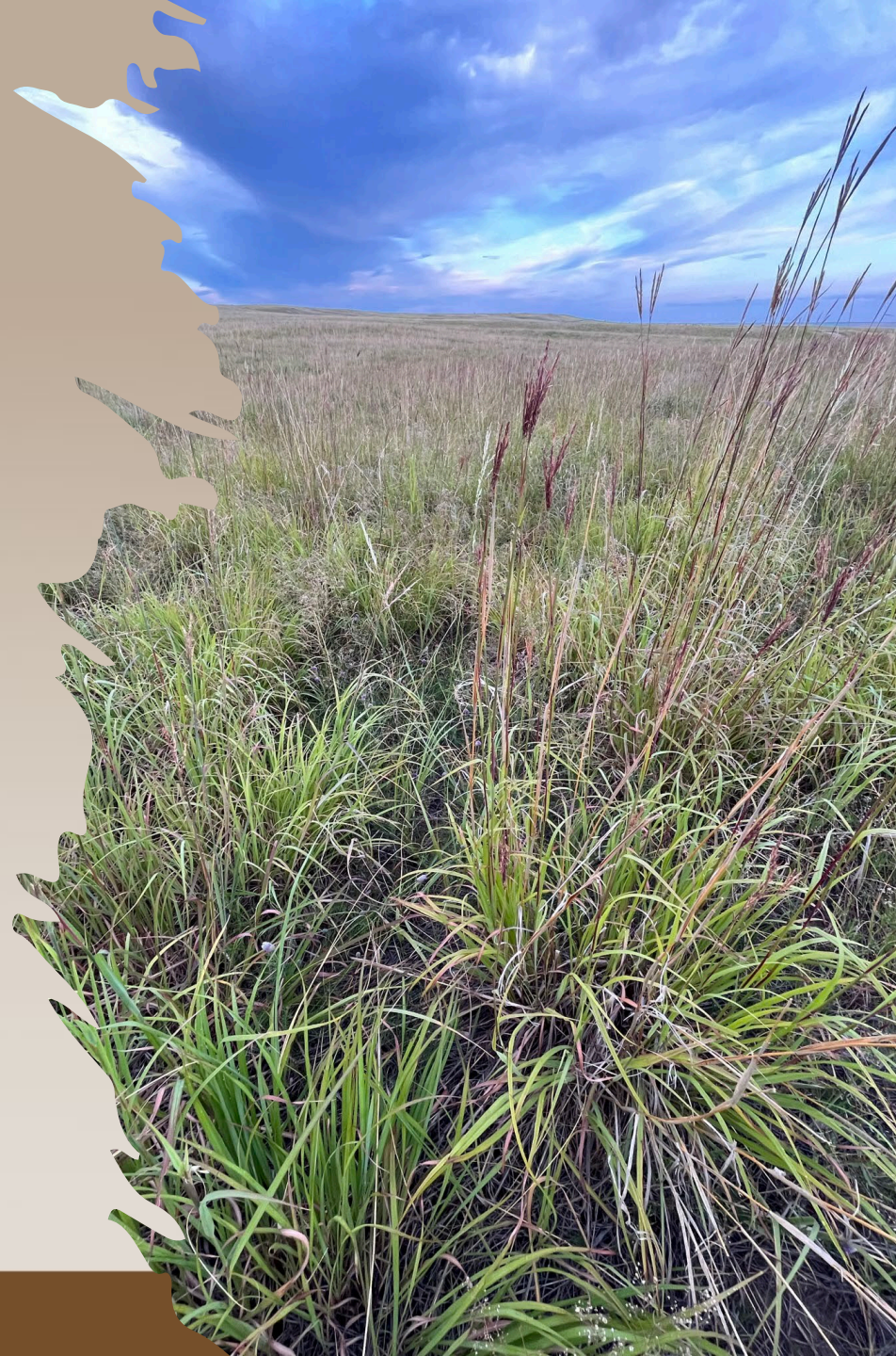


# Nesting Cover

- 1 Project that ended up switched to CRP Lease due to FSA complications
  - 764 acres of DNRC land in Daniels Co\*
- 2 Pollinator plots on HMLs to be planted soon
  - Seed provided by Pheasant's Forever
- 2 disking and interseeding projects, work to be conducted this fall\*
  - Improving old CRP stands
  - Seeding mostly alfalfa & forb mix



\*Partially funded with MBWP \$\$





# Food Plots

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- 13 Diverse mix plots on 115 acres
- 4 standing grain on 21.5 acres
  - 1 was not planted due to equipment failure
- 1 Cover crop on 35 acres
- Good precipitation = better food plot quality







# Habitat Management Leases

- 3 renewed and 3 new HMLs
- 605 acres of habitat total
- 603 acres of UGBEP only access plus 1,969 acres of BMA access impacted





# Open Fields

- 4 new and 10 renewed enrollments
  - 12 different landowners
  - 3,286 habitat acres
  - 4,426 access acres
- 96 total Open Fields in R6
  - 21,807 habitat acres
  - 34,366 access acres
  - About 1/3 of R6 UGBEP habitat acres are in Open Fields





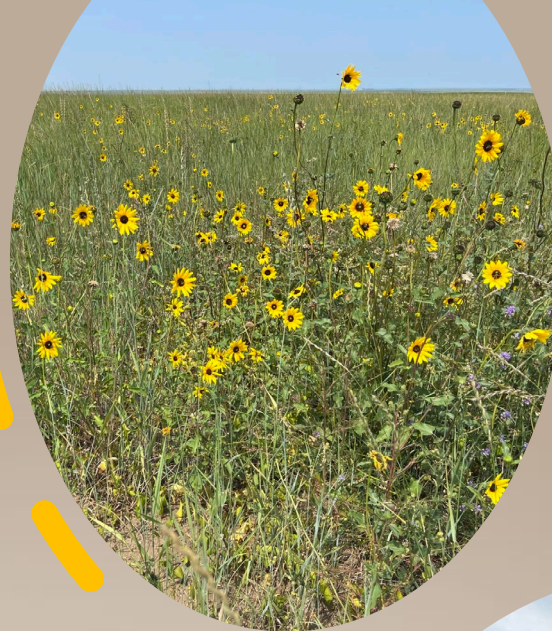
# Open Fields

- Lost about 2,000 habitat acres and 3,000 access acres compared to 2022 Open Fields
- Expirations outpaced renewals or new enrollments
- Driven by continuing low participation in CRP overall in Montana
- Only 2 OF expirations scheduled next year, 1 already expressed intent to renew
  - Lack of new Farm Bill and VPA-HIP may stall any Open Fields progress next year



# CRP Leases

- Same as Open Fields, but specifically allows BMA cooperators or public land lessees to participate
  - First year we've had the funding (PR) to offer this as an option
  - Included BMA landowners in annual Open Fields mailing
  - Funded via PR grant and UGB license dollars
- 15 projects enrolled
  - 3,598 habitat acres
  - 5,440 existing access acres impacted (mostly BMA)



# Monitoring



## Compliance

- Annual monitoring for all Open Fields, all Leases, Grazing systems, Food Plots
- Scheduled monitoring every 3 years of nesting cover & shelterbelts (attempt to check annually)

## Vegetation

- Piloted new surveys w/ intern
- Nesting cover & shelterbelt focus
- Goal was to test methods and begin data collection
- Stand quality over time & effects of disturbance



# Monitoring



## Compliance

- 168 of 190 (88%)
- No violations
- Very little haying of Open Fields or other CRP projects for MCM
- Habitat conditions noticeably better than last 2 years

## Vegetation Monitoring

- 9 nesting cover projects
  - 6 plots per project
  - 10 VOR readings per plot
  - 5 veg frame readings
  - Will analyze this winter
- 1 shelterbelt
  - Survey method needs refinement, too slow





# R6 Hunting Outlook

- Western R6 below average and recovering, eastern R6 above average
- Pheasants likely up across the region
- Sharptails stable or slight improvements
- Sage grouse down this spring but conditions were good for production
- Gray partridge seem to have increased again and are doing well in much of the region
- Hunter pressure in eastern R6 has been very high during early September. Appear on track for another record year of bird hunter-days in R6



# Questions?

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