

FWP FORESTRY PROGRAM

REPORT TO THE 69TH MONTANA LEGISLATURE

DECEMBER 2024



Island Lake Fishing Access Site Fuels Reduction Project (near Happy's Inn, MT). Photo Credit: J. Parke (2024)



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes forest management work undertaken by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) for the Calendar Years 2023 and 2024. FWP is required by law to manage forested lands under its jurisdiction; prioritizing management on Fishing Access Sites (FAS), Wildlife Management Areas (WMA), and State Parks with 50 acres or more of contiguous forest land, as mandated by § 87-1-201(10)(a)(iv), Montana Code Annotated (MCA). Furthermore, the legislature has directed FWP to manage its forested lands based on a forest management plan, as required by § 87-1-622, MCA. The legislature also created a special revenue account (§87-1-621, MCA), called the forest management account, to deposit money generated from timber sales which shall be used to implement forest management projects.

Summary of On-going/Completed Projects CY23-24

Fishing Access Sites

<u>Project Name</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>CY 23-24 Volume (MBF¹)</u>	<u>Acres</u>
River Junction FAS Forestry	Powell	40	27
Swan River FAS Fuels Reduction 2023	Lake	0	10
Island Lake FAS Fuels Reduction	Lincoln	55	26

Wildlife Management Areas

<u>Project Name</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>CY 23-24 Volume (MBF)</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Bull River WMA Blowdown Salvage	Lincoln	62	21
Wood's Ranch Beetle Kill Salvage	Lincoln	28	54
Blackfoot-Clearwater Prescribed Burn	Powell	0	315
Threemile 2 Timber Sale	Ravalli	2,142	476
Threemile WMA Prescribed Burn	Ravalli	0	493
Nevada Lake WMA Prescribed Burn	Powell	0	210
Calf Creek WMA Habitat Restoration	Ravalli	0	166
Mt Haggin Aspen & Erosion Control	Deer Lodge	0	70

¹ MBF = thousand board feet

Wildlife Management Areas

<u>Project Name</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>CY 23-24 Volume (MBF)</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Mt Haggin Habitat Project #4	Deer Lodge	0	1,045
Mt Haggin Willow Creek Project	Deer Lodge	0	165
Robb-Ledford Aspen Enhancement	Madison	0	17
Sun River WMA #2	Lewis & Clark	0	278

State Parks

<u>Project Name</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>CY 23-24 Volume (MBF)</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Placid Lake Day-Use Area	Missoula	4	1
TOTAL		2,330 MBF	3,374

Acres Treated by Site Type

FAS - 63
WMA - 3,310
Parks - 1

Acres by Treatment Type

Logging - 605
Thinning (non-commercial) - 1,473
Prescribed fire - 1,296

Timber Volume/Value

Sawlogs - 2,330 MBF
Non-sawlogs - 6,830 tons
Stumpage Revenue¹ - \$23,767
Service Work Cost Offset² - \$32,700
Service Work Cost - \$511,464

Grant Funding

CY23-24 Grant Funds Awarded
\$1,830,295
CY23-24 Grant Funds Spent
\$372,554

¹Stumpage revenue – timber value exceeded cost of service work (e.g. logging, hauling, road work). Funds deposited in Forest Management Account (§87-1-621, MCA)

²Service Work Cost Offset – timber value offset a portion of the service work cost

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
Summary of On-going/Completed Projects CY23-24.....	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	4
OVERVIEW.....	7
SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS, 2009-2024.....	9
FOREST MANAGEMENT ACCOUNT	10
FISHING ACCESS SITES.....	10
WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS.....	10
STATE PARKS	10
PROJECTS	11
FISHING ACCESS SITES.....	11
River Junction FAS Forestry Project	11
Swan River FAS Fuels Reduction 2023	11
Island Lake FAS Forestry Project	12
WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS.....	12
Bull River WMA Blowdown Salvage.....	12
Wood’s Ranch WMA Beetle Kill Salvage.....	13
Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA Prescribed Burn	13
Threemile 2 Timber Sale	14
Threemile WMA Prescribed Burn	15
Nevada Lake WMA Prescribed Burn	15
Calf Creek WMA Habitat Restoration Project.....	16

Mt Haggin WMA Aspen and Erosion Control.....	17
Mt. Haggin WMA Habitat Project #4	17
Mt. Haggin WMA Willow Creek Conifer Expansion	18
Robb-Ledford Aspen Enhancement	18
Sun River WMA #2	18
STATE PARKS	19
Placid Lake Day-Use Area Forestry Project	19
GRANTS	20
FUTURE PROJECTS.....	21
PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION	24
FOREST MANAGEMENT PLANS/INVENTORY DATABASE	27
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH	28

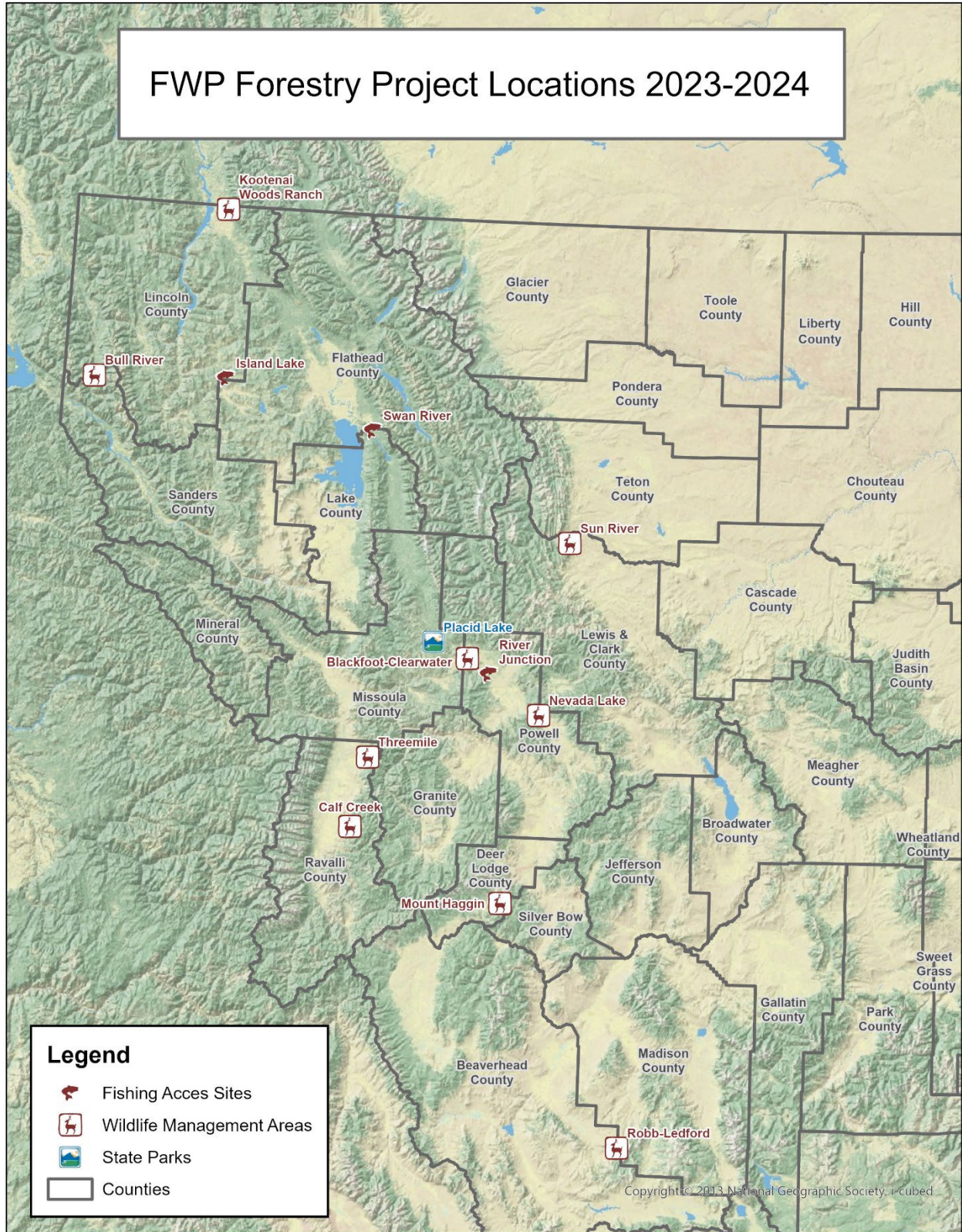


Figure 1 - FWP Forestry Project Locations 2023-2024

OVERVIEW

This report summarizes Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' (FWP) forestry program and project implementation between January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2024 and the status of Forest Management Account balances for fiscal years (FY) 2023 and 2024. The forestry program was legislatively mandated in 2009 with House Bill 42. The bill required FWP to implement programs to address fire mitigation, pine beetle infestation, and wildlife habitat enhancement with a priority placed on forested Wildlife Management Areas, Fishing Access Sites, and State Parks greater than 50 acres [§ 87-1-201(10)(a)(iv), Montana Code Annotated (MCA)]. The legislature also established the Forest Management Account to implement forestry projects using revenue generated from timber sales (§ 87-1-621, MCA).

In 2011, the Legislature added a provision with House Bill 619 requiring FWP to calculate an annual sustainable yield on its forested lands and adopt forest management plans based on that yield. The annual timber sale requirement for the timber sale program administered by FWP may not exceed the annual sustained yield [§ 87-1-622(3), MCA]. FWP contracted with Mason, Bruce & Girard, Inc., a forestry consulting company, to conduct an independent sustained yield calculation which was completed on December 31, 2013. The legislature also required the Fish and Wildlife Commission and Parks and Recreation Board to “review and redetermine the annual sustainable yield” every 5 years [§ 87-1-622(4), MCA]. The 2023 report found that 161,656 acres were commercially viable for timber production with 59,742 acres (37.0%) available for timber harvest. Of the acres available for harvest, 519 are on Fishing Access Sites (FAS), 5,026 are on State Parks (SP), and 54,197 are on Wildlife Management Areas. The report calculated that over the next 50 years, an annual sustained yield of 4.1 million board feet (MMBF) could be harvested on FWP lands.

In 2017, the 65th Legislature authorized a permanent base forester position to continue development of the forestry program, to develop and implement forest management plans and projects, and to keep forestry projects on schedule.

The State Parks and Recreation Board and Fish and Wildlife Commission are required by law to adopt forest management plans for lands under their jurisdiction [§ 87-1-622(1), MCA]. FWP completed a statewide programmatic forest management plan in 2018. The plan was adopted by the State Parks and Recreation Board in February 2018 and the Fish and Wildlife Commission in April 2018. This is a strategic plan that provides FWP with a framework for developing property-specific forest management plans and guidelines for implementing forest management projects. The plan defines a forest management approach for evaluating current conditions, developing desired future conditions, determining actions that can be implemented to achieve desired future conditions, and monitoring that will be done to track progress towards achieving desired future conditions.

Based on the forest management plan and site-specific objectives, the FWP forester works with the site manager (FAS manager, Park manager, area wildlife biologist) to design a project. The project approval process involves fulfilling Montana Environmental Policy Act (§75-1-101 *et seq.*, MCA) (MEPA)

requirements and, if the project involves sale of commercial timber, going through the Fish and Wildlife Commission or State Parks and Recreation Board approval process. Once the project is through MEPA, and the Commission or Board (if required), then a draft contract is prepared specifying project requirements and deliverables. FWP bids out these projects through its procurement office following state contracting laws (§18-4-101 *et seq.*, MCA).

FWP primarily uses two contract formats, a timber sale contract and a service contract. A timber sale contract is used when the value of commercial timber exceeds the cost of the service work performed. The “purchaser” pays FWP for the timber based on stumpage (e.g., \$/ton). Revenue generated from timber sales is deposited in FWP’s Forest Management Account as required by law (§ 87-1-621, MCA). Service contracts are used for work in which FWP pays a contractor to perform the services necessary to complete the project. These projects are typically funded using the FWP Forest Management Account, other FWP funds, and grants from various sources. Some service work contracts involve commercial timber value, which goes towards reducing the cost of the overall project. FWP also completes some work through contractors, partnerships, and interagency cooperative agreements with other state and federal agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). The FWP forester typically conducts field inspections and performs contract administration duties for the duration of the contract.



River Junction FAS Forestry Project. Photo credit: J. Parke (2023)

SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS, 2009-2024

Since the establishment of the FWP forestry program in 2009, dozens of forest management projects have been completed (see Table 1 below). These projects have treated 13,638 acres and generated 189,025 tons of forest products (approximately 6,300 log truck loads).

Table 1 - Forestry Projects Summary, 2009-2024

Year	# of Projects	Acres	Harvest Volume (Tons)
2010	2	763	8,056
2011	1	215	0
2012	2	370	10,203
2013	2	408	12,569
2014	2	812	25,961
2015	1	289	0
2016	4	630	11,852
2017	1	14	234
2018	4	949	25,414
2019	5	887	12,379
2020	3	2,425	8,065
2021	7	859	22,598
2022	10	2,011	29,718
2023	9	682	14,884
2024	11	2,324	7,092
	64 Projects	13,638 Acres	189,025 tons



Threemile WMA Prescribed Burn. Photo credit: J. Parke (2023)

FOREST MANAGEMENT ACCOUNT

The following tables summarize Forest Management Account activities within each FWP division for fiscal years (FY) 2023-2024.

FISHING ACCESS SITES

Table 2 – Fishing Access Site Forest Management Account Balance, FY 23-24

STARTING BALANCE (JULY 1, 2022)	\$78,285	
FWP SITE/TRANSACTION	EXPENSE	INCOME
River Junction FAS	\$25,597	
Swan River FAS	\$30,275	
Island Lake FAS	\$4,976	
Timber Sale Revenue		\$2,812
Interest		\$1,046
ENDING BALANCE (JUNE 30, 2024)	\$21,296	

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS

Table 3 – Wildlife Management Area Forest Management Account Balance, FY 23-24

STARTING BALANCE (JULY 1, 2022)	\$411,644	
FWP SITE/TRANSACTION	EXPENSE	INCOME
DNRC Forestry/Prescribed Fire Assistance	\$23,861	
Sun River WMA	\$10,256	
Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA	\$13,524	
Nevada Lake WMA	\$7,601	
Mount Haggin WMA	\$326	
Mount Jumbo WMA	\$10,000	
Timber Sale Revenue		\$34,648
Interest		\$39,335
Overhead (indirect costs)	\$23,368	
Base (salary, operating costs)	\$68,742	
ENDING BALANCE (JUNE 30, 2024)	\$327,948	

STATE PARKS

Table 4 – State Parks Forest Management Account Balance, FY 23-24

STARTING BALANCE (JULY 1, 2022)	\$2,057	
FWP SITE/TRANSACTION	EXPENSE	INCOME
Thompson Chain of Lakes	\$2,626	
Interest		\$291
Overhead (indirect costs)	\$346	
ENDING BALANCE (JUNE 30, 2024)	-\$624	

PROJECTS

FISHING ACCESS SITES

For calendar years 2023 through 2024, three forest management projects were completed.

River Junction FAS Forestry Project



Figure 2 – Thinned ponderosa pine stand on River Junction FAS, March 2023. Image: J. Parke

In October 2019, the Fish and Wildlife Commission approved FWP’s proposal to implement forest treatments on approximately 27 acres of the River Junction FAS near Ovando, MT. The objectives of the treatment were to mitigate hazard trees within the developed recreation site, reduce susceptibility to crown fire, increase resiliency to insects and diseases, and maintain/enhance aesthetics.

FWP awarded a contract to Bull Creek Forestry, Inc. in April 2022.

The project generated approximately 263 tons of sawlogs and 782 tons of non-sawlogs. Logs were sold to Big Sky Sawmill, Pyramid Mountain Lumber, and Willis Enterprises. The cost of the project was \$37,000. Timber sold from the project offset the cost by \$6,900 and the rest of the costs were covered out of the Fisheries Division’s Forest Management Account and grant funds.

Swan River FAS Fuels Reduction 2023

In February 2022, FWP entered into an agreement with Swan Valley Connections to perform fuels reduction treatments on the Swan River FAS. The objective of the project is primarily hazardous fuels mitigation in the wildland-urban interface.

Swan Valley Connections subcontracted CRC Land Improvement to perform mastication in the Fall of 2023 to complete the 10-acre project. The project cost \$14,600 and was paid for using the Fisheries Division’s Forest Management Account and grant funds.

Island Lake FAS Forestry Project

Island Lake FAS is located north of Happy’s Inn and was highlighted as a “Priority Area for Focused Attention” in the 2020 Montana Forest Action Plan. FWP was awarded grant funds through the Montana Forest Action Plan Implementation grant program for this project. The objective of the treatment was to mitigate hazardous fuels in the wildland-urban interface (WUI).



Figure 3 – Recently completed fuels reduction project on Island Lake FAS, February 2024. Image: J. Parke

FWP awarded a contract to Forest Management Specialists to perform the fuels reduction project. The project generated 354 tons of sawlogs and 133 tons of non-sawlogs. Logs were sold to Weyerhaeuser and Stillwater Post and Pole, which helped offset the cost of the project by \$10,800. The project cost \$31,266 and was paid for using the Fisheries Forest Management Account and grant funds.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS

For the calendar years 2023 through 2024, 12 forest management projects have been completed. Projects include both commercial timber harvest and non-commercial treatments such as hand-thinning and prescribed fire.



Figure 4 – Landing operations, February 2023. Image: J. Parke

Bull River WMA Blowdown Salvage

In January 2021, a severe wind event impacted the Bull River WMA resulting in blowdown timber across approximately 120 acres of the 1,576-acre WMA. The Fish and Wildlife Commission approved FWP’s proposal to remove the blown down trees in October 2021. The project objectives were to reduce

susceptibility to bark beetle infestations, mitigate fuel hazard created from blown down trees, promote aspen growth and regeneration, and improve elk and deer movement and access to forage within the affected stands.

In May 2022, FWP awarded a timber sale contract to Clark Fork Posts, LLC to remove the blown down timber. Clark Fork Posts subcontracted High Country Cutting to perform the logging and the project was completed in May 2023. The project generated 638 tons of sawlogs and 885 tons of non-sawlogs. Logs from the project were sold to Idaho Forest Group and Clark Fork Posts. The project generated \$3,579.85 in revenue for the Wildlife Forest Management Account.

Wood's Ranch WMA Beetle Kill Salvage

A windstorm on November 27, 2019 caused significant blowdown on approximately 86 acres of the WMA. FWP completed a blowdown salvage timber sale in 2020. Due to some wind-damaged trees remaining within and outside the WMA, a Douglas-fir bark beetle outbreak occurred resulting in additional mortality across 54 acres of the WMA in 2022-2023.

FWP determined that another salvage logging treatment was warranted to help reduce the spread of bark beetles and awarded a contract to Doble Enterprises, Inc. in 2023. The project generated 180 tons of sawlogs and 63 tons of non-sawlogs. The logs were sold to Weyerhaeuser and small sawmills in the Eureka area, which helped offset the cost by approximately \$15,000. The final project cost was \$7,000.

Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA Prescribed Burn

FWP completed approximately 2,000 acres of mechanical treatments (logging and noncommercial treatments) between 2018 and 2022. As a follow-up to these treatments, FWP sought the help of partners such as DNRC, The Nature Conservancy, Blackfoot Challenge, and the University of Montana Fire Center to develop prescribed fire plans to begin implementing prescribed burning. The primary objectives of the prescribed burns are to increase forage production for big game and reduce surface fuels that are not able to be treated mechanically (such as needle litter and woody debris).



Figure 5 - Firing operations on the Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA – Echo Unit, April 2024. Image: J. Parke

Through multiple partnerships, FWP successfully implemented two prescribed burns totaling 315 acres. The cost of the project to FWP was approximately \$40,000; which included developing the burn plan, prescribed burn prep work (e.g., fireline construction/hazard mitigation), implementation, and follow-up activities (e.g., mop-up and patrol). Some of the costs were shared by partners such as the University of Montana Fire Center and Blackfoot Challenge, which are not included in the total above. FWP used its Wildlife Forest Management Account and grants funds to pay for the work.

Threemile 2 Timber Sale



Figure 6 – Recently cut stand, August 2023. Image: J. Parke

The Fish and Wildlife Commission provided final approval of FWP’s proposal to implement the 1,492-acre Threemile 2 Timber Sale project in April 2019. The objectives of the project were to improve native grass and woody browse forage production for elk and mule deer, restore a more desirable species composition and successional stage, reduce susceptibility of treated stands to bark beetle epidemics and uncharacteristic stand-replacement fire, and improve aspen habitats.

FWP coordinated the project with DNRC and USFS-Bitterroot National Forest to treat an additional 320 acres of adjacent National Forest System Lands (NFSL) through the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) program.

In December 2019, Pyramid Mountain Lumber purchased the Threemile 2 Timber Sale. Pyramid Mountain Lumber announced their closure in spring of 2024 but continued to work towards the completion of the timber sale, completing all but 48 acres before the contract expired. The project generated 28,305 tons of sawlogs and 11,014 tons of non-sawlogs which were delivered to Pyramid Mountain Lumber, Willis Enterprises, Thompson River Lumber, and Sun Mountain Lumber. The project generated \$43,848 for the Wildlife Forest Management Account. FWP plans to complete the remaining 48 acres through a new contract in 2025.

Threemile WMA Prescribed Burn

As a follow-up to approximately 1,800 acres of mechanical treatments completed on the Threemile WMA between 2016 and 2024, FWP entered into a cooperative agreement with the Bitterroot National Forest to implement prescribed burning. The primary objectives of the prescribed burns are to increase forage production for big game and reduce surface fuels that are not able to be treated mechanically (such as needle litter and woody debris).



Figure 7 - Firing operations on the Threemile WMA – Alpha Unit, April 2024. Image: J. Parke

Through the cooperative agreement, FWP completed 494 acres of prescribed burning. The cost of the project to FWP was approximately \$18,475; which included developing the burn plan, prescribed burn prep work (e.g., fireline construction/hazard mitigation), implementation, and follow-up activities (e.g., mop-up and patrol). Some of the costs were shared by the Bitterroot National Forest, which are not included in the total above. FWP used its Wildlife Forest Management Account and grants funds to pay for the work.

Nevada Lake WMA Prescribed Burn



Figure 8 - Firing operations on Nevada Lake WMA, May 2023. Image: J. Parke

FWP completed approximately 444 acres of mechanical treatments (logging and noncommercial treatments) on the Nevada Lake WMA in 2019. As a follow-up to these treatments, FWP sought the help of partners such as DNRC, The Nature Conservancy, Blackfoot Challenge, and the University of Montana Fire Center to develop prescribed fire plans and implement prescribed burning. The primary objectives of the prescribed burns are to increase forage production for big game and

reduce surface fuels that are not able to be treated mechanically (such as needle litter and woody debris).

Through multiple partnerships, FWP had successfully completed approximately 180 acres of prescribed burns between 2021 and 2023. The approximate cost of the work (such as burn plan development, prep work, implementation, and follow-up activities) completed prior to FY24 was \$54,000, which was paid for using the Wildlife Forest Management Account, grant funds, and partner contributions. In October 2024, implementation of the final 61-acre prescribed burn unit resulted in an escaped fire, which grew to approximately 190 acres and burned 60 acres of neighboring private land. A Type 3 Incident Management Team was ordered to suppress the escaped fire, which was named the Nevada Lake Fire. Though suppression costs have not been finalized, the estimated cost of the escaped fire is approximately \$1 million and FWP is seeking supplemental budget authority through House Bill 3 to pay for suppression costs.

Calf Creek WMA Habitat Restoration Project



Figure 9 – Slash piles created from conifer removal in grass/shrubland, September 2024. Image: K. Siler (Pheasant’s Forever)

In August 2021, the Fish and Wildlife Commission approved FWP’s proposal to treat 1,116 acres of the Calf Creek WMA near Hamilton. The objectives of the project are to improve elk and deer winter forage, restore grasslands through conifer removal, promote stand conditions that would allow fire to burn at a low severity appropriate for the habitat type, and promote aspen growth and regeneration. The project will be completed over multiple phases due to the high cost of treatments and limited grant funding availability.

In March 2024, FWP entered into a contract with Pheasant’s Forever, Inc. (PF) to implement a portion of the project. PF subcontracted approximately 166 acres of conifer encroachment removal and understory thinning, which was completed in September 2024 at a cost of \$116,170. FWP used funding from the non-game wildlife program and grant funds to pay for the project. FWP also awarded a 307-acre logging contract in 2024 which will commence in 2025.

Mt Haggin WMA Aspen and Erosion Control



Figure 10 – Thinning slash in gullies to reduce soil erosion, August 2023. Image: J. Parke

FWP, in partnership with the Big Hole Watershed Committee (Divide) and the Montana Department of Justice, Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP), implemented an aspen enhancement and erosion control project on the Mt Haggin Injured Area, which is part of the Upper Clark Fork Superfund site. The project removed conifers from aspen stands and the cut material was placed in eroded gullies to reduce sediment transport.

FWP contracted with Worman Forest Management, LLC to perform the hand-cutting and erosion control work which treated approximately 70 acres of aspen stands and 27,000 linear-feet of eroded gullies. The project will cost \$41,067 which was paid for with NRDP funds through an MOU between FWP and Montana Department of Justice.

Mt. Haggin WMA Habitat Project #4

The Mt. Haggin WMA Habitat Project #4 was approved by the Fish and Wildlife Commission in April 2018. The objectives of the project were to prevent loss of sagebrush, grassland, aspen, and riparian habitat by removing competing conifers and increase year-round forage and browse available to elk, mule deer, moose, pronghorn, and ruffed grouse by removing conifers that compete with forb, grass, and deciduous shrub and tree species. This project was completed over five phases, ultimately treating 2,230 acres.



Figure 11 – Slash piles created from conifer removal, July 2023. Image: J. Parke

The 434-acre phase 4 of this project was completed in the summer of 2023 and the 611-acre phase 5 was completed in the summer of 2024. The total cost for these two phases was \$196,230, which was paid for with a combination of the Wildlife Forest Management Account, Habitat Montana with matching Pittman-Robertson funds, non-game wildlife funds, and grants.

Mt. Haggin WMA Willow Creek Conifer Expansion

FWP purchased the 829-acre Willow Creek Addition to the Mt. Haggin WMA in 2022. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) supported this land acquisition and donated funds to improve habitat on the newly acquired property. FWP identified 27 acres of aspen stands and 165 acres of bitterbrush stands in need of conifer removal to increase their value to wintering big game. A checklist environmental assessment was completed in July 2024 and a portion of the project was implemented in August 2024.

FWP contracted Worman Forest Management to complete 165 acres of conifer removal for bitterbrush enhancement. The project cost \$10,000 and was paid for with grant funds from RMEF and Skyline Sportsman's Association.

Robb-Ledford Aspen Enhancement

The Fish and Wildlife Commission approved the Robb-Ledford Aspen Enhancement Project in 2019. The objectives of the project were to promote aspen growth and regeneration by removing competing conifers. The project was originally designed to use logging to remove the conifers however due to economic viability, the logging portion of the project was scrapped and a pared down project using hand removal was determined to be the best option.

FWP completed the 17-acre project starting in August 2022 and wrapping up in August 2024. FWP staff and volunteers provided the labor to complete the project. FWP plans to implement a prescribed burn to dispose of the slash created from the project and to stimulate aspen regeneration.

Sun River WMA #2

FWP entered into a second cooperative agreement with the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest to implement a conifer encroachment removal and prescribed burning in 2022. This cooperative agreement was primarily focused on prescribed burning to enhance big game winter range and dispose of slash



Figure 12 – Firing operations, January 2024. Image: B. Lonner

generated from hand-cutting that occurred between 2017 to 2021.

Through the cooperative agreement, 278 acres of prescribed burning was completed in the winter of 2023 and 2024. The project cost was \$12,500 and was paid for with the Wildlife Forest Management Account.

STATE PARKS

For calendar years 2023 through 2024, one forest management projects was completed.

Placid Lake Day-Use Area Forestry Project

FWP completed a one-acre treatment at the Placid Lake Day-Use Area. The primary objective of the project was to reduce the risk of bark beetle infestation. FWP contracted JG Enterprises to complete the project in December 2023. The project generated 25 tons of sawlogs and 20 tons of non-sawlogs. The project cost was \$7,000 and was paid for with Parks Maintenance funds.

GRANTS

Several projects did not produce merchantable byproducts and/or the cost of the treatment exceeded the value of the merchantable timber removed. The projects listed below received grant funding to help pay for the cost of the treatment.

Table 5 – Active grants awarded to FWP

GRANT	PROJECT	AMOUNT
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation	Mt Haggin #4/Phase 5	\$35,000
	Nevada Lake WMA Prescribed Fire	\$10,000
	Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA Prescribed Fire	\$35,000
	Calf Creek WMA Conifer Removal	\$35,000
	Threemile WMA Prescribed Fire	\$35,000
	West Kootenai WMA Tree Planting	\$35,000
Montana Natural Resource Damage Program	Mt. Haggin Aspen and Erosion Control	\$96,000
	Mt. Haggin WMA Forest Inventory	\$35,800
	Garrity Mountain WMA Forest Inventory	\$14,300
Skyline Sportsman’s Association	Mt Haggin Willow Creek Conifer Expansion	\$5,000
Pittman-Robertson	Mt Haggin #4/Phase 5	\$82,150
	Mount Jumbo WMA Timber Harvesting	\$37,904
	Calf Creek WMA Habitat Restoration	\$19,500
Montana Forest Action Plan	Island Lake FAS Fuels Reduction	\$26,250
	Lone Pine State Park	\$65,000
Joint Chiefs’ Landscape Restoration Partnership	Ray Kuhns WMA Forest Habitat Improvement and Fuels Reduction	\$143,438
USDA-USFS Community Wildfire Defense Grant	Multiple sites	\$1,025,000
USDA-USFS Forest Health Western Bark Beetle Grant	Multiple sites	\$548,991
TOTAL ACTIVE GRANT FUNDS AWARDED TO FWP		\$2,284,333

FUTURE PROJECTS

The following table shows project areas that have been identified by FWP as priorities for forestry treatments. The project areas were identified through the 2013 Sustained Yield Calculation process, 2018 and 2023 Sustained Yield Review and Update, statewide planning processes, and site-specific priorities identified by FWP site managers. FWP completed a statewide forest management plan in 2018 which provides a framework for identifying, prioritizing, and implementing forest management projects. Additional priority areas may be identified in the event of unforeseen forest disturbances (e.g., blowdown, wildfire, insect infestation), opportunity, or through the annual call for project proposals. The acreages and volumes listed are estimates and subject to change depending on issues identified during project development and input received during public participation.

Table 6 - Forestry Project List, 2025-2030

Project Area	Region	Est. Acres	Est. Sawlog Volume (MBF)	Implementation Date	Description
Swan River FAS Fuels Reduction 2024	1	10	0	2024 - 2025	Fuels mitigation
Mount Jumbo WMA Timber Harvesting	2	27	36	2025 - 2026	Elk and deer winter range enhancement, fuels mitigation, bark beetle risk reduction
Ray Kuhns WMA	1	358	1,200	2025 - 2026	White-tailed deer winter range, fuels mitigation, bark beetle risk reduction
Rosebud Battlefield State Park Prescribed Fire	7	300	0	2025 - 2026	Fuels mitigation, grassland restoration
Robb Ledford Prescribed Fire	3	17	0	2025 - 2026	Big game winter range enhancement, aspen enhancement, fuels mitigation
Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA Prescribed Fire	2	1,200	0	2025 - 2027	Big game winter range enhancement, fuels mitigation
Calf Creek WMA	2	1,132	900	2025 - 2027	Elk and mule deer winter range enhancement

Project Area	Region	Est. Acres	Est. Sawlog Volume (MBF)	Implementation Date	Description
West Kootenai WMA Tree Planting	1	210	0	2025 - 2027	Reforestation from 2017 Caribou Fire
Lone Pine State Park	1	127	50-150	2025 - 2027	Douglas-fir dwarf mistletoe sanitation, tree planting
Threemile WMA Prescribed Fire	2	1,500	0	2025 - 2028	Big game winter range enhancement, fuels mitigation
Kootenai Falls WMA Fuels Reduction	1	100	250	2025 - 2028	Bark beetle risk reduction, bighorn sheep habitat improvement
North Swan WMA	1	500-1,000	500-1,500	2025 - 2028	Habitat diversity, fuels mitigation, bark beetle risk reduction
Doney Lake Forest Habitat Improvement – Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA	2	800	1,500	2025 - 2028	Elk winter range habitat enhancement, fuels mitigation, bark beetle risk reduction
Thompson Chain of Lakes Fuels Reduction	1	1,000	1,500 - 3,000	2025 - 2028	Hazard tree removal, fuels reduction, insects and diseases, aesthetics
Bull River WMA Fuels Reduction	1	250	250 - 500	2025 - 2028	Fuels mitigation, bark beetle risk reduction
Alberton Gorge Recreation Corridor	2	100-250	500-1,500	2025 - 2028	Fuels mitigation, bark beetle risk reduction
Mount Jumbo WMA Prescribed Fire	2	90	0	2026 - 2028	Big game winter range enhancement, fuels mitigation
Marshall WMA	2	400-1,000	100-2,500	2026 - 2029	Fuels mitigation, habitat diversity
Gallatin WMA	3	400	0	2026 - 2029	Taylor Fork, elk and mule deer winter/transitional range, aspen enhancement (non-commercial)

Project Area	Region	Est. Acres	Est. Sawlog Volume (MBF)	Implementation Date	Description
Flathead Lake State Park	1	300	250-750	2026 - 2030	Fuels mitigation, bark beetle risk reduction
Fireman's Point FAS	5	20-150	0	2027 - 2030	Fuels mitigation
Judith River WMA	4	200-400	0	2027 - 2030	Big game winter range enhancement, fuels mitigation
Haymaker WMA	5	200-400	0	2027 - 2030	Big game winter range enhancement, fuels mitigation
Big Snowy Mountains WMA	5	200-600	0	2027 - 2030	Big game winter range enhancement, fuels mitigation
Silver Run WMA	5	50-150	0	2027 - 2030	Big game winter range enhancement, fuels mitigation
Blackleaf WMA	4	100-500	0	2027 - 2030	Big game winter range enhancement, aspen enhancement, fuels mitigation
Sun River WMA	4	100-300	0	2027 - 2030	Big game winter range enhancement, aspen enhancement, fuels mitigation
Blue-Eyed Nellie, Lost Creek, Stucky Ridge WMA	2	200-400	0	2027 - 2030	Big game winter range enhancement, aspen enhancement, fuels mitigation
Mt Haggin WMA	3	200-400	0	2027 - 2030	Big game winter range enhancement, aspen enhancement, fuels mitigation
Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA – Boyd Ridge East	2	250-500	1,000-3,000	2027 - 2030	Big game winter range habitat
Garrity Mountain WMA	2	250-1,000	100-2,000	2027 - 2030	Big game summer/fall range
Mt Haggin WMA Commercial Thin	3	250-1,000	250-3,000	2027 - 2030	Big game summer/fall range
Spotted Dog WMA	2	100-500	0-500	2027 - 2030	Big game winter range habitat
TOTAL		10,941-16,371	8,386-22,286		

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

Montana DNRC

Cooperative Agreement Between Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

In October 2023, FWP and Montana DNRC entered into a cooperative agreement which allows FWP to reimburse DNRC for assistance with project planning, design, and layout; contract administration; and prescribed burning. DNRC and FWP are currently working together on several projects under this agreement including the Island Lake FAS Fuels Reduction, Ray Kuhns WMA Forest Habitat Improvement and Fuels Reduction, Robb-Ledford Aspen Enhancement, Rosebud Battlefield State Park Prescribed Fire, Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA Conifer Expansion and Native Grassland Restoration Project, Nevada Lake WMA Forest Habitat Enhancement Project, Bull River WMA Fuels Reduction, Thompson Chain of Lakes State Park Fuels Reduction, Kootenai Falls WMA Fuels Reduction, and Lone Pine State Park Grassland and Forest Improvement Project. The agreement is effective through August 31, 2026.

U.S. Forest Service (USFS)

Sun River WMA Habitat Project #2

FWP has partnered with the USFS to implement conifer removal treatments on elk winter range. FWP is compensating USFS for labor, supplies, and materials through a combination of grant funding and the Wildlife Division's Forest Management Account. The agreement is in effect through February 1, 2027.

Mount Jumbo WMA Habitat Restoration Project

FWP is working with USFS-Lolo National Forest and City of Missoula Conservation Lands Program to coordinate timber harvesting operations on Mount Jumbo WMA and adjacent Marshall Woods Timber Sale. The USFS-Lolo National Forest is also assisting FWP with slash disposal and burn plans to conduct cross boundary broadcast burning on the WMA, City of Missoula Conservation Lands, and NFSL adjacent to the WMA. FWP signed a cooperative agreement with the USFS in May 2021 for this project.

Threemile WMA Prescribed Fire

FWP is working with USFS-Bitterroot National Forest to coordinate prescribed fire implementation. The USFS-Bitterroot National Forest is preparing burn plans, implementing prescribed burning on the WMA NFSL adjacent to the WMA, and neighboring private lands. FWP signed a cooperative agreement with the USFS in March 2023 for this project.

The Nature Conservancy

Western Montana Shared Forester

FWP, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Blackfoot Challenge, the Bureau of Land Management, the USFS, and the University of Montana partnered to establish a forester position housed with The Nature Conservancy to assist with forest management in the greater Blackfoot watershed area. FWP committed funds from its Wildlife Division's Forest Management Account to support the position for work to be completed on Blackfoot-area WMAs. The shared forester has assisted in the planning and implementation of projects on the Blackfoot-Clearwater and Nevada Lake WMAs as well as working to develop a forest management plan for the Marshall WMA. FWP and TNC signed into the agreement in June 2023.

Southwest Montana Sagebrush Conservation Partnership

The Nature Conservancy helps agencies organize and implement sagebrush ecosystem restoration projects across southwest Montana. TNC has assisted FWP in implementing several hundred acres of conifer removal treatments on the Robb-Ledford WMA, Blacktail WMA, and Mt Haggin WMA.

Blackfoot Challenge

FWP and the Blackfoot Challenge entered into an agreement to allow the Blackfoot Challenge to assist FWP in prescribed fire implementation on FWP lands in the Blackfoot watershed. FWP committed funds from its Wildlife Division's Forest Management Account and the Blackfoot Challenge is providing matching funds. The Blackfoot Challenge will provide subcontractors to assist in planning and implementation prescribed fire projects on the Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA and Nevada Lake WMA. FWP and Blackfoot Challenge signed into the agreement in June 2023.

Swan Valley Connections

FWP and Swan Valley Connections entered into an agreement to allow Swan Valley Connections to provide forestry assistance, planning, and project implementation on FWP lands in the Swan watershed. FWP committed funds from its Wildlife Division's Forest Management Account and Swan Valley Connections is providing matching funds. Swan Valley Connections will provide a forester to assist in planning and implementation of fuels reductions projects on the Swan River FAS and North Swan WMA. FWP and Swan Valley Connections signed into the agreement in February 2022.

University of Montana Fire Center

FWP and the University of Montana Fire Center (Fire Center) entered into an agreement to allow the Fire Center to assist FWP in prescribed fire planning, implementation, and research on FWP lands. The Fire Center provides assistance to FWP at no cost. The Fire Center has provided prescribed fire planning and assistance with implementation on Blackfoot-Clearwater and Nevada Lake WMAs. FWP and the Fire Center signed into the agreement in February 2023.

Pheasant's Forever

FWP and Pheasant's Forever (PF) entered into an agreement to allow PF to provide forestry assistance and project implementation on FWP lands on the Calf Creek Wildlife Management Area. FWP committed funds from its Wildlife Division's Forest Management Account and PF is providing matching funds. PF will provide a forester to assist in planning and implementation of conifer encroachment and fuels reductions projects on the Calf Creek WMA. FWP and PF signed into the agreement in March 2023.

FOREST MANAGEMENT PLANS/INVENTORY DATABASE

2023 Sustained Yield Calculation Update

FWP prepared the '2023 FWP Annual Sustained Yield Calculation Update' in accordance with the statutory requirement of § 87-1-622(4), MCA which states that "The commission and board shall review and redetermine the annual sustained yield for lands under their jurisdiction at least once every 5 years." FWP's sustainable yield in the short-term (<50 years) was estimated to be 4.1 million board feet per year. FWP calculated that there are 161,656 acres of commercial forest land (timber land capable of growing commercial crops of trees, as defined by Montana Department of Revenue) under its jurisdiction and of those, 59,742 acres are potentially available for timber harvest. The Fish and Wildlife Commission approved the 2023 FWP Annual Sustained Yield Calculation Update in April 2024.

Mt Haggin WMA Forest Management Plan

FWP contracted Quality Forest Management to perform field data collection in 2023. FWP is currently drafting a forest management plan and expects the plan to be completed by 2026.

Marshall WMA Forest Management Plan

TNC performed field data collection in 2024 and will continue data collection through 2025. FWP and TNC are currently drafting a forest management plan and expect the plan to be completed by 2026.

Big Snowy Mountains WMA Management Plan

FWP collected field data on forest stands and prepared a forest management plan in 2023 that will be incorporated into the WMA management plan.

North Swan WMA Forest Management Plan

Swan Valley Connections performed field data collection in 2024 and will continue data collection through 2025. FWP and Swan Valley Connections are currently drafting a forest management plan and expect the plan to be completed by 2026.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH

In addition to implementing the legislative requirements of the forestry program, FWP's forester provided technical forestry assistance on FWP land interests, participated in educational outreach, and served as the spokesperson for external communication regarding FWP's forestry program.

Technical Assistance

Grady Ranch Conservation Easement

FWP's forester provided assistance to the Helena area wildlife biologist and conservation easement manager to review a proposal by Sun Mountain Lumber to treat approximately 1,200 acres on the Grady Ranch. FWP holds a conservation easement on the ranch which specifies timber harvesting prescriptions and cover retention requirements for big game security and thermal cover. Sun Mountain Lumber's proposal was approved in December 2023 and the project was implemented in 2023-2024.

Communication and Outreach

Montana Natural Resources Youth Camp

The Montana Natural Resources Youth Camp (MNRYC) introduces youth to a variety of natural resources conservation and management disciplines including geology, soils, water, wildlife, range, and forestry. FWP has been involved in MNRYC since its inception. FWP's forester has served on the Board of Directors since 2016 and instructs the forestry course.

Montana Forest Products Round Table

The FWP forester provided a presentation of FWP's forestry program and projects to the Montana Forest Products Roundtable in November 2023

Society of American Foresters

FWP's forester has been a member of the Society of American Foresters (SAF), a professional forestry association, since 2002. FWP's forester serves as the Communications Chair, participates in the Montana SAF Executive Committee and Forest Policy Committee, as was recognized as a SAF Fellow in 2024.

Montana Logging Association/Montana Wood Products Association

Timber harvest and timber sales remain a key tool in FWP's forest management toolbox and revenue generated from timber sales help ensure the fiscal sustainability of FWP's forestry program. FWP's forester continues to maintain communication with accredited logging professionals and forest products manufacturers by providing updates to these organizations at their request.