

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

Communication and Education Division

OVERVIEW

FWP's Communication & Education Division, through its Helena office and seven Regional Information and Education Program Managers, is responsible for FWP's information and education efforts.

Responsibilities include:

- Managing FWP's website, social media platforms, and targeted email delivery systems.
- Producing and distributing electronic, print, audio, and visual media materials.
- Promoting department products, programs, and customer opportunities through targeted marketing campaigns, particularly within the Parks Division.
- Coordinating hunter, bowhunter, boat education and safety, and the Becoming an Outdoor Woman programs.
- Coordinating and delivering outdoor recreation and conservation education programs to include archery, angling, aquatic species, and other programs in schools and with organizations around the state.
- Coordinating activities at the Montana WILD Education Center, including hosting external groups who use the meeting facilities, hosting education programs and tours for students from around the state, and providing high-quality conservation education displays.
- Operating FWP's wild animal rehabilitation center.
- Producing hunting, fishing, and trapping regulations.
- Producing the Montana Outdoors magazine.
- Administering a public shooting range grants program.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Communication

- Managed FWP communication associated with several high-profile issues including the Governor's Grizzly Bear Advisory Council; licensing system improvements; hunting regulation changes; increased use of our sites around the state in 2020, including fishing access sites, state parks, and other visitor centers; chronic wasting disease (CWD) management and surveillance; landowner relations and hunter access; and aquatic invasive species (AIS) management.
- Continued marketing and outreach efforts in-state and out-of-state to raise awareness of the AIS issues facing Montana and how watercraft owners and the general public could help.
- Promoted state parks through targeted marketing efforts, promotional partnerships, influencer campaigns on social media, and paid advertising in other venues.
- Worked with wildlife staff to communicate changes to CWD surveillance and management, including the discovery of CWD in the Libby area, as well as a focus in 2020 on proper carcass disposal. In a situation that was rapidly evolving, this communication was critical.
- Produced hundreds of news releases and participated in hundreds of radio and television interviews.
- In 2020, we worked with a contractor to redesign the FWP website to make it more dynamic, user-friendly, and mobile ready. The website launched in December 2020. FWP's website attracts more than 20 million page visits each year. Mobile use has surpassed 50 percent and continues to climb.
- Expanded our social media footprint, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Pinterest. Examples this year include a Fish Madness contest in the spring; Tuesdays with Torrey, highlighting nongame species; and Block Management Mondays, highlighting access partnerships with landowners.
- Increased customer reach using GovDelivery and improved targeted messaging. There are currently more than 300,000 subscribers choosing the news they want from more than 40 topics.

Education

- FWP provides a valuable resource to Montana youth and teachers throughout the state, particularly to rural communities who have a lack of resources to educate kids on fish, wildlife, and outdoor recreation. In 2019, FWP delivered programs to 60,264 youth through the following programs: Aquatic Education, National Archery in the Schools (NASP), Boating Safety, Montana Outdoors Science Literacy, Distance Learning, and Traveling WILD Program.
- In 2019, we provided professional development to 196 teachers on archery and fish and wildlife education, with 36 teachers becoming NASP certified to teach archery at their schools.
- In 2019, the Hunter and Bow Hunter ED programs taught 475 sessions to 9,027 students and Becoming an Outdoors Woman Program taught 21 classes statewide.
- In 2019, over 25,000 individuals visited the Montana WILD Education Center. A little over 100 Montana schools visited the center, with 3,000 students being taught outdoor recreation and fish and wildlife programs. An additional 2,900 youth and adults participated in outdoor recreation and fish and wildlife public programs.
- In 2020, as COVID changed operations and limited visitation at Montana WILD, staff shifted to more online options. This included providing aquatic education videos via social media platforms, as well as developing new educational video content to engage the public. These videos included informational segments on raptors, wildlife biology, and outdoor recreation. The videos were used by the general public, but also by teachers in classrooms across the state who were looking for online resources for their remote learning environments.
- The Montana WILD Wildlife Rehabilitation Center rehabilitates an average of 150-200 orphaned and injured wildlife annually and makes over 25,000 public contacts with their raptor education birds.
- We provided a little over \$28,000 in grants to schools through the Montana WILD Transportation & Lodging Grant and the National Archery in the Schools Grant, enabling rural schools to visit Montana WILD and implement archery programs within their schools.
- Throughout our education programs we managed 1,028 volunteers in 2019 who contributed 50,100 hours, which equates to 24 FTE and a savings of \$1,002,000/year (based on volunteer salary of \$20/hour).

CHALLENGES

- As people continue to diversify in how they consume information, we are challenged to stay current and active on various platforms: online, social media, mobile, text messages, etc.
- In 2020, reports from field staff noted an increase in unethical behavior, likely due to the increase in people participating in outdoor recreation. Our challenge will be to communicate the importance of ethical behavior within a new crop of outdoor enthusiasts.
- Implementing internal programs and building external partnerships aimed at recruiting, retaining, and reactivating hunters and anglers remains a challenge as FWP works to formalize internal plans and external partnerships.
- FWP's new focus on developing comprehensive marketing strategies aimed at increasing license sales, ethical behavior, better landowner relations, passion in and for the outdoors, and public support for FWP will be challenging at the outset as we look to develop more capacity toward helping develop this plan.
- Updating and modernizing our Wildlife Rehabilitation Center to enhance educational opportunities and animal care and treatment will remain a challenge as we work to engage a growing number of external partners to provide funding for the effort.
- Meeting an ever-increasing demand for education programs across the state, including our aquatic education, hunter and bow hunter education and other fish and wildlife programs, continues to challenge our regional and centralized staff who are unable to meet all the demand for programs with the current capacity.