

## MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS Wildlife Division

### DIVISION OVERVIEW

The Wildlife Division is responsible for the conservation and management of more than 600 Montana birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians and their habitat legislatively categorized as big game, nongame wildlife, migratory game birds, upland game, furbearers, and threatened and endangered species.

Responsibilities within the Wildlife Division fall into four major themes:

- Species Management (game and nongame)
- Habitat Conservation
- Access
- Wildlife Conflict Management

Activities related to the Wildlife Division include:

- coordination and planning for a number of species management programs;
- monitoring the status and distribution of wildlife and habitats;
- managing some populations through season setting and regulated hunting;
- conserving and enhancing wildlife habitat and managing those habitats;
- providing opportunity for public enjoyment of wildlife through hunting, trapping, and viewing;
- providing hunting access on over eight million acres;
- addressing wildlife conflicts including game damage and public safety; and
- involvement in numerous public involvement processes, including Commission, advisory groups, CACs, public meetings, meeting with different constituent groups, and thousands of one on one contacts with interested citizens.

The Wildlife Division in Helena develops priorities in conjunction with FWP's seven administrative regions where the programs are carried out at the field level.

### DIVISION ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Wildlife Legacy: We have continued to maintain abundant populations of game animals including deer, elk, antelope, ducks, geese, swans, game birds and furbearers. We have recovered and maintained a full suite of carnivores including grizzly bears, black bears, wolves, mountain lions, wolverines, fisher, lynx, and bobcats; and we continue to maintain a diverse suite of nongame wildlife including small mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and over 400 species of birds. This has been accomplished through scientific wildlife research and management, conservation of important habitats, and continual efforts working collaboratively with landowners, land managers, conservation groups, industry groups, and political leaders.
- Opportunity:
  - Provided over 2.4 million hunter days for big game and upland game birds, resulting in a positive economic impact to local communities of more than \$347 million.

- Provided a six-week archery season; five-week general big game season; a 101-day waterfowl season, spring and fall turkey, and bear seasons; a six-month wolf season, and a liberal upland game bird season.
- A significant portion of Montana's population (45%) participates in wildlife viewing as well and contributes a significant amount to Montana's economy.
- Provided access to over eight million acres for public hunting and other recreational activities. This includes access through the Block Management Program, Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program, Open Fields, Public Access Land Agreements (PALA), and Habitat MT.
- **Block Management:** In 2020, there were 1,293 landowners enrolled in Block Management resulting in 899 Block Management Areas (BMA) totaling 7,159,707 acres, spread throughout the state. This resulted in contract payments to landowners of \$6,199,631.
- **Elk Management:** FWP is embarking on revising its elk management plan. The initial effort involves convening of an advisory committee to provide input on issues and fundamental objectives the plan should address. Following this, the department will embark on a more focused planning effort that will seek and incorporate information from landowners, sportspersons, and interested publics.
- **Grizzly Bear Recovery:** FWP research, management, outreach, and conflict response efforts have led to recovery and expansion of grizzly bears throughout western Montana. Efforts to delist populations have been unsuccessful to date. With the continuing expansion of bears, there is a need to address grizzly bear management at a statewide approach rather than the current ecosystem by ecosystem approach. Governor Bullock convened a Grizzly Bear Advisory Committee in 2019 and tasked them to develop recommendations for fundamental guidance and direction on key issues and challenges related to the conservation and management of grizzly bears in Montana, particularly those issues on which there is significant social disagreement. Using the recommendations as a foundation, FWP has initiated a grizzly bear statewide management planning process directed towards outlining how grizzly bears will be managed in different parts of the state.
- **Forest Carnivores and ESA (Wolverine, Fisher, and Lynx):** FWP has been very involved in collecting and providing information on forest carnivores to help inform status reviews and assessments and help demonstrate that ESA listing is not warranted. We provided information on status review for fisher and status assessments for wolverine and lynx. Fisher and wolverine have been determined to be Not Warranted for ESA listing by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and lynx have been found to be warranted for delisting. FWP provided extensive information and expertise to help inform these decisions.

### **DIVISION CHALLENGES + PRIORITIES**

- Addressing growing volume and diversity of workload, and increased expectations by the public (e.g., hunters, nonhunters, industry, landowners, recreationists) with existing capacity.
- Improving relations between landowners, sportspersons, and FWP.
- The increasing number of petitions to list species and the potential to lose management authority to the federal government of resident public wildlife species.
- Addressing wildlife disease issues such as brucellosis, CWD, EHD, avian influenza, and more. This is a growing but important workload that demands additional expertise, capacity, and resources.
- Increasing litigation affecting the management abilities of FWP (e.g., lynx, wolverine, grizzly bears).
- Managing wildlife to address a diversity of interests with limited funding sources.