



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: Aug. 17, 2023

Agenda Item: Nongame Wildlife Account Workplan for FY2024

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is responsible for managing about 500 wildlife species, the majority of which are nongame wildlife. Eighty percent of residents enjoy non-hunting wildlife recreation, and in a 2001 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) survey, 44% of Montanans participated in bird watching, the highest percentage in the country. Nongame conservation and management includes, but is not limited to, developing and implementing species management plans, developing and implementing monitoring techniques for populations of nongame animals, producing credible information on the distribution and status of at risk species to prevent Endangered Species Act (ESA) listings, working to recover listed species, managing survey and inventory data, reporting on that data in professional and public settings, and collaborating with diverse partnerships to use limited resources efficiently to manage and conserve nongame species and their habitats.

The nongame wildlife account is a state special revenue fund provided for in 17-2-102, MCA. All money collected under 15-30-2387, MCA and now 4% of the marijuana taxes deposited under 16-12-111, MCA goes into this account. Money in the account must be used by the department for research, management, and education programs for nongame wildlife in Montana. The nongame program uses Montana's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) to prioritize nongame survey, management, and conservation efforts. The SWAP identifies 128 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), as well 13 aquatic and 14 terrestrial Community Types of Greatest Conservation Need. Under the provisions of 87-5-122, MCA, "the FWP Commission shall review and annually approve the nongame wildlife program's projects recommended by the department for funding from the nongame wildlife account. The Commission shall provide for public comment during the review and approval process."

The FY24 appropriation for the nongame wildlife account workplan is \$1,137,375. The nongame program will continue using the new funding from marijuana tax revenue to tackle a larger portion of SGCN and their habitats to keep species from needing federal protection and to ensure healthy habitat is available for all species. Building on success in FY23, funding will continue to increase opportunities to partner with landowners, universities, conservation organizations, and outdoor recreationists.

The nongame program will initiate a planning process in FY24 to stand up a grant program to fund habitat conservation, restoration, and enhancement projects that benefit SGCN and the habitats they depend on, similar to the Future Fisheries Program. The program would be operational in FY25, pending legislative assurance that the full 4% allocation of marijuana revenue will be available in FY26/27 and beyond.



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Proposed use of funding in the nongame account is as follows. For background on some projects see accompanying 2022 Nongame Wildlife Program Accomplishments.

\$454,000	<p>Species and habitat restoration and conservation work, e.g., disease monitoring and management, population augmentation, habitat enhancement in community types of greatest conservation need to keep the maximum number of species from declining and therefore prevent the need for listing, landowner incentive programs to keep working lands available for wildlife. Specific projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor bat populations and surveillance for a disease: white-nose syndrome. • Habitat enhancement and restoration projects with a focus on wetland – riparian areas and prairie grasslands. • Initiate 10-year review of Montana’s SWAP, a document that guides FWP’s work to manage and conserve SGCN and the habitats they depend on. The plan is required by the USFWS to be eligible for federal funding and is due in 2025.
\$403,375	<p>Inventory and monitoring work on species of greatest conservation need and species in need of inventory as determined through a formal ranking process, with a primary objective of preventing the need for ESA listing and minimizing the impact of ESA listings on private landowners, industry, and recreationists. Specific projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys for at least two species petitioned for listing under the ESA in 2022: pygmy rabbit and pinyon jays. • Annual statewide bird monitoring program in collaboration with USFS, BLM, and private landowners provides data on nearly 200 bird species, including 36 SGCN. • Year two of a three-year statewide shorebird survey in collaboration with 11 western states. • Rangewide surveys for the Rocky Mountain breeding population of Harlequin ducks in collaboration with Idaho, Wyoming, and Alberta.
\$180,000	<p>Research and data analysis that provide information needed to conserve, restore, and enhance populations and habitat for species of greatest conservation need and other nongame wildlife. Graduate research projects could meet these needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue establishing a network of motus stations to track migration and movement of birds and bats equipped with tiny radio transmitters. • Fund three graduate research projects that provide information critical to the effective management of SGCN and the habitats they depend on. • Hire a biometrician to design statistically rigorous surveys and analyze results to provide credible information to provide to the USFWS and avert ESA listings.
\$ 50,000	<p>Internship program to provide professional development opportunities for undergraduate students in wildlife biology and related degree programs while increasing capacity of nongame program biologists. Summer interns have become critical to meeting annual survey and inventory goals.</p>
\$ 50,000	<p>K-12 education and wildlife viewing programs. Work with staff at Montana WILD to design and deliver distance learning programs on nongame species. Increase opportunities for wildlife viewing and outreach projects that encourage more Montanans to appreciate Montana wildlife.</p>
\$1,137,375	<p>Total FY24 appropriation (nongame checkoff + marijuana tax)</p>



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Public Involvement Process & Results: Public comment will be solicited for a four-week period starting June 9. Public comments will be posted online and provided to commissioners at least two weeks prior to the August commission meeting.

Analysis & Alternatives: The recommended work addresses all core objectives of FWP's overall nongame management program.

Alternative A: The commission may choose to approve the Nongame Wildlife Account Workplan as proposed.

Alternative B: The commission could choose not to approve the workplan as proposed and allocate more or less funding among these categories or identify new categories.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: The department recommends the commission endorse the proposed work for funding with the nongame wildlife account that includes the marijuana tax revenue.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the proposed Nongame Wildlife Account Workplan for Fiscal Year 2024 with emphasis on finding ways to minimize impacts of Endangered Species Act listings on landowners, recreationists, and other user groups.