



#1 Rank of Montana among all states in the production of lentils and dry peas.



The state's new drought plan provides advice for landowners, businesses, and homeowners to conserve Montana's dwindling water supplies for agriculture, municipal use, fisheries, and recreation.

Could drones help keep wolves away from cattle?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is funding a study to see if drones might be an option for preventing wolves from attacking livestock. In 2022, a research team with the USDA Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Wildlife Services National Wildlife Research Center in Utah fitted drones with thermal cameras and speakers. During a study period on a ranch in Oregon, a state where wolves are federally protected, human voices from the speakers scared wolves away from cattle and significantly reduced depredation.

To hear the lead researcher Dustin Ranglack talk about the study and see footage of the drones scaring wolves from cattle, scan the QR code below or visit youtu.be/qMKFVtQ4vvU.



WATER CONSERVATION

Updated drought plan offers water-saving measures

Montana state agencies can't produce more rain and snow, but they can find ways for irrigators, municipalities, and state and county policymakers to more effectively conserve what precipitation does fall on Montana each year.

In December 2023, the state released its updated drought management plan, the first revision since the original plan was developed in 1995. The updated plan provides guidance on drought monitoring and assessment, temperature and precipitation forecasts for the next several decades, and projections on how warming temperatures will affect Montanans.

It also includes 36 recommendations for retaining more water in the Treasure State, such as protecting natural water storage features like wetlands, improving existing reservoirs and other developed storage facilities, and installing low-flow faucets and other water-

saving plumbing alterations.

The plan's goal, say officials with the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, which coordinated the plan update with FWP and six other state agencies, is to build greater drought resilience across Montana.

The plan's release came before one of the worst statewide snow seasons on record. Snowpack percentages as of May 1 ranged

from 40 percent to 75 percent of normal across Montana, according to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Montana Water Supply Outlook Report.

When this issue of *Montana Outdoors* went to press, the U.S. Drought Monitor map classified

35 percent of Montana as being in moderate to extreme drought.

To read the Montana Drought Management Plan, view current conditions, and access monitoring data and federal support programs, visit <https://drought.mt.gov/>.



WETLAND PROTECTION

Art-adorned Montana state bird stamp is back

After a 22-year absence, Montana again has a state migratory bird stamp that actually features a migratory bird. The image of a northern pintail drake, by Florida artist John Nelson Harris, was selected from among more than 70 submissions from artists across the United States. Harris has painted images for more than a dozen conservation prints and stamps, including duck stamps for California, Oklahoma, and Washington.

The citizen-based Montana Wetlands Protection Advisory Council selected the winner in January.

Montana first began holding a migratory bird stamp contest in 1986 and featured winning paintings on its annual state migratory bird stamp (license). The contest was discontinued in 2002 due to a lack of entries. Since then, the "stamp" was just an imprint of that word on hunting licenses.

FWP decided to restore the stamp contest to raise awareness of the state's Migra-

tory Bird Wetland Program, which uses duck hunting license revenue to protect and revitalize these vital wildlife ecosystems. "Intact wetlands benefit fish and wildlife, as well as landowners and communities," says Dustin Temple, FWP director.

To hunt migratory birds, hunters need a current Montana migratory bird license and a federal duck stamp, the same as in years past. Beginning in 2024, those who purchase the state license will receive by mail a free collectible stamp (actually a peel-off sticker) depicting the winning artwork, along with information about the Migratory Bird Wetland Program and information about how to make additional contributions.

Hunters aren't the only ones who can help wetlands by purchasing a migratory bird license. "Birders and other conservationists can also contribute by buying a state migratory bird stamp, the federal duck stamp, or both," Temple says.



Montana's new state duck stamp, featuring a drake northern pintail in flight, is aimed at raising awareness of wetlands protection and the value of these watery ecosystems.



Named for Meriwether Lewis, who first described the species for science, Lewis's woodpecker will likely be among the birds given more descriptive names.

New names slated for some bird species

The American Ornithological Society (AOS) recently announced it will change the names of more than 260 North and Central American birds. The decision follows recommendations from a committee of prominent birders and ornithologists that decided that naming wildlife species after any individual was problematic because the names were not descriptive and imply ownership. Renaming is set to begin in 2024, and over the next several years will eventually cover 263 species, including 45 in Montana. Among those slated for renaming are well-known Treasure State species such as Cooper's hawk, Steller's jay, Townsend's solitaire, Lewis's woodpecker, and Clark's nutcracker.

The American Ornithological Society has said it will establish a new committee that will include individuals whose expertise represents ornithology, taxonomy, the social sciences, education, arts, and communication. The organization has also committed to involving the public in the process of selecting new names.

Renaming animal species is uncommon but not unheard of. In recent years, the blue grouse has been renamed the dusky grouse due to new genetic findings, and the squawfish is now known as the northern pikeminnow.