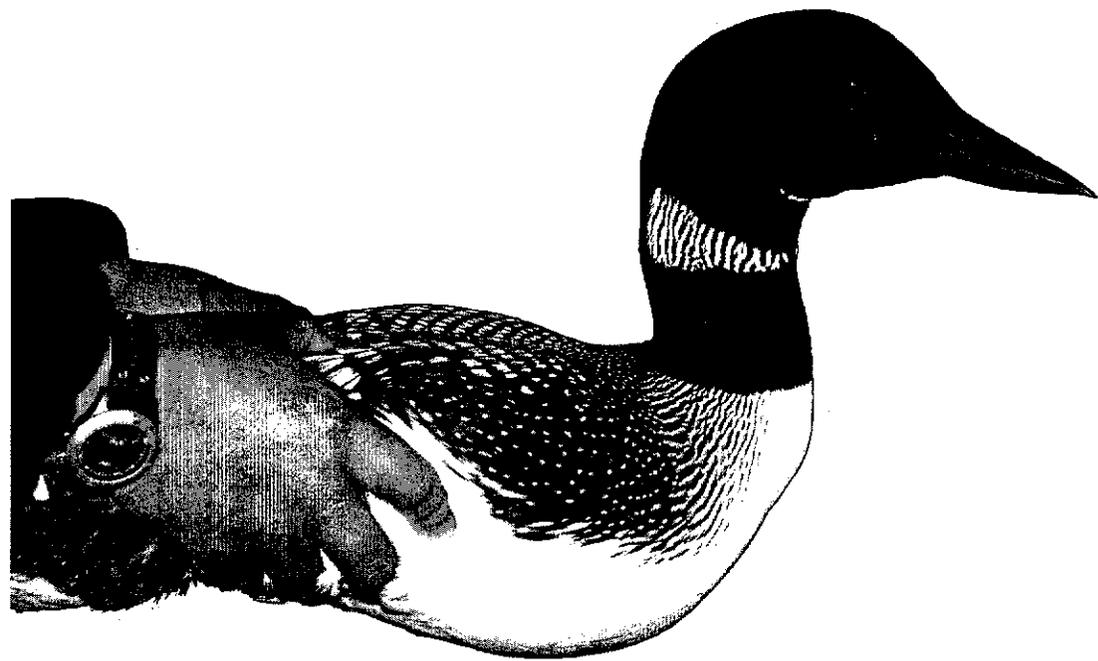


EXHIBIT 2
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HB 2

Report to the 59th Legislature



Use of Nongame Checkoff Funds in the Nongame Portion of FWP's Wildlife Program



Prepared by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
January 2005



**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

PROJECT REPORT SUMMARY - NONGAME CHECK-OFF FUNDS
Fiscal Years 2004-05

	<u>FY04</u>	<u>FY05</u>
<u>25% of "native species specialist" position in Billings</u>	\$13,000	\$13,000

This newly filled position serves the public in eastern Montana by addressing education and conservation needs of prairie wildlife species of concern. In FY 2004, the native species specialist presented talks to the public, led field trips, and responded to numerous requests for information from the public on Montana's native nongame species. She taught bird identification classes at the Becoming an Outdoor Woman workshop, worked with Eagle Scout projects, and served as a science fair judge.

The Native Species Specialist chaired the Prairie Dog Working Group, where she led conservation efforts that contributed towards this species being dropped as a candidate for ES listing by the USFWS. She worked on a Conservation Assessment for the white-tailed prairie dog, prepared the black-tailed prairie dog status report for the USFWS, assisted with the completion of the prairie dog translocation ARM rule, reviewed the annual prairie dog shooting regulations, and led efforts to develop a plan that would provide incentives to private landowners for hosting prairie dog colonies on their lands. She put together a 2-day consensus workshop, People, Prairies, and Ferrets, to assist the Black-footed Ferret Working Group in working through the controversial issues associated with this endangered species.

The native species specialist in Billings also serves as the statewide coordinator for the North American Amphibian Monitoring Program, which is a nation-wide program to survey amphibians using volunteers. She formed an Amphibian and Reptile Working Group, to share information and assist with the development of amphibian and reptile conservation plans. The native species coordinator is assisting other efforts to develop a statewide Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Plan, required under the State Wildlife Grants program. She also conducts bald eagle nesting surveys in southeastern Montana, which are critical to the on-going efforts to remove this species from ESA listing now that the species has exceeded recovery goals.

Matching Funds: These funds are matched with federal Pittman-Robertson funds at a 3:1 ratio (\$39,000 federal, \$13,000 check-off funds; yielding an effective total of \$52,000/year).

<u>Support publishing of the 6th edition of <i>Montana Bird Distribution</i> and a new/updated list of Montana bird species</u>	\$ 5,000
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The Montana Bird Distribution (MBD) database and associated publications is a cooperative effort between Montana Audubon, MFWP, and the Montana Natural Heritage Program to maintain up-to-date information on the status and distribution of Montana's bird species. The first edition of MBD was published in 1975, and the MBD database was developed in 1991. The Montana Natural Heritage Program maintains the web page where people can search this database for bird information by geographic area. In FY2004, FWP contributed \$4,000 to Montana Audubon to support the evaluation of bird records, data quality control, and data entry into the MBD database. About 39,000 new records were added to the database between the 5th Edition of MBD, published in 1996 and the 6th Edition, which was published in summer, 2003. Another 3,000 records were added to the database in FY2004, which now contains over 89,000 records.

In conjunction with the publication of the 6th Edition, MFWP non-game staff updated the Checklist of Montana Birds based on information from the Montana Bird Database and printed 14,000 copies at a cost of \$1,000 for free distribution to the public in FY2004. The Checklist was also placed on the FWP web page as a downloadable pdf file format. The bird checklist had not been updated since 1995.

Matching Funds: These funds are matched with private and federal funds; yielding an effective total project cost of \$19,000, and countless hours of volunteer efforts from birders throughout Montana.

<u>Support publishing of a field guide to reptiles and amphibians</u>	\$ 5,000
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The state's reptile and amphibian experts have donated many hours of personal time to develop Montana's first-ever field guide to these often overlooked – but important – species. The *Amphibians and Reptiles of Montana* was completed in FY2004, and printed copies became available in December 2004. FWP contributed \$1,300 towards the printing of the book, purchasing 130 copies at a discounted price to distribute to FWP fisheries and wildlife

biologists. FWP also contributed \$3,700 and partnered with ZooMontana to update and reprint 15,000 copies of the very popular poster on Frogs and Toads of Montana. Matching Funds: These funds were matched with Federal, ZooMontana, and other funds, yielding an effective total of approximately \$18,000.

Support loon conservation efforts in northwestern Montana

\$ 5,000 \$8,000

The common loon is a species of concern in Montana due to small population size and sensitivity to activity during the nesting season. This cooperative project includes conservation measures designed to improve nesting success, monitoring of population trends and education of water-based recreationists and wildlife viewers. Cooperators include the Montana Loon Society, Plum Creek Timber Company, US Forest Service, the Biodiversity Research Institute, and private landowners. The project consists of two main components: the Montana Loon Ranger Program and a research project to look at the habitat requirements and population demographics of Montana's nesting loons.

The Loon Ranger Program is a cooperative educational effort funded by multiple partners. Four seasonal loon rangers cover lakes in the Clearwater, Thompson Chain of Lakes, Kalispell, and Kootenai areas. Loon rangers educate the recreating public about the needs of nesting loons, post temporary "quiet" zones around active loon nests, and work with public land managers, lake homeowners, and volunteers to monitor loon nesting success.

A 2-year Masters level study through Montana State University was initiated to determine the habitat requirements and population characteristics for Montana's breeding common loons. This project was funded through the State Wildlife Grants program, using Nongame Tax Checkoff funds, partial waived overhead from MSU, donations from Plum Creek Timber Company, and volunteer efforts from the Montana Loon Society and Biodiversity Research Institute to provide non-federal match. Habitat data was obtained for 25 loon nests in 2003 and 38 nests in 2004. Sixty-nine loons (22 adults and 47 juveniles) were captured and color-banded in 2003 and 2004, to allow the identification of individual loons during migration and future nesting seasons. One band recovery was obtained from a dead Montana adult female loon, from Pigeon Point, California. The Biodiversity Research Institute completed methylmercury analysis of blood and feather samples collected from Montana loons from 1996-2003.

Work will continue through June 2005 under the FY2005 funding allotment. The loon research project is expected to continue through 2008, with a follow-up masters student project through the University of Montana to look at population demographics and survival of the color-banded loons.

Matching Funds: These funds are being matched with federal State Wildlife Grant funds and other partners (\$49,900 federal, \$20,000 donations/volunteer time, \$13,000 check-off funds; yielding an effective total of \$82,900 for fiscal years 2004 and 2005).

Promote placement and maintenance of nesting boxes for bluebirds and other species

\$ 3,000 \$5,000

The goal of this project is to promote conservation of bluebirds and other cavity-nesting birds by providing nest box plans, materials and building instructions to youth groups, interested landowners, and other members of the public. FWP entered into a cooperative agreement with Mountain Bluebird Trails, Inc. (MBT), a local chapter of the North American Bluebird Society. In 2004, MBT members put up over 650 bluebird nest boxes with FWP funding, and probably over 1,000 nest boxes in total. Most bluebird houses were placed on private land, with landowner permission. Also, 250 of these bluebird houses were built through a cooperative project with one of the prisons. MBT printed up 5,000 nest box plans and distributed 50 copies to each of the 55 county extension offices to be handed out to interested landowners. They also printed and distributed bluebird nest box monitoring guides to the county extension offices. They ordered additional educational videos for their members to loan out to teachers. They made 4 additional copies of their slide program, for their members to give educational programs on cavity-nesting birds. They placed educational books and videos into the school libraries of 6 small towns in Montana. Their members put on over 30 educational programs to schools and groups, and they also staffed booths at several county fairs and the Montana Stockgrowers Convention, where they handed out nest box plans and ran educational videos.

Matching Funds: These funds are matched approximately 1:1 by MBT with \$2,000 of additional supplies purchased, and their volunteer labor and mileage to give educational talks, build bluebird houses, and put them out (\$8,000 MBT, \$8,000 check-off funds for an effective total of \$16,000).

Inventory and monitor sensitive wildlife species

\$ 6,000 \$10,000

This work will focus on species of special concern, which are either known to be rare or declining – or perceived to be rare or declining due to a lack of basic biological information. In FY 2004, FWP contributed \$4,500 towards a pygmy rabbit study being conducted by University of Idaho through a cooperative agreement, to be used for collecting pygmy rabbit genetic samples in Montana adjacent to their primary study populations in Idaho. The goal is to determine whether Montana's pygmy rabbit populations are genetically distinct from other populations. They collected samples from two different Montana sites during the 2004 field season, and documented the distances that juveniles can disperse to be much greater than previous studies. They will collect additional samples, continue their work on juvenile dispersal and complete the genetics analysis will in 2005. The FY2004 contribution provided match for a BLM Challenge Cost Share grant.

In FY 2004, \$1,500 of check-off funds provided a portion of the non-federal match for a songbird and waterbird study that was initiated in northeastern Montana during summer, 2004. Although much work has been done on waterfowl in the prairie pothole region of Montana, data on the occurrence, distribution, habitat associations and population status are lacking for the vast majority of bird species that inhabit northeastern Montana – particularly waterbirds, marshbirds, shorebirds and prairie-riparian birds. Fifteen species of birds that depend on wetland and riparian habitats in northeastern Montana are listed as Species of Concern, including the black-crowned night-heron, white-faced ibis, black tern, common tern, Caspian tern, Forster's tern, Franklin's gull, yellow-billed cuckoo, yellow rail, and Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrow. The first step in evaluating the status of little-known species and addressing their conservation needs is to document their occurrence, distribution, population trends and habitat associations. These particular species groups are not detected or monitored effectively by existing Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) routes and the current status of these species groups is unknown, incomplete or limited to fragmentary, old data. Baseline data collected during the course of this project will fill an important hole in Montana's statewide bird database.

In 2004, songbird counts were completed along the Milk River, and 20 wetlands on state and federal lands in Phillips, Blaine, and Sheridan counties were surveyed for nongame waterbirds. These survey efforts will be continued and expanded during April-June 2005. Depending on funding needs, FY 2005 check-off funds may be used to contribute to survey efforts on several Species of Concern in other parts of Montana, including Harlequin ducks, long-billed curlews, and mountain plovers during spring, 2005.

Matching Funds: 3:1 match, federal funds. Matching Funds: These funds are being matched with federal State Wildlife Grant funds, BLM Challenge cost-share grants, and other funding sources at a 3:1 ratio (\$48,000 SWG, \$16,000 check-off funds, for an effective total of \$64,000).

Statewide raptor survey routes

\$2,000 \$3,000

Raptor survey routes provide a long-term database on resident raptor species. Volunteers conduct most of the raptor survey routes in Montana but these funds would cover coordination of field efforts and compilation and analysis of data collected. A private contractor was hired to do this extensive data analysis during the FY04-05 period. This analysis will be completed by June 2005.

Raptor survey routes are surveyed between May 15 and June 5 each year. For FY 2004, there were 43 of 46 Raptor Survey Routes completed. A total of 842 individual raptors, representing 13 different species, were observed by 65 observers who drove 2,263 miles to complete the survey routes. FY 2005 Raptor Routes will be completed between May 15 and June 5, 2005.

Matching Funds: These funds will be matched with at least a 1:1 match, primarily with volunteer mileage and labor, for an effective total of \$10,000.