

Montana Migratory Game Bird Habitat Program
Programmatic Direction
April 2012

Introduction – The Montana Legislature passed a statute in 1985 that required migratory game bird hunters to purchase a state license. Revenue from these license sales is available for the sole purpose of “protection, conservation, and development of wetlands in Montana” MCA, 87-2-411. Also, as a part of the original legislation, a Wetlands Protection Advisory Council was established to review habitat project proposals developed by Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) that use migratory game bird license funds. Members of the Council are appointed by the FWP Director and must represent Montana migratory game bird hunters, nonconsumptive users of wildlife, and the agricultural industry. As project proposals are developed, Council members provide recommendations to FWP through email and conference calls. This has amounted to 3-10 projects annually over recent years. More recently, Council members assisted FWP in developing the following program goal and objectives.

Goal – The goal of the Migratory Game Bird Habitat Program is to protect, conserve, and develop high quality wetland habitat to benefit wildlife, especially migratory birds, and the residents and visitors of Montana.

Objectives and Strategies –

1. Provide funding for a variety of types of high priority projects that support the program’s goal.
 - a. Continue to pursue wetland restoration, repair, and development projects, emphasizing sites that are of high value to wetland-associated migratory birds and where water availability does not appear to be a limiting factor to project implementation and success.
 - b. Continue to pursue habitat conservation and protection projects to include vegetation management, upland seedings, term leases, conservation easements, and land acquisitions.
 - c. Work with the Montana Wetland Protection Advisory Council and FWP staff to establish a prioritization methodology that will be used to guide program focus and funding decisions (Milestone June 2013).
2. Complete projects at a rate that uses incoming revenue while maintaining a fund balance sufficient to complete one or more landscape-level projects as they become available.
 - a. Maintain an average fund balance of \$150,000-\$400,000.
 - b. Work with regional staff and conservation partners to develop a more consistent stream of projects for funding (Ongoing).
 - c. Work with Wildlife Managers where appropriate to include Migratory Game Bird Habitat Program (Program) accomplishments as part of annual work items for field staff (Fiscal Year 2013).
3. Develop and maintain partnerships for funding projects to expand the Program’s conservation value.
 - a. Continue involvement with Joint Venture action committees, North American Wetland Conservation Act Grant partnerships, Montana Wetlands Legacy Partnership, the

Montana Department of Environmental Quality Wetland Program, watershed groups, nongovernmental conservation organizations, and other partnership opportunities (Ongoing).

4. Work to achieve a broad distribution of projects across Montana while maintaining high quality habitat standards.
 - a. Provide training for FWP staff that will enable biologists to identify quality projects and take appropriate steps toward project initiation and completion (Milestone May 2012).
 - b. Finalize and distribute the "Wetland Project Guidelines" document for guiding staff and others as they pursue wetland development and restoration projects through the Program. Or, as an alternative, revise the current draft into a field manual, covering all types of habitat projects funded through the Program (Milestone June 2013).
5. Conduct a field evaluation of past wetland projects and produce a summary report for public distribution (Milestone June 2013, contingent on contracted field work being completed Summer 2012).
 - a. Complete year three of the three-year evaluation.
6. Refine and maintain the program's project database for tracking, reporting, and inventorying program accomplishments (Ongoing).
 - a. Helena administrative staff will be responsible for entering completed project data with oversight of Habitat Section supervisor.
 - b. Compile and enter historical project information that currently is not part of the database system.
 - c. Migrate program database into the Wildlife Bureau database system, including accessibility for viewing and limited data entry (e.g., status updates) by field staff.
7. Support and develop the assistance of the Wetland Protection Advisory Council.
 - a. Meet twice a year with at least one meeting in person to provide updates and receive recommendations on Program advancement.
 - b. Move meeting locations around the state to review past or current projects funded through the Program.
 - c. Invite and include WPAC members to meetings and trainings during the course of the year to provide them with opportunities to learn more about wetland conservation and management beneficial to them and the Department in reviewing wetland project proposals.