

MEPA Basics
Purpose and Need Exercise
April 2020

The Urban Conservation Treaty for Migratory Birds (Urban Bird Treaty) program was created to help municipal governments conserve birds that live and nest in or overwinter or migrate through their cities. The treaties are a partnership agreement between the city and the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service to conserve migratory birds through education, habitat improvement, and bird conservation actions.

Designed to increase citizen awareness and understanding of the importance of bird conservation through partnerships between the Service and municipal governments, other agencies, and non-government organizations, the Urban Bird Treaty challenge grant -- offered through the Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks -- will help finance education and outreach projects with a focus on the migratory bird protection and conservation as well as help with the creation and restoration of habitats within the urban/suburban area.

In addition, Urban Bird Treaty Cities will work with partners to increase awareness of the value of migratory birds and their habitats, especially for their intrinsic, ecological, recreational, and economic significance.

Urban areas are critical for migrating birds. Large concentrations of birds migrate along four major flyways or routes (Atlantic, Pacific, Mississippi, and Central) on which many large urban centers have developed. Important migratory bird habitat is often found within these metropolitan areas. Habitat refers to those areas that birds require for feeding, nesting, roosting, resting, and protection from predators. With an environmentally aware citizenry dedicated to conserving and enhancing their natural resources, cities can be sanctuaries for migratory birds and other wildlife.

For the vast majority of people, birds represent their most frequent contact with wildlife. Birds are integral parts of our landscapes, providing important, sometimes irreplaceable functions. Birds pollinate plants, disperse seeds, are critical links in the food web, and play significant roles in insect pest control. Birds are considered indicators of the health of our environment. Bird populations can provide an indication of healthy or unhealthy changes in the nation's habitats and natural resources. The health of bird populations is linked to the quality of life for citizens of the United States. Healthy habitats are good for birds and other wildlife and therefore good for people.

The level of bird-related recreation is also a strong indicator of the value of birds to society. Nature-based recreation is the fastest growing segment of the tourism industry. Almost 48 million Americans watch birds. Birders spend hundreds of millions of dollars per year feeding birds, purchasing birdwatching equipment, and traveling in pursuit of birds.

The single most important reason for population declines in migratory birds is loss of habitat. For this reason, a major component of the Urban Bird Treaty is habitat creation, protection, and restoration for wild birds in the urban and suburban setting.

Scenario: The Helena City Commission plans to become an Urban Bird Treaty city to utilize a \$100,000 partnership grant from the Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Migratory Bird program. To be eligible, the grant requires participating entities to develop plans to increase bird habitat by 50% in the designated project areas and reduce hazards to birds by 75%. The city has selected the Bill Roberts Golf Course and Centennial Park as its project areas.

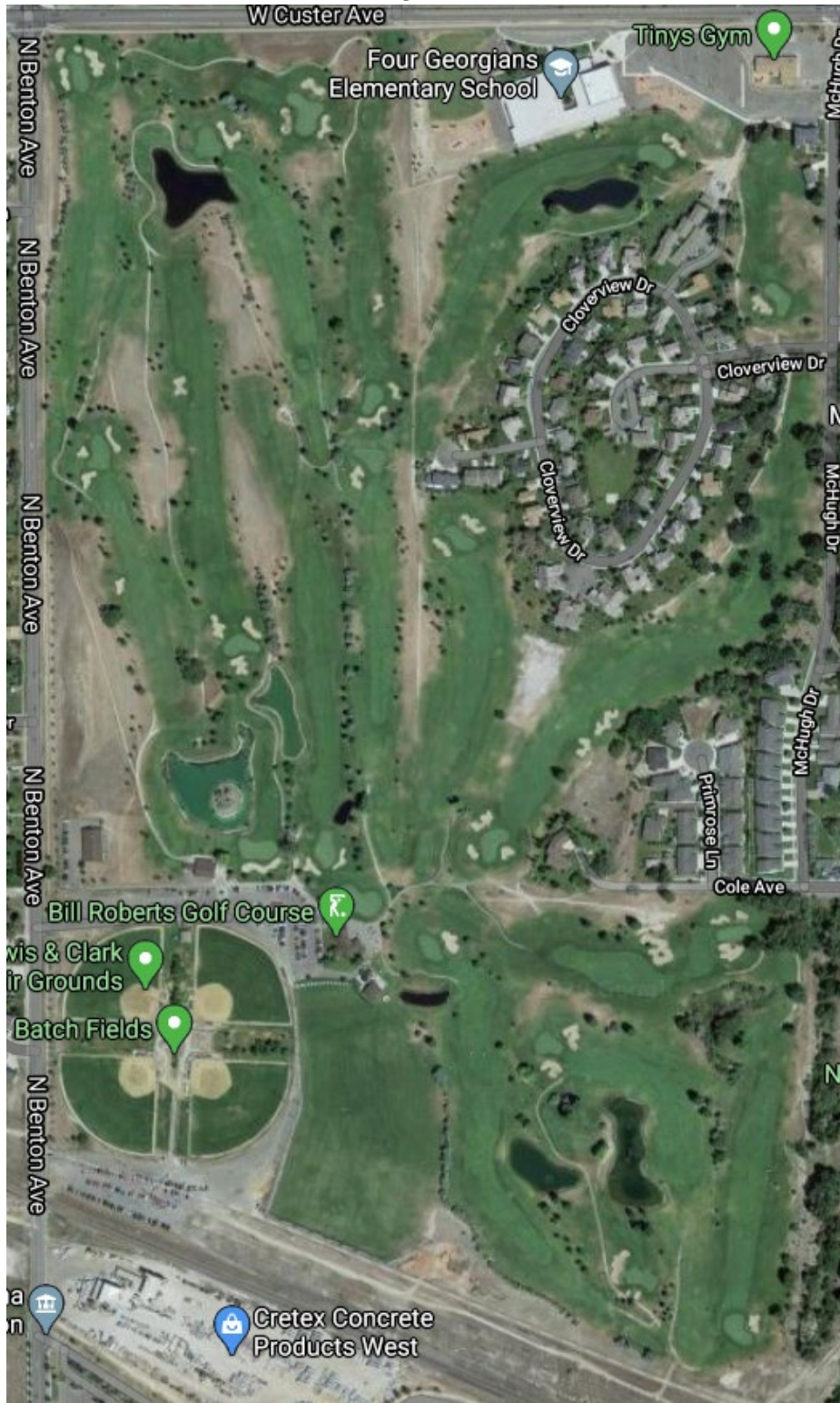
There are also several birds listed as "species of concern" that are confirmed to be present in Lewis and Clark County. The Helena City Commission wants to particularly focus its efforts on supporting habitat for those species. Focus species for habitat construction include the Clark's Grebe, Black-necked Stilt, Great Blue Heron, Forster's Tern, and Golden Eagle.

Centennial Park satellite image



Centennial Park is bounded by the rail bed on the north, Last Chance Gulch on the east, Lyndale Avenue to the south, and Carroll College and the city solid waste transfer station to the west. The park is about 60 acres and is the site of a former landfill, which lies (capped) underneath. It includes baseball fields, sand volleyball pits, a climbing wall area, dog park, and rugged terrain bike park.

Bill Roberts Golf Course satellite image



Satellite image of both Bill Roberts Golf Course and Centennial Park

