

UPLAND GAME BIRD ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

REPORT TO THE 68th MONTANA LEGISLATURE

September 2022



Photo Credit: Craig Roberts



(page intentionally blank)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES..... 2

LIST OF FIGURES..... 2

OVERVIEW 3

INTRODUCTION..... 4

PROGRAM MILESTONES..... 5

 Habitat Capital: Managing a Structurally Balanced Budget..... 5

 Habitat Capital: Leveraging UGBEP with other Funding Sources..... 6

 Volunteer Public Access – Habitat Incentive Program Grant (FY 21 – FY 23) 6

 Nongame Program (FY 22)..... 6

 Pittman–Robertson (PR) Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act (FY 23)..... 6

BIENNIAL REVENUE AND EXPENDITURES..... 7

 Annual Revenues and Expended Funds..... 7

 Bird Planting Fund..... 8

BIENNIAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS 9

 Habitat Project Accomplishments 9

 Cooperative Conservation Positions 25

 Region 1 Lake County-based Farming (FWP/USFWS/HF/PF Partnership) 25

 Region 4 Denton-based Farming (FWP/HF/PF Partnership)..... 27

 Region 5 Billings-based Farming (FWP/HF/BLM Partnership)..... 30

 Western Forests Cooperative Biologist..... 33

 Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologists..... 34

 UGBEP Pen-reared Pheasant Releases 34

 UGBEP - Wild Turkey Transplants..... 35

 Supplemental Feeding..... 35

 UGBEP Projects Access Guide 35

PROGRAM EVALUATION AND ONGOING ADAPTATION 39

 Contract/Project Monitoring..... 39

 UGBEP Citizens’ Advisory Council..... 40

 UGBEP Hunter Survey 40

APPENDIX A: 10-Year License Sales that contribute to the UGBEP revenue. 42

APPENDIX B: List of Partnerships participating in UGBEP Projects..... 43

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. UGBEP Revenue and Expenditures for FY 21 and FY 22. 8
Table 2. Non-license funds that contributed to UGBEP..... 8
Table 3. UGBEP funded pheasant releases during the biennium. 8
Table 4. Summary of habitat enhancement and maintenance activities: Denton..... 29
Table 5. Summary of Habitat Forever enhancement and maintenance activities: Billings..... 31
Table 6. Summary of pheasant release contracts awarded by UGBEP, not including releases for youth pheasant opener..... 34
Table 7. Total number of guides requested online by fiscal year. 39
Table 8. Summary of UGBEP hunter survey responses. 40

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. The UGBEP advances game bird conservation for the benefit of generations. 3
Figure 2. Map showing overview of active UGBEP projects (Fall 2022)..... 11
Figure 3. A 5-acre pollinator plot on the PF-80 area responded well to early mowing to manage weeds..... 26
Figure 4. Small grain food plot on the Anderson WPA provides excellent habitat for pheasants while prepping the site for future seeding to a permanent native grass cover..... 27
Figure 5. Mature shelterbelts, nesting/brood cover, and small grains are a part of the PF Coffee Creek property, culminating in a pheasant haven where birds thrive and hunters with dogs reap the benefits..... 28
Figure 6. Tilling between shrub rows is an effective method to keeping weeds at bay and enhancing shrub growth. 28
Figure 7. Montana Habitat Partnership sign located at BLM Pompeys Pillar. 31
Figure 8. Irrigated food and cover plot on FWP Yellowstone WMA 33
Figure 9. Cover of the 2022 UGBEP Projects Access Guide, comprising a compilation of all active projects and associated maps, available for fall upland game bird hunting..... 36
Figure 10. This example of a Map Page provides hunters with key information on project access. 38

The Goal of the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program is to efficiently and responsibly conserve and enhance upland game bird habitats and populations—providing quality public hunting opportunities for upland game birds for present and future generations.

OVERVIEW

Montana is fortunate to have a program dedicated to upland game bird habitats and hunting access opportunities. The Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program (UGBEP) advances game bird conservation, providing the means for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) and its partners to work directly with interested landowners and conservation partners to achieve abundant game bird populations. As changes in land uses intensify and hunting access becomes more difficult to attain, the value of the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program appreciates (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The UGBEP advances game bird conservation for the benefit of generations.

This biennial report chronicles program achievements, summarizes revenue and expenditures, and tabulates habitat enhancement projects and upland game bird releases conducted in FY 21 and FY 22. This report is intended for Montana legislators, the UGBEP Citizen Advisory Council, FWP staff, and interested organizations and citizens.

INTRODUCTION

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks administers the statewide Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program, which is organized into two parts:

1. Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program (Montana ARM 12.9.7)
2. Upland Game Bird Release Program (Montana ARM 12.9.6)

The primary outcomes of the UGBEP are:

- establishment or enhancement of game bird habitats that benefit gray partridge, forest grouse, ring-necked pheasants, sage-grouse, sharp-tailed grouse, and wild turkey;
- conservation of valuable game bird habitats;
- enhanced public game bird hunting opportunities;
- release of pen-reared pheasants into suitable habitats to establish or enhance populations; and
- wild turkey transplants in suitable areas generally void of turkeys.

A portion of the funds received from the sale of each upland game bird hunting license must be used by the department for the exclusive purpose to preserve and enhance upland game bird populations in Montana (87-1-246 through 87-1-249, MCA). The following license types contribute specific amounts to the Program:

- Class A-1, resident upland game bird, \$2
- Class B-1, nonresident upland game bird, \$23
- Class B-2, 3-day nonresident upland game bird, \$10
- Class AAA, combination sports, \$2; and
- Class B-10, nonresident big game combination, \$23

Overall bird license sales appear to have stabilized since the last licensing adjustments in 2016, which included base hunting prerequisites and elimination of most free licenses. There appears to be some fluctuation in numbers due to the quality of bird hunting in a particular year, but the many combination licenses that include upland bird hunting buffers the effect of individual

bird license sales. See Appendix A: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks 10-Year License Sales – Upland Game Bird.

Program implementation is focused and strategic, guided by the long-term UGBEP Strategic Plan (adopted by the Fish & Wildlife Commission in 2011). The program is delivered statewide through projects located on private or public lands and spans collaborative involvement with private landowners, government agencies, and conservation partners.

PROGRAM MILESTONES

The UGBEP continues to grow and evolve in ways that increase program enrollment interest and participation. Each year, the program continues to increase cooperator enrollments, expanding access and habitat enhancement activities successfully. In the past biennium, the following program milestones were noteworthy:

Habitat Capital: Managing a Structurally Balanced Budget

Historically, the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program carried a large sum of unspent, unobligated dollars earmarked for habitat enhancements. In recent years, increased enrollments and cooperative work contracts with conservation partners obligated most of this fund balance. During the past biennium, the program operated within a balanced budget, allocating most of the \$600,000 of available authority. In contrast, the previous biennium had \$1.5 million available for program enrollment.

Managing UGBEP contracts requires a tracking system for obligations, expenses, and balances throughout the term of a contract. Unallocated funds must also be tracked to plan for future program enrollments. Since FY 19, UGBEP habitat contracts have been assigned unique project numbers (“orgs”) to track funding obligations, expenditures, and unspent balances in a more transparent manner. This method is especially important for annual food plots and habitat management leases where the program disburses funds annually for up to 10 years, depending on the contract term.

When looking at SABHRS report of UGBEP’s habitat capital fund balance, it’s key that observers note the fund balance includes unspent, ***obligated*** dollars for contracts that may have annual payments for up to 10 years or longer.

Habitat Capital: Leveraging UGBEP with other Funding Sources

With increasing program enrollment interest, UGBEP tapped into 3 additional funding sources to help maintain enrollment rates.

VOLUNTEER PUBLIC ACCESS – HABITAT INCENTIVE PROGRAM GRANT (FY 21 – FY 23)

UGBEP was awarded a grant of \$1.4 million to expand access for game bird hunters. Enrollments focus on leasing high quality game bird habitat, specifically Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands, for periods of 3 to 15 years. All enrollments are on private lands open for walk-in game bird hunting with no further permission required from landowners.

NONGAME PROGRAM (FY 22)

UGBEP enters into agreements to lease productive upland game bird habitats (up to 160 acres) or contributes funding to regenerate aspen stands, renovate degraded rangelands, or establish native, herbaceous habitat cover. These projects focus on upland game bird habitat enhancements but also provide enhanced habitat for avian and mammalian species that are recognized in Montana as Species of Concern (SOC). UGBEP staff used the Montana Natural Heritage Program's mapper to conduct site-specific analyses to determine if UGBEP projects also benefited SOC and other nongame species. Several habitat projects provided benefits to native grassland or wetland birds, including chestnut-collared longspur, whooping crane, Sprague's pipit, sage-grouse, various bat species, and birds of prey. During FY 22, the Nongame Program contributed \$105,825 to 8 UGBEP projects that met the criteria for nongame funding.

PITTMAN–ROBERTSON (PR) FEDERAL AID IN WILDLIFE RESTORATION ACT (FY 23)

UGBEP has longstanding partnerships with Pheasants Forever, Inc., Central Montana Chapter of Pheasants Forever, National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf), and U. S. Forest Service (USFS). These partnerships collaborate to support 2 positions that advance habitat for upland game birds (Pheasants Forever partnership) and wild turkeys (NWTf and USFS partnership). The contracts supporting these positions were scheduled to expire June 30, 2022. To continue funding the enhancement activities during FY 23 through FY 26, UGBEP submitted proposals requesting PR funds matched with UGBEP funds. The proposals were recently approved, leveraging \$111,000 UGBEP match with \$249,000 PR.

In previous fiscal years, the UGBEP coordinator's personnel costs were funded 100% by UGBEP. Beginning FY 23, funding will be PR with UGBEP match (75:25).

BIENNIAL REVENUE AND EXPENDITURES

Annual Revenues and Expended Funds

Table 1 reports the annual license revenue and expenditures during the biennium. The total income was \$1,573,642, which includes funding for habitat enhancement projects, program administration, and bird planting activities. The program expended a total of \$853,449 on habitat projects during the biennium, making payments on contracts executed during the biennium and previous years' obligations. Payments are typically for habitat cost-share reimbursements, annual leases, and cooperative conservation positions.

The program expended a total of \$50,577 on bird planting during the biennium, releasing a total of 3,301 pen-raised pheasants. This included pheasants released on Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) for the 2021 youth pheasant opener to promote youth hunting opportunities and recruitment. Responding to the 2021 Legislature's annual appropriation of up to \$1 million for pheasants to be released on state lands (HB 637), more releases outside the UGBEP are planned to help recruit, retain, and reactivate hunters. FWP contracted with 2 pheasant raisers, who provided pheasants.

Administrative expenditures include all costs attributable to the overall operation and implementation of the program, including personnel and operations costs of the UGBEP coordinator, a portion of the 3 UGBEP habitat specialists' positions, and the annual Projects Access Guide. Administrative costs also included \$ 12,524 in support of 4 UGBEP Council meetings, two of which were held virtually because of COVID-19. Council expenditures included daily honorariums, mileage and lodging costs, per-diem allowances, and meeting expenses.

Table 2 provides fiscal information for Pittman-Roberson Federal Aid funds, which were used to partially fund the 3 UGBEP Habitat Specialists positions.

Between FY 20 through FY 22, UGBEP obligated \$1,088,069 Voluntary Public Access - Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) grant dollars to enroll productive game bird habitats in Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters and expand hunting opportunities for game bird hunters. The unspent, unobligated balance is \$507,736. The grant expires March 2023, but a no-cost extension will be requested.

Table 1. UGBEP Revenue and Expenditures for FY 21 and FY 22.

FY 21							
UGBEP Funding (\$)			Expenditures (\$)				
License Revenue	Interest Revenue	Total Income	Bird Planting	Habitat Enhancement	Admin	Overhead	Total Expenditures
776,317	5,173	781,490	2,526	467,531	163,740	60,766	694,563
FY 22							
UGBEP Funding (\$)			Expenditures (\$)				
License Revenue	Interest Revenue	Total Income	Bird Planting	Habitat Enhancement	Admin	Overhead	Total Expenditures
784,763	7,389	792,152	48,051 ¹	385,918	195,370	82,398	711,737

¹Bird planting expenditures funded UGBEP releases and Youth Pheasant opener.

Table 2. Non-license funds that contributed to UGBEP.

Program/Grant	FY 21			FY 22		
	Habitat Enhancement	Admin	Total Expenditures	Habitat Enhancement	Admin	Total Expenditures
Pittman-Robertson	NA	\$179,404	\$179,404	NA	\$162,884	\$162,884
VPA-HIP	\$86,847	NA	\$86,847	\$530,951	NA	\$530,951
Nongame	NA	NA	NA	\$105,825	NA	\$105,825

Table 3 summarizes pheasant releases during the biennium, including UGBEP and releases for the Youth Opener.

Table 3. UGBEP funded pheasant releases during the biennium.

Program	FY 21		FY 22		Biennium Totals
	# Pheasants	Expenditures	# Pheasants	Expenditures	
UGBEP Bird Planting	475	\$2,526	200	\$2,351	675 Pheasants \$4,877
WMA Youth Pheasant	NA	NA	2,626	\$45,700	2,626 Pheasants \$45,700
TOTAL	475	\$2,526	2,826	\$48,051	3,301 Pheasants \$50,577

Bird Planting Fund

Per statute, 15 percent of the program’s annual revenue is earmarked for the bird planting fund. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is also required to spend 25% of the earmarked funds specifically on pheasant releases (87-1-247(2)(a, b), MCA).

Pheasant releases have historically taken place in eastern regions of the state, typically in association with commercial pheasant raisers. Interest in pheasant releases continues to wane in Regions 4 and 6. Region 7 has lacked a pheasant provider since 2016 and had no releases since that time. One of Montana’s largest pheasant raisers who has a long history of providing pheasants for UGBEP releases recently retired in 2022. Overall, the number of pheasants raised and released through the program has declined sharply. With the lack of sources for pen-raised pheasants and a general lack of interest in participating in this part of the program, there is a strong likelihood that releasing pheasants through UGBEP will continue to diminish.

While interest has declined, the account balance of unexpended funds in the Bird Planting side of the program continues to grow. At the end of FY 22, the bird planting fund had a balance of \$370,177. The UGBEP Citizens’ Advisory Council has recommended the statute be modified to allow unspent bird planting funds to be used for habitat projects (See Page 40).

BIENNIAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Habitat Project Accomplishments

The UGBEP provides funding for habitat enhancements and conservation through partnerships with landowners, organizations, state, and federal government agencies (See APPENDIX B for a list of partners). During the biennium, the UGBEP enrolled 173 new habitat projects, enhancing and conserving approximately 46,519 acres of upland game bird habitats and providing 257,450 acres of free public upland game bird hunting opportunity (Table 4). Types of projects included aspen regeneration, nesting cover, shelterbelts, grazing management, food plots, retention of CRP-enrolled lands through Open Fields and CRP seed cost-shares, and short-term and long-term habitat leases.

The total estimated cost of projects initiated during the biennium, involving all contributors, was \$3,369,139 (Table 4). Of that total, the UGBEP obligated¹ \$758,088 (23%) of the total estimated costs. With the exception of lease projects², UGBEP contracts are generally reimbursements for the cost of materials. Cooperators contributed a total of \$1,438,421 (43%) of the costs, usually as in-kind contributions. The remaining funds of \$1,172,630 (34% total costs) were combined contributions from federal and non-governmental conservation partner

¹ Obligated funds are defined as the program’s financial commitment to a specific contract. Obligated funds are not the same as expenditures, which are reported in Tables 1 and 2. All UGBEP obligated costs are tracked by the program coordinator for the purpose of making program payments and tracking contract budget balances.

² Habitat Management leases are a minimum of 3 years, but enrollments are frequently up to 10 years in length. Payments are made annually, leaving an unspent but obligated balance for the remainder of the lease term.

organizations, other state programs, and VPA-HIP. Partnerships include the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA Farm Service Agency, USDA Forest Service, Pheasants Forever, and the National Wild Turkey Federation.

Table 4 provides information on individual projects. Note: Several UGBEP contracts include multiple types of projects. To prevent over-counting access acres, cells marked with an asterisk (*) indicate the access acres were already reported.

As of August 2022, the program manages a total of 473 active contracts that enhance over 333,000 acres of upland game bird habitat and providing approximately 800,000 acres of game bird hunting access. Figure 2, extracted from the 2022 UGBEP Projects Access Guide, shows the general location of each of these active UGBEP contracts. The colored symbols inform users as to public or private landownership and how access might be obtained (e.g., Block Management, landowner contact, or walk-in with no further permission).

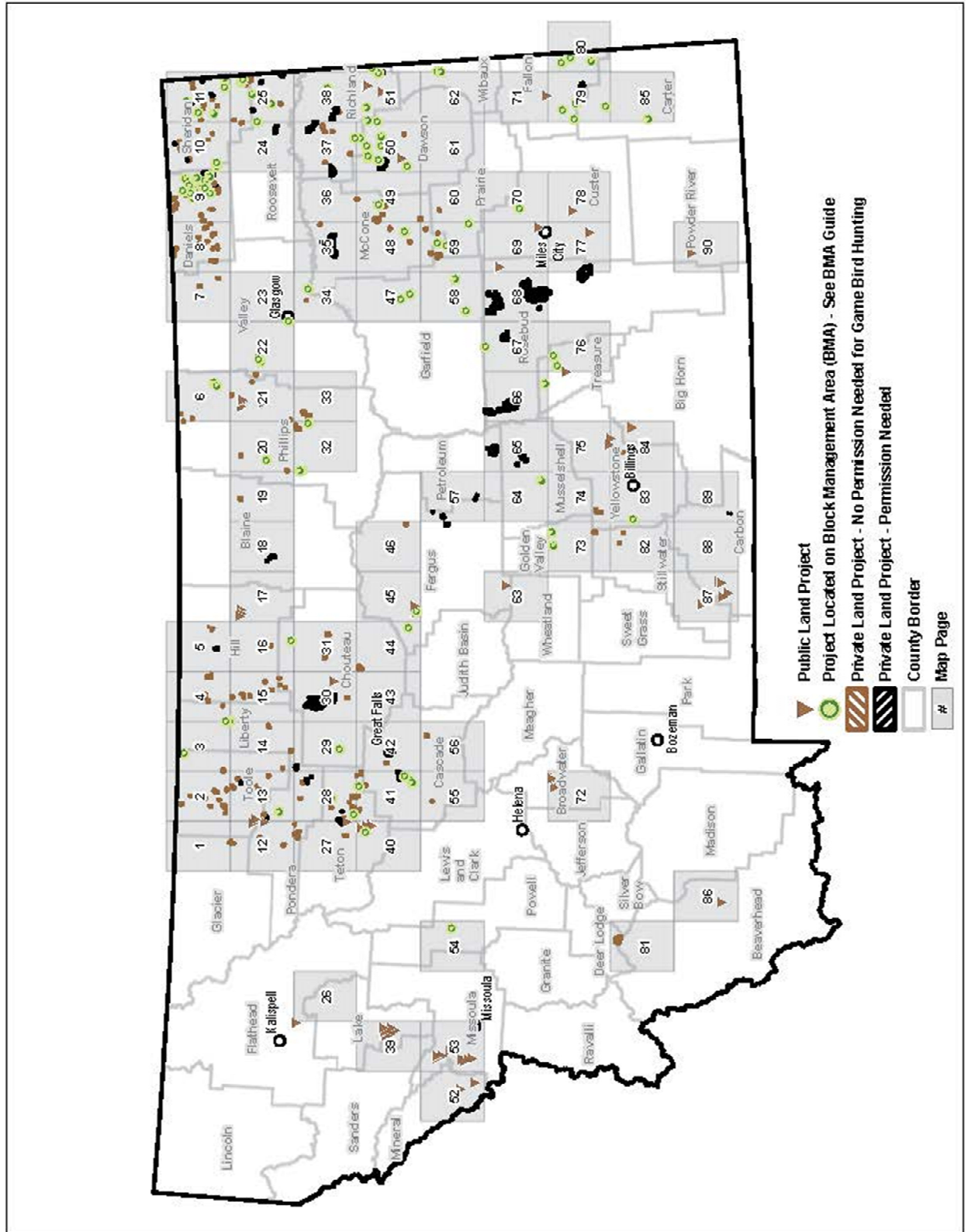


Figure 2. Map showing overview of active UGBEP projects (Fall 2022).

Table 4. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

Project Type	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Project Acres	Acres Open to Access	Obligated Costs (\$)			
						UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total
Aspen Regeneration	2	Missoula	02/01/21	6,048	6,100	\$9,000	\$422,795	\$0	\$431,795
Aspen Regeneration	2	Missoula	01/27/21	6,048	6,588	\$12,000	\$298,877	\$0	\$310,877
Aspen Regeneration	2	Missoula	01/27/21	2,558	1,000	\$9,000	\$422,975	\$0	\$431,975
Biennial Food Plot	6	Valley	04/01/21	17	629	\$2,465	\$1,371	\$0	\$3,836
Conservation Lease Agreement	6	Roosevelt	08/01/21	2,037	2,755	\$0	\$0	\$61,100	\$61,100
Cover Crop Management Lease	7	Dawson	05/01/22	100	160	\$1,500	\$0	\$656	\$2,156
Cover Crop Management Lease	7	Richland	04/01/22	160	13,964	\$7,200	\$0	\$0	\$7,200
CRP Seed Cost-Share	6	Daniels	04/01/22	640	921	\$18,117	\$0	\$0	\$18,117
CRP Seed Cost-Share	6	Daniels	05/01/22	640	921	\$18,117	\$7,765	\$25,882	\$51,764
CRP Seed Cost-Share	6	Daniels	05/01/22	268	300	\$7,587	\$3,251	\$10,838	\$21,676
CRP Seed Cost-Share	6	Hill	06/01/22	232	640	\$6,567	\$2,815	\$9,382	\$18,764
CRP Seed Cost-Share	6	Phillips	05/01/22	640	1,280	\$12,723	\$5,453	\$18,176	\$36,353
CRP Seed Cost-Share	7	Prairie	05/01/22	507	617	\$12,275	\$22,796	\$35,070	\$70,140

Table 4—continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

Project Type	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Project Acres	Acres Open to Access	Obligated Costs (\$)			Project Total
						UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	
Disking Project	4	Teton	04/01/21	19	11,333	\$285	\$95	\$0	\$380
Disking/Interseeding	7	Rosebud	05/01/22	320	292	\$9,600	\$0	\$0	\$9,600
Disking/Interseeding	7	Rosebud	05/01/22	320	9,292	\$9,600	\$20,022	\$0	\$29,622
Fence	6	Richland	04/01/22	177	*	\$4,386	\$4,386	\$0	\$8,772
Fence	7	Carter	04/01/21	162	*	\$10,560	\$10,560	\$0	\$21,120
Fence	4	Chouteau	04/01/22	160	4,194	\$11,341	\$3,780	\$0	\$15,121
Grain Food Plot	7	Custer	04/01/21	40	649	\$3,000	\$2,000	\$0	\$5,000
Grain Food Plot	7	Custer	05/01/22	30	1,700	\$6,750	\$4,500	\$0	\$11,250
Grain Food Plot	7	Custer	05/01/22	30	600	\$6,750	\$0	\$0	\$6,750
Grain Food Plot	6	Daniels	05/01/22	10	321	\$2,250	\$750	\$0	\$3,000
Grain Food Plot	7	Fallon	04/01/21	40	5,765	\$12,000	\$8,000	\$0	\$20,000
Grain Food Plot	7	Fallon	04/01/21	20	1,168	\$3,000	\$2,000	\$0	\$5,000
Grain Food Plot	7	Fallon	05/01/22	10	1,141	\$2,250	\$1,500	\$0	\$3,750

Table 4—continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

Project Type	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Project Acres	Acres Open to Access	Obligated Costs (\$)			Project Total
						UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	
Grain Food Plot	7	Fallon	05/01/22	40	4,471	\$12,000	\$8,000	\$0	\$20,000
Grain Food Plot	7	Fallon	05/01/22	40	1,273	\$9,000	\$6,000	\$0	\$15,000
Grain Food Plot	7	Prairie	05/01/22	40	2,207	\$9,000	\$6,000	\$0	\$15,000
Grain Food Plot	6	Sheridan	04/01/22	2	320	\$450	\$300	\$0	\$750
Grain Food Plot	6	Sheridan	05/01/22	10	480	\$2,250	\$1,500	\$0	\$3,750
Grain Food Plot	4	Teton	04/01/21	6	*	\$979	\$326	\$0	\$1,305
Grazing Management	6	Sheridan	04/01/21	535	721	\$21,583	\$9,961	\$1,156	\$32,700
Habitat Mgt Lease	7	Carter	04/01/21	162	1,888	\$0	\$0	\$21,917	\$21,917
Habitat Mgt Lease	4	Chouteau	04/01/22	160	4,194	\$32,942	\$0	\$0	\$32,942
Habitat Mgt Lease	4	Chouteau	04/01/22	160	4,194	\$32,942	\$0	\$0	\$32,942
Habitat Mgt Lease	6	Daniels	01/01/21	120	320	\$15,050	\$0	\$0	\$15,050
Habitat Mgt Lease	6	Daniels	01/01/21	113	480	\$14,125	\$0	\$0	\$14,125
Habitat Mgt Lease	6	Daniels	01/01/21	147	640	\$6,615	\$0	\$0	\$6,615
Habitat Mgt Lease	6	Daniels	04/01/21	53	320	\$0	\$0	\$13,250	\$13,250

Table 4—continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

Project Type	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Project Acres	Acres Open to Access	Obligated Costs (\$)			
						UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total
Habitat Mgt Lease	6	Daniels	05/01/21	85	759	\$21,929	\$0	\$0	\$21,929
Habitat Mgt Lease	7	Dawson	04/01/21	80	640	\$6,045	\$0	\$0	\$6,045
Habitat Mgt Lease	7	Dawson	05/01/21	160	316	\$0	\$0	\$21,696	\$21,696
Habitat Mgt Lease	7	Dawson	07/01/21	92	320	\$6,550	\$0	\$0	\$6,550
Habitat Mgt Lease	7	Dawson	04/01/22	57	326	\$4,713	\$0	\$0	\$4,713
Habitat Mgt Lease	7	Dawson	04/01/22	100	640	\$11,448	\$0	\$0	\$11,448
Habitat Mgt Lease	7	Dawson	04/01/22	86	160	\$0	\$0	\$6,473	\$6,473
Habitat Mgt Lease	7	Dawson	05/01/22	184	639	\$0	\$0	\$37,720	\$37,720
Habitat Mgt Lease	7	Dawson	05/01/22	98	310	\$0	\$0	\$23,950	\$23,950
Habitat Mgt Lease	7	Dawson	05/01/22	30	320	\$0	\$0	\$7,500	\$7,500
Habitat Mgt Lease	7	Dawson	05/01/22	196	318	\$0	\$0	\$47,500	\$47,500
Habitat Mgt Lease	7	Dawson	06/01/22	105	300	\$0	\$0	\$7,485	\$7,485
Habitat Mgt Lease	7	Fallon	04/01/21	70	5,765	\$7,000	\$0	\$0	\$7,000

Table 4—continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

Project Type	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Project Acres	Acres Open to Access	Obligated Costs (\$)			
						UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total
Habitat Mgt Lease	4	Liberty	07/01/21	320	4,442	\$2,035	\$0	\$16,500	\$18,535
Habitat Mgt Lease	7	McCone	05/01/21	82	640	\$0	\$0	\$9,100	\$9,100
Habitat Mgt Lease	7	McCone	05/01/21	249	1,920	\$0	\$0	\$31,350	\$31,350
Habitat Mgt Lease	7	McCone	05/01/21	70	327	\$0	\$0	\$7,350	\$7,350
Habitat Mgt Lease	7	McCone	06/01/21	188	640	*	\$0	\$21,850	\$21,850
Habitat Mgt Lease	6	McCone	06/01/22	22	318	*	\$0	\$3,955	\$3,955
Habitat Mgt Lease	6	Phillips	04/01/22	73	803	\$18,250	\$0	\$0	\$18,250
Habitat Mgt Lease	6	Phillips	06/01/22	87	400	\$0	\$0	\$21,211	\$21,211
Habitat Mgt Lease	7	Prairie	05/01/22	105	320	\$0	\$0	\$26,250	\$26,250
Habitat Mgt Lease	6	Roosevelt	04/01/21	82	705	\$9,925	\$0	\$0	\$9,925
Habitat Mgt Lease	4	Teton	04/01/22	183	640	\$6,519	\$0	\$0	\$6,519
Habitat Mgt Lease	7	Wibaux	04/01/21	22	640	\$1,800	\$0	\$0	\$1,800
Herbicide	6	Daniels	04/01/21	53	*	\$1,124	\$0	\$0	\$1,124
Herbicide	6	Daniels	04/01/22	640	*	\$25,975	\$0	\$0	\$25,975

Table 4—continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

Project Type	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Project Acres	Acres Open to Access	Obligated Costs (\$)			Project Total
						UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	
Herbicide	6	Daniels	05/01/22	640	*	\$25,975	\$11,132	\$37,107	\$74,215
Herbicide	6	Daniels	05/01/22	268	*	\$11,965	\$5,128	\$17,093	\$34,186
Herbicide	6	Phillips	05/01/22	640	*	\$14,287	\$6,123	\$20,410	\$40,819
Herbicide	7	Prairie	05/01/22	507	*	\$4,860	\$32,361	\$37,220	\$74,441
Interseeding Project	7	Carter	04/01/21	100	1,890	\$3,000	\$4,801	\$0	\$7,801
Interseeding Project	7	Fallon	04/01/21	70	*	\$2,100	\$3,361	\$0	\$5,461
Interseeding Project	7	Rosebud	04/01/21	320	9,292	\$9,600	\$15,363	\$1,000	\$25,963
Interseeding Project	7	Rosebud	05/01/22	320	*	\$9,600	\$29,622	\$0	\$39,222
Light Disking	6	Daniels	01/01/21	118	*	\$2,360	\$0	\$0	\$2,360
Light Disking	6	Daniels	01/01/21	65	*	\$1,300	\$0	\$0	\$1,300
Managed Hay Lease	6	Daniels	04/01/21	236	1,914	\$5,900	\$0	\$0	\$5,900
Managed Hay Lease	7	Dawson	04/01/22	226	*	\$11,300	\$0	\$0	\$11,300
Managed Hay Lease	7	Dawson	05/01/22	320	640	\$16,000	\$0	\$0	\$16,000
Nesting Cover	4	Chouteau	10/31/20	640	30,000	\$31,279	\$9,418	\$0	\$40,697

Table 4—continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

Project Type	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Project Acres	Acres Open to Access	Obligated Costs (\$)			
						UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total
Nesting Cover	6	Hill	04/01/21	20	2,284	\$2,235	\$0	\$0	\$2,235
Nesting Cover	6	Richland	04/01/22	177	960	\$0	\$6,145	\$18,434	\$24,578
Nesting Cover	4	Teton	04/01/21	99	*	\$26,449	\$7,744	\$0	\$34,193
Open Fields	4	Cascade	09/01/21	198	198	\$0	\$0	\$1,982	\$1,982
Open Fields	4	Chouteau	09/01/21	290	482	\$0	\$0	\$13,045	\$13,045
Open Fields	6	Daniels	07/31/20	316	320	\$15,800	\$0	\$0	\$15,800
Open Fields	6	Daniels	07/31/20	314	320	\$15,679	\$0	\$0	\$15,679
Open Fields	6	Daniels	07/31/20	179	794	\$8,955	\$0	\$0	\$8,955
Open Fields	6	Daniels	09/01/21	297	304	\$0	\$0	\$8,916	\$8,916
Open Fields	6	Daniels	09/01/21	320	394	\$0	\$0	\$14,400	\$14,400
Open Fields	6	Daniels	09/01/21	315	320	\$0	\$0	\$14,166	\$14,166
Open Fields	6	Daniels	09/01/21	78	316	\$0	\$0	\$3,516	\$3,516
Open Fields	6	Daniels	09/01/21	315	320	\$0	\$0	\$14,182	\$14,182
Open Fields	7	Dawson	07/31/20	281	321	\$14,055	\$0	\$0	\$14,055

Table 4—continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

Project Type	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Project Acres	Acres Open to Access	Obligated Costs (\$)			Project Total
						UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	
Open Fields	7	Fallon	07/31/20	320	394	\$16,000	\$0	\$0	\$16,000
Open Fields	6	Hill	07/31/20	320	640	\$11,200	\$0	\$0	\$11,200
Open Fields	6	Hill	07/31/20	320	480	\$11,200	\$0	\$0	\$11,200
Open Fields	6	Hill	07/31/20	181	444	\$6,748	\$0	\$0	\$6,748
Open Fields	6	Hill	07/31/20	316	320	\$4,736	\$0	\$0	\$4,736
Open Fields	6	Hill	07/31/20	102	160	\$1,534	\$0	\$0	\$1,534
Open Fields	6	Hill	07/31/20	270	274	\$4,050	\$0	\$0	\$4,050
Open Fields	6	Hill	07/31/20	302	320	\$6,040	\$0	\$0	\$6,040
Open Fields	6	Hill	09/01/21	311	324	\$0	\$0	\$9,339	\$9,339
Open Fields	6	Hill	09/01/21	320	459	\$0	\$0	\$3,200	\$3,200
Open Fields	6	Hill	09/01/21	317	317	\$0	\$0	\$3,168	\$3,168
Open Fields	6	Hill	06/01/22	309	309	\$16,975	\$0	\$0	\$16,975
Open Fields	4	Liberty	09/01/21	4	67	\$0	\$0	\$132	\$132
Open Fields	6	Phillips	09/01/21	242	480	\$0	\$0	\$8,478	\$8,478

Table 4—continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

Project Type	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Project Acres	Acres Open to Access	Obligated Costs (\$)			
						UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total
Open Fields	6	Phillips	09/01/21	241	320	\$0	\$0	\$7,239	\$7,239
Open Fields	6	Phillips	09/01/21	286	320	\$0	\$0	\$8,557	\$8,557
Open Fields	6	Phillips	09/01/21	69	80	\$0	\$0	\$691	\$691
Open Fields	6	Phillips	06/01/22	320	341	\$0	\$0	\$16,000	\$16,000
Open Fields	6	Phillips	06/01/22	320	341	\$16,000	\$0	\$0	\$16,000
Open Fields	6	Richland	09/01/21	88	640	\$0	\$0	\$4,837	\$4,837
Open Fields	6	Richland	09/01/21	149	160	\$0	\$0	\$1,488	\$1,488
Open Fields	6	Roosevelt	07/31/20	232	390	\$11,622	\$0	\$0	\$11,622
Open Fields	6	Roosevelt	07/31/20	192	320	\$9,606	\$0	\$0	\$9,606
Open Fields	6	Roosevelt	07/31/20	53	320	\$2,660	\$0	\$0	\$2,660
Open Fields	6	Sheridan	07/31/20	74	80	\$4,410	\$0	\$0	\$4,410
Open Fields	6	Sheridan	07/31/20	120	320	\$7,180	\$0	\$0	\$7,180
Open Fields	6	Sheridan	07/31/20	134	168	\$6,723	\$0	\$0	\$6,723

Table 4—continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

Project Type	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Project Acres	Acres Open to Access	Obligated Costs (\$)			Project Total
						UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	
Open Fields	6	Sheridan	07/31/20	320	387	\$16,000	\$0	\$0	\$16,000
Open Fields	6	Sheridan	09/01/21	159	160	\$0	\$0	\$8,735	\$8,735
Open Fields	6	Sheridan	09/01/21	182	182	\$0	\$0	\$10,028	\$10,028
Open Fields	6	Sheridan	09/01/21	214	238	\$0	\$0	\$7,504	\$7,504
Open Fields	6	Sheridan	09/01/21	214	420	\$0	\$0	\$4,814	\$4,814
Open Fields	6	Sheridan	09/01/21	78	80	\$0	\$0	\$2,735	\$2,735
Open Fields	6	Sheridan	09/01/21	208	240	\$0	\$0	\$7,286	\$7,286
Open Fields	6	Sheridan	09/01/21	206	640	\$0	\$0	\$1,030	\$1,030
Open Fields	4	Teton	09/01/21	253	235	\$0	\$0	\$10,585	\$10,585
Open Fields	4	Teton	09/01/21	320	556	\$0	\$0	\$16,000	\$16,000
Open Fields	4	Teton	09/01/21	143	143	\$0	\$0	\$7,165	\$7,165
Open Fields	4	Teton	09/01/21	320	534	\$0	\$0	\$16,000	\$16,000
Open Fields	4	Teton	09/01/21	123	160	\$0	\$0	\$5,549	\$5,549
Open Fields	4	Teton	09/01/21	197	197	\$0	\$0	\$3,943	\$3,943

Table 4—continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

Project Type	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Project Acres	Acres Open to Access	Obligated Costs (\$)			Project Total
						UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	
Open Fields	4	Toole	08/01/21	120	305	\$0	\$0	\$5,398	\$5,398
Open Fields	4	Toole	08/17/21	320	588	\$0	\$0	\$14,400	\$14,400
Open Fields	4	Toole	08/17/21	224	240	\$0	\$0	\$10,083	\$10,083
Open Fields	4	Toole	09/01/21	183	484	\$0	\$0	\$9,129	\$9,129
Open Fields	4	Toole	09/01/21	320	320	\$0	\$0	\$9,600	\$9,600
Open Fields	4	Toole	09/01/21	320	960	\$0	\$0	\$17,600	\$17,600
Open Fields	5	Yellowstone	09/01/21	287	326	\$0	\$0	\$8,603	\$8,603
Shelterbelt(s)	7	Rosebud	12/01/20	12	17,884	\$34,200	\$9,644	\$18,504	\$62,349
Shelterbelt(s)	6	Sheridan	04/01/21	1	182	\$3,306	\$358	\$601	\$4,265
Weed Mgt Payment	7	Dawson	05/01/21	160	*	\$1,696	\$0	\$0	\$1,696
Weed Mgt Payment	7	Dawson	04/01/22	86	*	\$549	\$0	\$0	\$549
Weed Mgt Payment	7	Dawson	05/01/22	184	639	\$3,121	\$0	\$0	\$3,121
Weed Mgt Payment	7	Dawson	05/01/22	98	*	\$2,078	\$0	\$0	\$2,078
Weed Mgt Payment	7	Dawson	05/01/22	30	*	\$636	\$0	\$0	\$636

Table 4—continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

Project Type	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Project Acres	Acres Open to Access	Obligated Costs (\$)			
						UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total
Weed Mgt Payment	7	Dawson	05/01/22	196	*	\$4,155	\$0	\$0	\$4,155
Weed Mgt Payment	7	Dawson	06/01/22	105	*	\$668	\$0	\$0	\$668
Weed Mgt Payment	7	McCone	05/01/21	249	*	\$2,639	\$0	\$0	\$2,639
Weed Mgt Payment	7	McCone	05/01/21	70	*	\$742	\$0	\$0	\$742
Weed Mgt Payment	7	McCone	06/01/21	188	*	\$1,993	\$0	\$0	\$1,993
Weed Mgt Payment	7	McCone	05/01/22	82	*	\$869	\$0	\$0	\$869
Weed Mgt Payment	6	McCone	06/01/22	25	*	\$312	\$0	\$0	\$312
Weed Mgt Payment	6	Phillips	04/01/22	73	*	\$1,548	\$0	\$0	\$1,548
Weed Mgt Payment	7	Prairie	05/01/22	105	*	\$2,226	\$0	\$0	\$2,226
Winter Food/Cover Plots	7	Carter	04/01/22	10	4,998	\$3,600	\$1,500	\$0	\$5,100
Winter Food/Cover Plots	7	Carter	05/01/22	10	1,890	\$4,800	\$2,000	\$0	\$6,800
Winter Food/Cover Plots	7	Custer	04/01/21	15	21,206	\$5,400	\$2,250	\$0	\$7,650
Winter Food/Cover Plots	7	Custer	04/01/21	32	22,128	\$7,200	\$1,600	\$0	\$8,800
Winter Food/Cover Plots	6	Daniels	05/01/22	10	422	\$3,750	\$1,150	\$0	\$4,900

Table 4—continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during the biennium.

Project Type	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Project Acres	Acres Open to Access	Obligated Costs (\$)			
						UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total
Winter Food/Cover Plots	7	Fallon	05/01/22	10	*	\$3,600	\$1,500	\$0	\$5,100
Winter Food/Cover Plots	6	Phillips	04/01/22	10	803	\$12,500	\$5,000	\$0	\$17,500
Winter Food/Cover Plots	7	Richland	05/01/22	40	1,555	\$2,400	\$0	\$0	\$2,400
Winter Food/Cover Plots	6	Sheridan	01/01/21	10	790	\$3,540	\$750	\$0	\$4,290
Winter Food/Cover Plots	6	Sheridan	04/01/22	10	*	\$3,750	\$1,500	\$0	\$5,250
Winter Food/Cover Plots	6	Sheridan	04/01/22	10	240	\$3,750	\$1,500	\$0	\$5,250
Winter Food/Cover Plots	6	Sheridan	05/01/22	5	215	\$625	\$192	\$0	\$817
Winter Food/Cover Plots	4	Teton	04/01/21	8	*	\$1,504	\$501	\$0	\$2,005
Winter Food/Cover Plots	7	Treasure	05/01/22	40	800	\$2,400	\$0	\$0	\$2,400
SUMMARY: 173 Habitat Projects	1 acre of habitat enhanced	5.5 acres open for access (average)	5.5	46,519	257,088	\$758,088 (23%)	\$1,438,421 (43%)	\$1,172,630 (34%)	\$3,369,139 (100%)

Cooperative Conservation Positions

The UGBEP currently contributes toward partner agreements that support cooperatively funded positions. These positions help deliver upland game bird habitat improvement and conservation. This section describes those individual agreements and the work they accomplish. Additional contributors to these positions include the USDA Natural Resources and Conservation Service, Bureau of Land Management, USDA Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, local Pheasants Forever chapters, and others.

During the past biennium, the department renewed contracts for the following positions:

- FY 21: A cooperative position administered by Pheasants Forever, Inc to conduct upland renovations on Waterfowl Production Areas in collaboration with USFWS and local Pheasant Forever chapters. (Region 1, Mission Valley)
- FY 21: A cooperative position administered by Pheasants Forever, Inc to establish and maintain pheasant habitat improvements primarily on FWP's Yellowstone WMA and BLM Pompeys Pillar. (Region 5, Billings public lands)
- FY 22: support for four Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologist positions stationed at USDA service centers for conducting UGBEP outreach and assistance with leveraging outside funding sources. (Regions 4, 5, and 6)

The following is a more detailed description of the cooperatively funded positions and their accomplishments over the past biennium.

REGION 1 LAKE COUNTY-BASED FARMING (FWP/USFWS/HF/PF PARTNERSHIP)

The partner-supported Pheasant Forever Habitat Specialist position focuses primarily on renovating upland habitats on USFWS Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs) and on FWP Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area (WMA), all in the Mission Valley. These areas are popular hunting destinations, known for their beauty and highly productive waterfowl and pheasant habitats. The WMA offers approximately 4,000 acres of hunting access and WPAs span nearly 4,000 acres.

The habitat specialist treated approximately 200 acres through controlled burns, site preparation, herbicide treatments, seeding, and mowing. Food plots, cover plots and pollinator plots establish well (Figures 3 and 4). UGBEP obligated \$26,000 towards the support of the PF Habitat Specialist position, from FY 22 through FY 23.



Figure 3. A 5-acre pollinator plot on the PF-80 area responded well to early mowing to manage weeds.



Figure 4. Small grain food plot on the Anderson WPA provides excellent habitat for pheasants while prepping the site for future seeding to a permanent native grass cover.

REGION 4 DENTON-BASED FARMING (FWP/HF/PF PARTNERSHIP)

This partnership primarily focuses on five properties: Pheasants Forever (PF) Coffee Creek (800 deeded acres)—see Figure 5; PF Wolf Creek (1,000 deeded acres); DNRC Wolf Creek (2,500 acres); DNRC Coffee Creek (640 acres); and the Beckman WMA (6,568 acres, see Figure 6), totaling over 11,500 acres of habitat and hunting opportunity. The following projects have been developed and subsequently maintained by the Central Montana Chapter of Pheasants Forever (CMCPF) and the PF Habitat Specialist.

Throughout the biennium, habitat work comprised mostly of maintenance of existing enhancement projects (Table 5). Ongoing maintenance efforts include mechanical tillage, in-row hand weeding, control of currant worms in the golden currant and tent caterpillars in the chokecherries, spraying and cultivating field bindweed infestations, and planting and maintaining food plots. UGBEP obligated \$192,000 for work accomplished between FY 19 and FY 22.



Figure 5. Mature shelterbelts, nesting/brood cover, and small grains are a part of the PF Coffee Creek property, culminating in a pheasant haven where birds thrive and hunters with dogs reap the benefits.



Figure 6. Tilling between shrub rows is an effective method to keeping weeds at bay and enhancing shrub growth.

Table 4. Summary of habitat enhancement and maintenance activities: Denton.

Project Sites	FY 21		FY 22	
	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres
Food Plots: Spring, winter, barley, or mix	7	20	11	47
Nesting Cover & Food Plot Renovation	1	30	1	30
Shelterbelt	5	16	5	16
Silver Sage Travel Corridors	9	4	9	4 (5 miles double rows)
Sub-total	22	70	26	97

	FY 21		FY 22	
	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres
DNRC Wolf Creek Projects				
Food Plots	2	3	2	2
Shelterbelt	1	4	1	4
Sub-total	3	7	3	7

	FY 21		FY 22	
	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres
PF Wolf Creek Projects				
Food Plot	4	10	4	10
Nesting Cover	4	67	4	10
Shelterbelt	2	7	2	7
Silver Sage Travel Corridors	6	4 (3 miles double rows)	6	4 (3 miles double rows)
Sub-total	16	88	16	31

	FY 21		FY 22	
	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres
PF Coffee Creek Projects				
Brood Cover	2	3	3	2
Food Plot	11	37	15	41
Nesting Cover (DNC)	4	325	5	350
Shelterbelts	5	34	5	34

Herbicide Treatment	7	5	8	6
Fence Maintenance	1	na	2	na
Sub-total	30	404	38	433

	FY 21		FY 22	
<i>DNRC Coffee Creek Project</i>	<i>Total Project Sites</i>	<i>Total Habitat Acres</i>	<i>Total Project Sites</i>	<i>Total Habitat Acres</i>
Food Plot	1	7	1	7
Nesting Cover (DNRC)	1	1	1	1
Sub-total	2	8	2	8

REGION 5 BILLINGS-BASED FARMING (FWP/HF/BLM PARTNERSHIP)

Now in its twelfth year, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Habitat Forever (HF), and FWP partnership continues to support a Billings-area PF farming position. Additional supporting partners at times have included the Yellowstone Valley Chapter of Pheasants Forever, Billings Rod & Gun Club, Montana Chapter of Safari Club International, and Conoco Phillips.

Known in the community as the Montana Habitat Partnership (Figure 7), the habitat work is intended to restore and enhance pheasant and other upland game bird habitats on public lands open to hunting, primarily along the Yellowstone River.

Habitat enhancement and maintenance efforts are focused on the BLM-administered Pompeys Pillar National Monument and FWP properties: Yellowstone Wildlife Management Area (Figure 8, page 34), Voyager’s Rest Fishing Access Site, Clarks Fork Fishing Access Site, as well as Grant Marsh Wildlife Management Area, along the Bighorn River. Habitat management is conducted on irrigated and dry land food plots, nesting cover, brood plots, wetland development, riparian vegetation restoration, shelterbelt/winter cover plantings and general equipment maintenance. Where available, flood and sprinkler irrigation are used to improve habitat enhancement results. See Table 5 for habitat accomplishments.

Between FY 20 through FY 23, UGBEP obligated \$180,000 to support this cooperative position.



Figure 7. Montana Habitat Partnership sign located at BLM Pompeys Pillar.

Table 5. Summary of Habitat Forever enhancement and maintenance activities: Billings.

Project Sites	FY 21		FY 22	
	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres
DNC Cover/ Native Cover	19	157	10	132
Shelterbelt	2	16	4	10
Grain Food Plot	4	37	5	26
Clump Planting	na	na	1	1
Brood Plot	na	na	5	4
Sub-Totals	25	210	25	173

Project Sites	FY 21		FY 22	
FWP Yellowstone WMA	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres
Irrigated Nesting Cover	3	27	9	78
Irrigated Food Plot	4	28	3	20
Dryland Nesting Cover	2	89	7	47
Roosting Cover	2	5	1	3
Brood Plot	1	5	2	12
Sub-Totals	12	154	22	160

Project Sites	FY 21		FY 22	
FWP Voyagers Rest FAS	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres
Irrigated Food Plot	1	4	1	4
Sub-Totals	1	4	1	4

Project Sites	FY 21		FY 22	
Grant Marsh WMA	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres
Irrigated Food Plot	1	25	1	25
Sub-Totals	1	25	1	25

Grand Total	FY 21		FY 22	
	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres
	39	393	49	362



Figure 8. Irrigated food and cover plot on FWP Yellowstone WMA

WESTERN FORESTS COOPERATIVE BIOLOGIST

Stationed in Missoula, the National Wild Turkey Federation Cooperative Biologist position has been in place for seven years and is funded through the USDA Forest Service and UGBEP. The partnership’s primary focus is to promote, design, and implement management activities that enhance wild turkey and forest grouse habitats and promote healthy forest ecosystems in the Bitterroot National Forest and other Montana National Forest complexes.

During FY 21 and FY 22, the biologist position worked on 17 project sites on 3 National Forests in various stages of completion, ranging from pre-planning and writing of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents to management implementation. Approximately 2,112 acres of forests received management treatments supported in part by the cooperative biologist position, particularly benefitting ruffed and dusky grouse and wild turkey.

Between FY 19 through FY 22, UGBEP obligated \$120,000 to support this cooperative position.

PHEASANTS FOREVER FARM BILL BIOLOGISTS

The UGBEP contributes toward 4 Farm Bill Biologists' positions that are stationed in USDA Service Center offices in Conrad (R4), Chinook (R6), Scobey (6), and Billings (R5). Staff provide UGBEP outreach to landowners who participate in Farm Bill programs, with the intent to increase program interest and enrollment. These positions have been especially valuable during the general CRP sign-up, where information about the various UGBEP funding opportunities are provided to farmers and ranchers.

With the Farm Bill Biologist's assistance, UGBEP projects may also be eligible to receive Farm Bill funding when eligible, further leveraging program dollars and incentivizing producers to enroll in UGBEP projects. UGBEP obligated \$58,500 to support these 4 positions between FY 22 through FY 25.

UGBEP Pen-reared Pheasant Releases

The purpose of releasing pen-reared pheasants, as identified in statute (87-1-246 through 87-1-248, MCA), is to establish or enhance pheasant populations in suitable habitats that have combinations of permanent winter cover, idle cover (e.g., CRP), and cultivated grain. Each release consists of up to 40% cocks (12.9.602(1)(b), ARM), and all releases take place from August 1 through September 15.

Cooperators are eligible to participate in the pen-reared pheasant releasing program for up to 5 consecutive years (12.9.602(1)(r), ARM). An additional 5-year release period is allowed if habitat improvements are established that address factors limiting pheasant numbers.

For FY 21, the program paid for the release of 250 pen-reared pheasants and expended \$2,526. During FY 22, the program expended \$2,351 for the release of 200 pen-reared pheasants. Unique to FY 22, the program also paid for 2,626 pheasants released for the Youth Pheasant Opener, expending \$45,700. Total FY 22 expenditures were \$48,051 for 2,826 pheasants. See Table 6 for the breakdown of pheasants and expenditures for UGBEP pheasant releases during the biennium.

Table 6. Summary of pheasant release contracts awarded by UGBEP, not including releases for youth pheasant opener.

Region	FY 21			FY 22		
	# Contracts	# Pheasants	Expenditures	# Contracts	# Pheasants	Expenditures
4	0	0	\$0	1	100	\$1,176
6	3	250	\$2,526	1	100	\$1,175
TOTAL	3	250	\$2,526	2	200	\$2,351

UGBEP - Wild Turkey Transplants

No wild turkey transplants occurred during the past biennium.

Supplemental Feeding

The option of supplemental feeding for game birds is restricted to a 3-county area in Region 6 in northeast Montana (12.9.615(1), ARM). Monitoring of winter conditions on established routes was conducted by department staff from January through March during FY 21 and FY 22. Winter conditions were average. Supplemental game bird feeding is only supported by the program when extreme weather and snow cover condition criteria are met, which didn't occur during the biennium and no supplemental feeding expenditures were incurred.

UGBEP Projects Access Guide

The annual Access Guide is the catalog of program accomplishments that are available for use by upland game bird hunters (Figure 9). The guide provides detailed information about every active project of the UGBEP and the methods used to obtain permission from landowners for hunting access. The guide is published annually both in printed form and electronically by download through the program's web page: <https://fwp.mt.gov/ugbep>

2022

ACCESS GUIDE

FWP Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program Projects



Sharp-tailed Grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*)
on a lek. Photo by Donald M. Jones



**UPLAND GAME BIRD
ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM**

Your opinion matters! See page 3 for Details

TURN IN POACHERS: 1-800-TIP-MONT

Figure 9. Cover of the 2022 UGBEP Projects Access Guide with all active projects and associated maps available free to hunters for the 2022 fall upland game bird hunting.

Within the guide, private lands projects include geospatially represented access boundaries that are color-coded to indicate whether the access area is open to: (1) walk-in game bird hunting with no further permission needed from the landowner (brown polygons), (2) landowner permission needed prior to hunting game birds (black polygons), or (3) private land projects enrolled in the Block Management Program (green circles). Public land projects are represented by triangular points. See Figure 10 for an example map page.

UGBEP Permission Methods - See 2022 Projects Access Guide

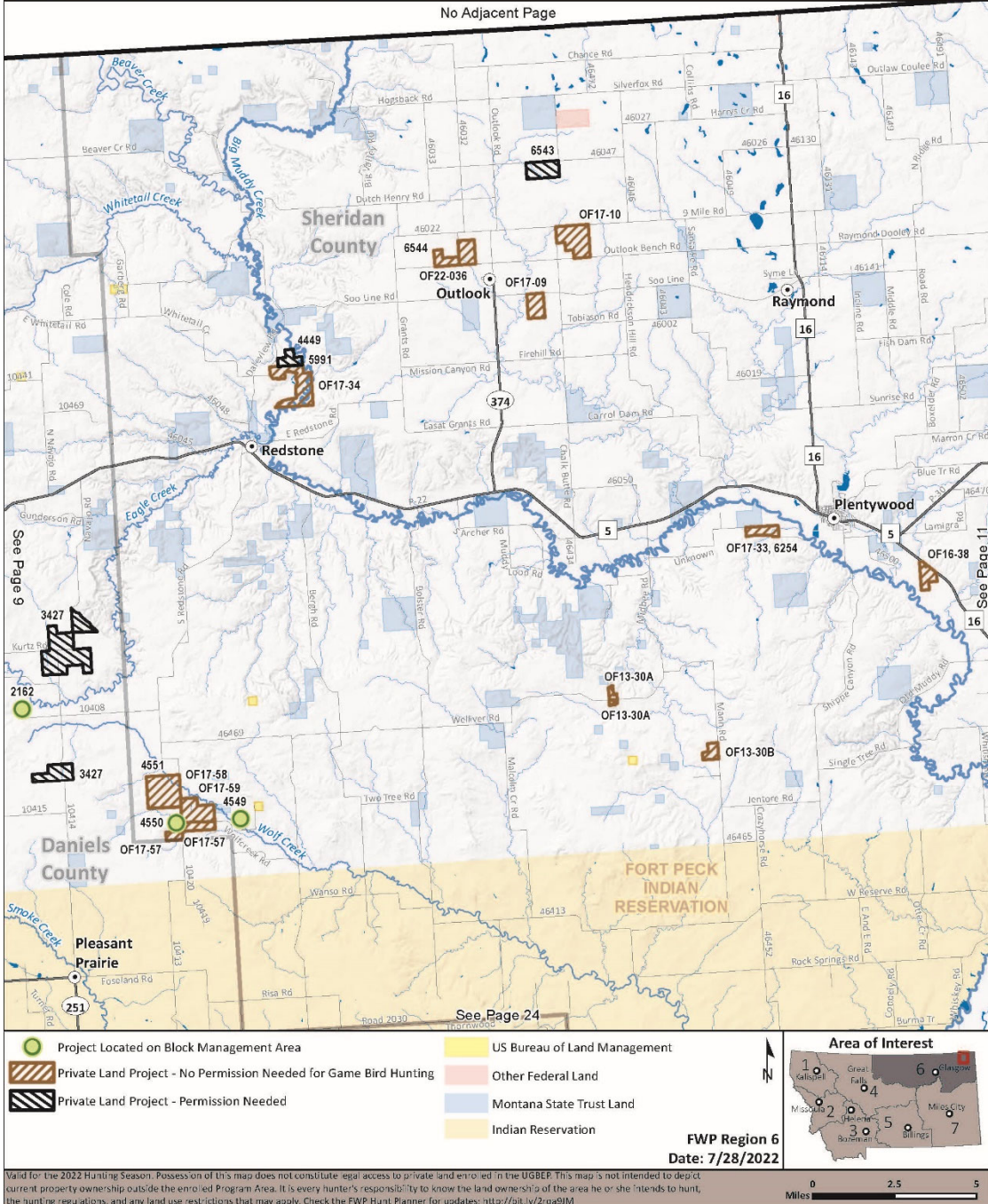


Figure 10. This example of a Map Page provides hunters with “at a glance” access information for UGBEP projects.

Each year the UGBEP Access Guide is distributed to all FWP regions by late August. Hunters may also request a guide be mailed to them via a web link.

For each fiscal year, 7,500 guides were printed at a cost of \$12,825 (\$1.71 per guide) for a total of \$25,650, including freight and mailing costs for online requests. Table 7 provides an overview of the number of guides requested online and mailed to hunters each fiscal year. Hunters also pick up a copy of the guide at regional FWP offices.

Table 7. Total number of guides requested online by fiscal year.

Calendar Year	Total Online Guide Requests
2021	1,527
2020	2,992
2019	3,097
2018	1,395
2017	1,817
2016	1,968
2015	1,856
2014	631
2013	464
2012	459
2011	249

PROGRAM EVALUATION AND ONGOING ADAPTATION

The UGBEP receives evaluation or feedback in a number of ways, which helps the program adapt to changing circumstances, improving performance. These include: (1) project monitoring, (2) ongoing assessment of needs, (3) input from the UGBEP Council, and (4) hunter and cooperator feedback.

Contract/Project Monitoring

FWP Habitat Specialists and biologists conduct monitoring of all annual contracts, including Open Fields, Habitat Management Leases, grazing systems, and food plots. Project types such as nesting cover, shelterbelts, and conservation leases are monitored less frequently, on an established schedule. Unscheduled monitoring also occurs whenever staff stop by a project or to “check in” with the cooperator to collect receipts for reimbursements or to note progress of a project that is underway. Generally, well over 200 projects are monitored in a given year.

UGBEP Citizens' Advisory Council

The council and department staff met four times in this past biennium, twice on a conference call during the COVID-19 shut down, to review work planning and progress, receive public input, and to make program recommendations. Since 2009, the Council's input has consistently served to improve program performance. The department appreciates the Council's dedication and support for the program.

In addition to ongoing program direction and technical guidance, the council recommended specific statutory changes for the program, which may be a consideration for the 2023 Legislature, as follows:

- Change the program's pheasant release statute, allowing expenditures up to a *maximum* of 15% of annual program revenue (87-1-247(2)(a), MCA).
 - Eliminate the minimum expenditure requirement (87-1-247(2)(b), MCA).
 - Allow unspent pheasant release funds to be available for use on the habitat enhancement side of the program.
- Simplify the requirement of council membership (87-1-251 (1)(f), MCA) to two legislators, *one from each major party*. Current statute also requires that the members be selected from both the house and the senate, which has caused additional challenge for maintaining active participation on the council by legislators.

UGBEP Hunter Survey

The UGBEP invites hunters, via an on-line survey, to provide comments about their experiences with the program during the hunting season. The survey link is published in the UGBEP Projects Access Guide and on the program web page. During the biennium, 93 respondents provided comments on their experiences. Out of the 93 respondents, 57 comments were from hunters who hunted on UGBEP enrollments. Of the 57 UGBEP-related comments, 46 hunters provided their level of satisfaction. (Table 8).

Table 8. Summary of UGBEP hunter survey responses.

Calendar Year	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Total
2020 and 2021	4	4	2	24	12	46
Percentage	9	9	4	52	26	---

The following statements are samples of hunters' comments:

"Found sharpies and huns in most places and encountered few hunters."

"I am excited every time I see a UGBEP property on the map. They are always awesome areas to hunt and are typically more productive for birds than any other BMP."

"Hunted sage grouse and while I didn't see a lot of coveys in the 4+ hours I spend hunting, the quality of the habitat was great, and I saw lots of bird sign."

"There were no birds."

"Thank you for considering upland bird hunters. Need more projects in Region 3"

"Did not see efforts to really improve habitat for food or cover and do not think FWP considers water sources during drought years-need guzzlers in some locals."

"Some areas had very little improvements made for UGB habitat. I may have been that it was such a drought year that the area seemed grazed or they were, in fact grazed. Other areas were much better. Until you get eyes on the property it is difficult to know if is worth putting boots on the ground. regardless, i appreciate it and i hope we can keep the project going. The permission structure is is difficult. many areas require you to go to the property and look for the contact and then try to get permission. If you cant reach the owner, you are out of luck. One land owner i spoke with did not let us hunt, but didn't really give us a reason. I would be nice to know what kind of requirements are on the land owners to be in this program. Regardless, until we get more CRP enrollment, i will take any UGB projects that he state can make happen. We really appreciate the effort."

APPENDIX A: 10-YEAR LICENSE SALES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE UGBEP REVENUE.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE, & PARKS
10-YEAR LICENSE SALES UPLAND BIRD

LICENSE TYPE	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Res. Bird	26,011	26,820	26,417	28,105	24,131	21,259	19,642	18,341	20,535	19,040
Res. Senior/Youth/Disabled Bird	1,304	1,299	1,289	1,533	12,733	11,658	10,721	10,067	10,894	10,613
Res. Sportsman (w/o bear)	18,706	19,126	19,330	18,945	23,199	23,892	24,217	24,662	26,490	29,410
Res. Sportsman (w/bear)	14,872	15,977	16,536	16,422	17,931	19,081	19,226	20,339	23,010	26,267
Res. Youth Sportsman	6,219	6,305	6,426	6,232	6,964	6,200	5,607	5,469	4,969	5,362
Res. Senior Sportsman	1,298	1,548	1,842	1,926	11,523	12,366	13,030	13,486	13,258	14,831
Military Recognition Sportsman	1,298	904	856	740	555	428	324	247	222	302
Cooperators Sportsman	665	629	614	607	631	622	567	549	585	948
Res. Free Youth Sportsman	4,976	5,194	4,872	4,661	1					
Total Resident Upland Bird Season	75,349	77,802	78,182	79,171	97,668	95,506	93,334	93,160	99,963	106,973
Nonres. Bird	6,373	5,144	5,215	5,590	5,419	4,318	4,213	4,328	5,328	6,291
Nonres. Bird - Youth	126	161	186	211	188	137	103	94	180	163
Nonres. Big Game Combo-General	12,197	12,362	12,570	12,376	12,303	11,657	12,241	11,817	11,769	11,557
Nonres. Big Game Combo-Family Sponsor	46	20	12	10	183	263	296	296	388	437
Nonres. Elk Combo-Family Sponsor										
Nonres. Deer Combo-General	8,491	9,777	9,776	10,158	10,316	10,653	10,838	11,326	11,203	10,958
Nonres. Deer Combo-Landowner	1,470	1,284	971	960	893	884	948	1,010	857	917
Nonres. Deer Combo-Family Sponsor	41	20	15	12	98	128	148	192	208	215
Nonres. Elk Combo-General	2,482	2,529	2,756	4,316	4,641	4,800	4,638	5,432	5,016	4,853
Nonres. Youth Sponsored Big Game Combo	388	511	548	592	628	594	311	286	310	280
Nonres. Youth Sponsored Elk Combo										
Nonres. Youth Sponsored Deer Combo										
Nonres. College Student Big Game Combo	393	409	463	477	115	106	90	77	93	100
Nonres. College Student Elk Combo										
Nonres. College Student Deer Combo										
Nonres. Cooperators Big Game Combo	127	123	129	136	147	147	166	178	183	187
Nonres. Native Upland Game Bird	416	595	653	683	73	60	53	44	46	74
Nonres. Native Big Game Combo					931	887	845	815	785	926
Nonres. Native Elk Combo										
Nonres. Native Deer Combo					379	384	347	335	324	355
Total Nonresident Upland Bird Season	32,550	32,985	33,294	35,521	36,314	35,018	35,857	36,988	37,735	38,126
Nonres. 3-Day Bird Stamp-Shooting Preserve	526	507	479	521	505	473	505	431	409	583
Nonres. 3-Day Bird Stamp		1,911	1,989	2,432	2,539	2,200	2,112	2,007	2,356	2,869

APPENDIX B: LIST OF PARTNERSHIPS PARTICIPATING IN UGBEP PROJECTS

Region 1	Region 2
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes Five Valleys Chapter of Pheasants Forever Pheasants Forever, Inc Mission Valley Chapter of Pheasants Forever US Fish Wildlife Service	Blackfoot Community Conservation Area National Wild Turkey Federation US Forest Service
Region 3	
Beaverhead Chapter of Pheasants Forever Bureau of Land Management, Butte Field Office Gallatin Valley Chapter of Pheasants Forever	Headwaters Chapter of Pheasants Forever
Region 4	
Bureau of Land Management, Havre Field Office Central Montana Chapter of Pheasants Forever DNRC State Lands, Conrad Unit Ducks Unlimited Farm Service Agency, Cascade County Farm Service Agency, Chouteau County Farm Service Agency, Glacier County Farm Service Agency, Pondera County Farm Service Agency, Teton County Farm Service Agency, Toole County Golden Triangle Chapter of Pheasants Forever	Montana Salinity Control Association NRCS Field Office, Cascade County NRCS Field Office, Chouteau County NRCS Field Office, Glacier County NRCS Field Office, Pondera County NRCS Field Office, Teton County NRCS Field Office, Toole County Pheasants Forever, Inc Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologists Pondera County Conservation District Upper Missouri Chapter of Pheasants Forever USFWS Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge USFWS Benton Lake Wetland Management District USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife
Region 5	
Billings Rod & Gun Club Bureau of Land Management, Billings Field Office Conoco Phillips-Phillips 66 Montana Chapter of Safari Club	National Wild Turkey Federation Pheasants Forever, Inc Yellowstone Valley Chapter of Pheasants Forever

Region 6	
<p>Daniels County Conservation District DNRC State Lands, Glasgow Unit Ducks Unlimited Farm Service Agency, Blaine County Farm Service Agency, Daniels County Farm Service Agency, Hill County Farm Service Agency, McCone County Farm Service Agency, Phillips County Farm Service Agency, Richland County Farm Service Agency, Roosevelt County Farm Service Agency, Sheridan County Farm Service Agency, Valley County National Fish and Wildlife Foundation National Wild Turkey Federation Northeast Montana Chapter of Pheasants Forever NRCS Field Office, Blaine County NRCS Field Office, Daniels County</p>	<p>NRCS Field Office, Hill County NRCS Field Office, Phillips County NRCS Field Office, Richland County NRCS Field Office, Roosevelt County NRCS Field Office, Sheridan County NRCS Field Office, Valley County Northeast Chapter of Pheasants Forever Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologists Phillips County Conservation District Roosevelt County Conservation District Sheridan County Conservation District The Nature Conservancy USFWS Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge USFWS Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program</p>
Region 7	
<p>American Bird Conservancy Bureau of Land Management, Miles City Office Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Rosebud County Farm Service Agency, Dawson County Farm Service Agency, McCone County</p>	<p>NRCS Field Office, Baker County NRCS Field Office, Carter County NRCS Field Office, Custer County NRCS Field Office, McCone County NRCS Field Office, Richland County</p>