



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

FINDING COMMON GROUND TO SUSTAIN FISH AND WILDLIFE

DEPARTMENT COVER PAGE

Introduction

Montana is known for the quality and abundance of its fish and wildlife, as well as the habitat that supports them. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) is responsible for managing the fish and wildlife resources. It's an expensive endeavor that has for decades been almost exclusively funded by hunters and anglers. Broader support will be needed to help sustain fish and wildlife and their habitat into the future. There are efforts underway at the national level to secure additional federal funding, e.g. the work of the Blue Ribbon Panel. FWP anticipates that any solutions at the national level will require matching state dollars, which illustrates the importance of broadening support here in Montana. Towards this goal, FWP convened a group of citizens to develop recommendations on what wildlife enthusiasts have in common, and how this "common ground" can lead to broadened support for fish and wildlife. The effort was referred to as Finding Common Ground.

After initial discussion, the Finding Common Ground group (FCG) concluded that its primary purpose was to develop recommendations for broadening funding sources for FWP fish and wildlife programs. In recognition that public support will be needed to broaden funding for FWP, the FCG group agreed to develop recommendations for building and strengthening relationships, trust, and mutual respect and understanding among the many different people who value, enjoy and sustain fish and wildlife in Montana.

History Behind Finding Common Ground

In 2014, FWP considered a proposal to create a voluntary wolf stamp that was intended to generate funding for the department's wolf management work, and outreach and education, law enforcement, and habitat protection. Following a lively debate, FWP Director Jeff Hagener identified a number of concerns with the proposed stamp and ultimately decided not to go forward with the proposal.

The fact that 50,000 comments were received was a good indication that there was considerable public interest in the topic. The Director saw an opportunity to engage the public in a discussion about how to build support for FWP fish and wildlife work. He convened a number of people who were vocal proponents and opponents of the proposed wolf stamp to discuss whether there was enough interest to warrant some future discussions on how to build trust and broaden funding. The group that convened on October 28, 2014 concluded that interest was high and requested the department initiate a process to continue the discussions. The director agreed to this request and ultimately appointed the Finding Common Ground group, which consisted of many of the original meeting participants from the 2014

meeting plus a few additional people to improve group diversity. The group was meant to represent a cross-section of Montanans who share an appreciation for fish and wildlife, including representatives from various organizations with fish and wildlife conservation interests. There were also landowner and agriculture interests in recognition that landowners contribute to and benefit from wildlife management. Other interests at the table included business owners, and non-affiliated hunters, anglers, general wildlife enthusiasts, and FWP Fish and Wildlife Commissioners (see Appendix A for list of participants).

The Process

The Finding Common Ground (FCG) group met five times in several different locations beginning in the spring of 2015. The meetings were facilitated and the group used a consensus-based approach to develop its recommendations. Each meeting provided an opportunity for the public to comment. The department provided regular updates on its website and maintained an interested parties list. The group conducted its final meeting on February 25, 2016.

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FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Finding Common Ground (FCG) members' recommendations are as follows. In some cases, the recommendations represent the ideas of individual group members, rather than the entire group. There are also recommendations that were developed and agreed upon by the entire group. The process used to arrive at the recommendations is identified.

Potential Benefits from Broadening Funding

The FCG members began by identifying potential benefits to be gained by broadening funding. FCG members were asked to individually prepare a list with the top three benefits they believe should come from a proposed funding mechanism, i.e., things that would build public support for the proposed funding and explain why additional funding is needed. They noted benefits can be derived from continuing the existing work of the department, as well as expanding programs and services. The group organized their ideas into actions and outcomes. A summation of those ideas follows.

List of Ideas (Actions and Outcomes)

1. Action: Expand the mission and organization of the FWP Communications-Education Division to deliver programs designed to engage, inform and educate, a public that is much broader-based with respect to wildlife and their management by the State.
2. Action: Create a special emergency account (minimum of \$2.5 million) to address unforeseen expenses, e.g., if Chronic Wasting Disease was discovered in Montana.
3. Action: Implement or build upon a wolf and/or carnivore friendly program that is balanced and science-based to increase social tolerance for wolves and other carnivores, and build support among the non-hunting community and other Montana residents.
4. Action: Expand FWP's research projects to include more collaboration with private and Federal wildlife and fish researchers on wildlife and fish behavior, population dynamics, and other biological systems, with the goal of improving people's understanding and support for the natural balances within the many Montana ecosystems.
5. Action: Institute programs supporting the interests of wildlife watchers and citizen scientists.
6. Action: Increase outreach and education efforts in schools and communities, with a focus on the best available research regarding how our ecosystems work and on science-based wildlife management.
7. Action: Study and take actions to prevent wildlife species from becoming endangered; these proactive measures will benefit tourism, natural resource extraction, ranching, logging, and other industries in Montana.

8. Action: Support FWP law enforcement, which benefits all citizens of this state by helping to protect wildlife resources and protect citizens from those who would exploit wildlife for their own personal gains.
9. Action: Develop a more realistic working relationship with hunters and anglers, those who don't purchase hunting or fishing licenses, state legislators, etc.
10. Outcome: A broadened constituency that is vested in supporting fish and wildlife management (new audiences as constituents and advocates).
11. Outcome: The name of the new mechanism (or the mechanism itself) helps people become supporters, e.g., it gives an opportunity to support fish and wildlife management in the great state of Montana).
12. Outcome: A better understanding of the FWP constituent base (all those who value and enjoy fish and wildlife), thus better priorities set for serving those constituents.

Recommendations for Funding Mechanisms

Evaluation Process

The FCG was tasked with identifying funding mechanisms to support FWP fish and wildlife management, with the understanding that the revenue could serve as Montana's required match to obtain available federal funding. To accomplish this task, the FCG developed questions that could be used to help evaluate funding mechanisms. The questions should also be of value to the department and others when considering funding mechanisms that might arise after this group had completed its work. The group brainstormed a broad list of potential funding mechanisms and used its questions to evaluate each one. After the evaluation they produced a final set of recommendations for the department to consider.

- 1) Does it have state-wide support?
- 2) Does it attract a broad range of interests?
- 3) Would it have organized opposition?
- 4) Are the administrative costs burdensome?
- 5) Does it supply a consistent revenue stream?
- 6) Do the individuals who benefit contribute?
- 7) Is it marketable?
- 8) Does it provide funding for broad or targeted benefits for Montana wildlife?
- 9) Is it feasible to enact the mechanism?
- 10) Is it sustainable long-term?
- 11) Does it provide additional funding over the current funding?

The group considered adding a 12th question, Can the funding serve as match for federal dollars? They determined that all of the funding mechanisms under consideration would satisfy this question, so it was dropped as an evaluation question.

Potential Mandatory Funding Mechanisms

The FCG recommended that the department give further consideration to the following mandatory funding mechanisms that would help support FWP fish and wildlife management. These mechanisms were not prioritized by the group (see Appendix B for an evaluation of funding mechanisms):

- Establish a natural resource trust fund.
- Establish a state tax on resource extraction and/or energy production.
- Establish a boat launch / Fishing Access Site (FAS) user fee.
- Expand use of the existing conservation license.
- Establish a recreation license.

Potential Voluntary Funding Mechanisms

The FCG considered different ideas for establishing a voluntary conservation stamp with funds dedicated to existing fish and wildlife programs or FWP's operating costs. The group concluded that a voluntary funding mechanism could help to support fish and wildlife management and therefore the department should give further consideration to the following voluntary funding mechanisms (see Appendix B for an evaluation of funding mechanisms):

- Establish a single-species voluntary conservation stamp.
- Establish a "generic" voluntary conservation stamp (not specific to any one species).

Governor's emergency funds and environmental contingency account

The FCG identified the Governor's emergency funds and the environmental contingency account as two additional sources of potential funding for fish and wildlife management. They recognized these funding sources have specific limitations on their use and should not be considered a sustainable or broad source of funding for fish and wildlife management. Rather, these might be considered for special circumstances.

Taxes

The FCG discussed the potential to establish a new state tax, or to allocate a portion of an existing tax, to fish and wildlife management. The group observed that it might be more feasible to allocate a portion of an existing tax, compared to creating a new tax. The group was intrigued by the potential for tax revenue to make a significant fiscal contribution to FWP fish and wildlife management. The group concluded, however, that it would need a specific (detailed) tax proposal in order to conduct a valid evaluation. With only a limited amount of time available for gathering information and conducting meetings, the group instead focused on other types of funding.

Recommendations for Building Support

In recognition that public support will be needed to broaden funding for FWP, the FCG group developed recommendations for building and strengthening relationships, trust, and mutual respect and understanding among the many different people who value, enjoy and help to sustain fish and wildlife in Montana.

In general, the group observed that any campaign to broaden funding should include a strong outreach and education component to increase awareness about the world class fish and wildlife resources that are found in Montana, and FWP's role in managing these resources for the public's benefit. To build support, individuals will need to understand why fish and wildlife management and FWP are important and how they benefits them personally, keeping in mind that information should flow both ways (inform not "educate").

The outreach should avoid terms that could be divisive. For example, the group discussed the use of the term "non-consumptive" that is commonly used to describe people who appreciate wildlife but don't hunt or fish. They observed that oftentimes people who enjoy hunting and fishing also enjoy bird watching, wildlife watching, and other wildlife-related activities. The group was concerned that use of the term "non-consumptive" tends to divide people, which contradicts the effort to broaden support for fish and wildlife management. The group acknowledged that it is difficult to arrive at a simple way to refer to the collective body of people who don't hunt or fish but appreciate wildlife. The group suggested describing them based on the activities they participate in, e.g., bird watchers.

People also need to understand the connection between department expenditures and funding; how the department would spend any new funding it might receive. A part of the message is highlighting the benefits and significance that fish and wildlife bring to society and the economy. The message should tell a compelling story, much like the Back from the Brink story of how hunters and anglers worked together in the first half of the last century to recover depleted fish and wildlife populations. Lastly, the message needs to be relevant to everyone, not only those already directly participating in fish and wildlife related activities, but also the general public and industries and businesses that have a vested interest in fish and wildlife management.

The group advised that it will be important to get buy-in from interested groups, and that it may be beneficial to have a coalition of people/groups to help develop and promote the endeavor. Some members suggested FWP could play a leadership role and help to coordinate the effort. Others noted that the effort could be led by a coalition of supporters with support from the department.

Trust and Relationship Building

The FCG group generated a list of ideas for building trust and strengthening relationships:

- There is value in improving how groups and individuals talk to each other about fish and wildlife issues; communication needs to be less divisive. This includes being careful not to speak in a derogatory manner about industry, agriculture, wildlife enthusiasts, the wildlife tourism industry, etc.
- Broaden the interests that are included in these types of discussions, and do more to refer to the other (non-traditional) stakeholders by interest, e.g., bird watchers, wildlife watchers, or citizen

scientists. Doing so will help to build assurance among the stakeholders that FWP is interested in working with them. The group recognized that there are still challenges in terms of how best to refer to non-traditional stakeholders (non-hunters/anglers) in a way that doesn't drive a wedge between groups. The label "non-consumptive users" has been used for a long time but it may be helpful to come up with better terminology.

- There was an overwhelming message that it is important to maintain the momentum of this effort to take advantage of the improved trust that has already occurred as a result of the FCG discussions. Shifts in attitude are already occurring, communications have opened up. It was noted that a loss of momentum and trust could mean that the next big issue drives a wedge between the various stakeholders, organizations, etc. Observation: Values unite us, issues divide us. Trust is based on familiarity.
- It is appropriate to recognize the important role that hunters and anglers have had in wildlife restoration and conservation over the years. It is also important to recognize that there are other types of users and organizations that have played a part too, and that recognizing their contributions helps to break down the barriers between disparate groups. This includes recognizing the stewardship and conservation role that ranchers and farmers have provided to wildlife and their habitat throughout Montana's history.
- There is value in recognizing that there are many other ways to enjoy fish and wildlife besides hunting and fishing; taking a more holistic view toward fish and wildlife management will help to broaden support and build trust. What are the changing values related to wildlife? It is important to recognize these. It is also important to consider the resistance of traditional hunters and anglers who fear they are losing something.
- It is important that these discussions continue to involve the public and not be an internal agency process. Success will depend on the public understanding why this is important, and how it will benefit them as individuals.
- It was suggested that FWP should do more to "humanize" the agency by highlighting the people who work there, e.g., feature employees in stories and newsletters. A good example of this is the Region 2 Wildlife Quarterly.
- Find the common ground. Identify that for people. The common ground may be the love that people have for "special places" and the fish and wildlife resources.

Looking Ahead

The department considers broadening support and funding to be a long-term effort. It will take time to articulate a "Montana vision" for fish and wildlife management and conservation that is compelling. An example is the State of Missouri's Design for Conservation. The FCG concluded that it is time to take this discussion statewide, that broadening support and funding for FWP and fish and wildlife management needs to become a broad, public conversation. The group discussed ideas for maintaining momentum and building the Montana vision.

- Establishing a coalition of interested groups/organizations may be a starting point toward developing a common vision.
- There is value in citizen advisory groups like FCG and the FWP Licensing and Funding Advisory Committee.
- There may be an opportunity to continue the discussion on broadening support as part of implementing the department's new '15 and Forward vision document.
- At some point in developing a shared fish and wildlife vision it is critical to determine what the public wants from fish and wildlife management. It is also critical to understand what they think should be done to address the fact that hunting and fishing license revenue alone won't be enough to sustain FWP fish and wildlife management. Some type of public outreach and survey work may help to answer these questions.

In Conclusion

The Finding Common Ground members convened on five different occasions beginning in June of 2015. Throughout the process the group recognized the importance of these discussions and was optimistic that real progress could be made to help broaden support for fish and wildlife management. At their final meeting, members reflected on the progress they had made and expressed satisfaction in the work they accomplished. They agreed that the relationships established through this effort should make it easier in the future to resolve conflicts. The group appreciated the diversity of voices in the room, the contributions of the FWP staff, and the passion that each person has for fish and wildlife.

The Finding Common Ground members agreed that the common ground for all of them is Montana's remarkable and unique wildlife, and that the passion people have for these resources is the basis for sustaining Montana's fish and wildlife and their habitat into the future.

Appendix A. Finding Common Ground Participants

First Name	Last Name	Organization
Tim	Aldrich	Retired Forest Service
David	Allen	Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Rob	Arnaud	Montana Outfitters and Guides Association, Montana Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife
Ed	Beall	Capital Sports & Western Wear
Jay	Bodner	Montana Stockgrowers Association
John	Borgreen	Russell Country Sportsmen’s Association
Dave	Chadwick	Montana Wildlife Federation
Chris	Colligan	Greater Yellowstone Coalition
Marc	Cooke	Wolves of the Rockies
Jerry	Davis	Montana Bowhunters Association
Erin	Edge	Defenders of Wildlife
Janet	Ellis	Montana Audubon
Jeff	Hagener	FWP Director
Richard	Kerstein	FW Commission
Ben	Lamb	Consulting Services
Jim	Manning	Local Sportsmen’s Group
Ilona	Popper	Bear Creek Council
Zach	Strong	Natural Resources Defense Council
Richard	Stuker	FW Commission/Landowner/Ag Producer
Dan	Vermillion	FW Commission
Gary	Wolfe	FW Commission

Appendix B. Evaluation of Funding Mechanisms

Establish a natural resource trust fund.

1) <i>Would it have state-wide support?</i>	Unknown
2) <i>Would it attract a broad range of interests?</i>	Yes
3) <i>Would it have organized opposition?</i>	Yes
4) <i>Would the administrative costs be burdensome?</i>	Minimal
5) <i>Would it supply a consistent revenue stream?</i>	Yes
6) <i>Would the individuals who benefit contribute?</i>	Yes
7) <i>Would it be marketable?</i>	Yes
8) <i>Would it provide funding for broad or targeted benefits for Montana wildlife?</i>	Both
9) <i>Would it be feasible to enact the mechanism?</i>	Yes
10) <i>Would it be sustainable long-term?</i>	Probably
11) <i>Would it provide additional funding over the current funding?</i>	Yes

State tax on resource extraction and/or energy production.

1) <i>Would it have state-wide support?</i>	Unsure
2) <i>Would it attract a broad range of interests?</i>	Yes
3) <i>Would it have organized opposition?</i>	Yes
4) <i>Would the administrative costs be burdensome?</i>	No
5) <i>Would it supply a consistent revenue stream?</i>	Unsure
6) <i>Would the individuals who benefit contribute?</i>	Yes
7) <i>Would it be marketable?</i>	Yes
8) <i>Would it provide funding for broad or targeted benefits for Montana wildlife?</i>	Targeted
9) <i>Would it be feasible to enact the mechanism?</i>	Yes
10) <i>Would it be sustainable long-term?</i>	Maybe
11) <i>Would it provide additional funding over the current funding?</i>	Yes

Boat launch / FAS user fee.

1) <i>Would it have state-wide support?</i>	No
2) <i>Would it attract a broad range of interests?</i>	No
3) <i>Would it have organized opposition?</i>	Yes
4) <i>Would the administrative costs be burdensome?</i>	Maybe
5) <i>Would it supply a consistent revenue stream?</i>	Yes
6) <i>Would the individuals who benefit contribute?</i>	Yes
7) <i>Would it be marketable?</i>	Maybe
8) <i>Would it provide funding for broad or targeted benefits for Montana wildlife?</i>	Targeted
9) <i>Would it be feasible to enact the mechanism?</i>	Yes
10) <i>Would it be sustainable long-term?</i>	Yes
11) <i>Would it provide additional funding over the current funding?</i>	Yes

Expand use of conservation license and make it a requirement for wildlife viewing

1) <i>Would it have state-wide support?</i>	Yes
2) <i>Would it attract a broad range of interests?</i>	No
3) <i>Would it have organized opposition?</i>	Yes
4) <i>Would the administrative costs be burdensome?</i>	Yes
5) <i>Would it supply a consistent revenue stream?</i>	Unknown
6) <i>Would the individuals who benefit contribute?</i>	Yes
7) <i>Would it be marketable?</i>	Yes
8) <i>Would it provide funding for broad or targeted benefits for Montana wildlife?</i>	Broad
9) <i>Would it be feasible to enact the mechanism?</i>	Maybe
10) <i>Would it be sustainable long-term?</i>	Yes
11) <i>Would it provide additional funding over the current funding?</i>	Yes

Establish a recreation license.

1) <i>Would it have state-wide support?</i>	Maybe
2) <i>Would it attract a broad range of interests?</i>	Yes
3) <i>Would it have organized opposition?</i>	Yes
4) <i>Would the administrative costs be burdensome?</i>	Maybe
5) <i>Would it supply a consistent revenue stream?</i>	Probably
6) <i>Would the individuals who benefit contribute?</i>	Yes
7) <i>Would it be marketable?</i>	Yes
8) <i>Would it provide funding for broad or targeted benefits for Montana wildlife?</i>	Both
9) <i>Would it be feasible to enact the mechanism?</i>	Maybe
10) <i>Would it be sustainable long-term?</i>	Yes
11) <i>Would it provide additional funding over the current funding?</i>	Yes

Governor’s emergency funds (and environmental contingency fund)

1) <i>Would it have state-wide support?</i>	Yes
2) <i>Would it attract a broad range of interests?</i>	No
3) <i>Would it have organized opposition?</i>	No
4) <i>Would the administrative costs be burdensome?</i>	No
5) <i>Would it supply a consistent revenue stream?</i>	No
6) <i>Would the individuals who benefit contribute?</i>	Yes
7) <i>Would it be marketable?</i>	Maybe
8) <i>Would it provide funding for broad or targeted benefits for Montana wildlife?</i>	Targeted
9) <i>Would it be feasible to enact the mechanism?</i>	Maybe
10) <i>Would it be sustainable long-term?</i>	No
11) <i>Would it provide additional funding over the current funding?</i>	Yes

Establish a voluntary conservation stamp.

1) <i>Would it have state-wide support?</i>	Yes
2) <i>Would it attract a broad range of interests?</i>	Yes
3) <i>Would it have organized opposition?</i>	Maybe
4) <i>Would the administrative costs be burdensome?</i>	No
5) <i>Would it supply a consistent revenue stream?</i>	No
6) <i>Would the individuals who benefit contribute?</i>	Yes
7) <i>Would it be marketable?</i>	Yes
8) <i>Would it provide funding for broad or targeted benefits for Montana wildlife?</i>	Both
9) <i>Would it be feasible to enact the mechanism?</i>	Yes
10) <i>Would it be sustainable long-term?</i>	Maybe
11) <i>Would it provide additional funding over the current funding?</i>	Yes