
MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS – A WILDLIFE HABITAT CONSERVATION HERITAGE

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The course of wildlife habitat conservation in Montana was set in 1940, with the initial purchase of 1,000 acres, the “Judith River Game Range”. This was the start of extensive investment in wildlife habitat conservation across the state. Hunting license, Pittman-Robertson Federal Aide, USDA Forest Legacy, and funds from many partners have helped to conserve and manage nearly 890,000 acres of high priority wildlife habitats across Montana. I used historical records, program database queries, interviews, and popular articles from the Montana Outdoors publication to summarize conservation highlights from over the past 80 years. Two programs have been instrumental in accomplishing perpetual conservation in recent history. Since 1987, Habitat Montana has invested over \$75 million and leveraged \$66 million in partner funds. Since 2001, the Forest Legacy Program has invested nearly \$65 million in Montana in addition to \$60 million of partner funding, specifically for forest land conservation. In total, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) and partners have

invested \$290 million toward wildlife conservation easements and land purchase, including \$42 million of donated value by landowners. FWP currently owns 385,000 acres, managed as wildlife management areas. Wildlife habitat conservation easements total 448,000 acres, making FWP the 10th largest holder of conservation easements in the nation. Conserved habitats span coniferous forest, intermountain grasslands, riparian bottomlands, wetlands, prairie, and shrub grasslands, benefitting many species. These lands substantially overlap with mapped priority habitats, involving hunted game and species of concern. Broad public support is essential to program survival. Such support appears to hinge on various project outcomes, including conservation benefits, compatible recreation, economic benefits, managing land as a good neighbor, and tapping local producers to assist with management.