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## **RECOVERING AMERICA'S WILDLIFE ACT OF 2016: WHAT PASSAGE OF THE ACT MAY MEAN TO YOU**

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The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies organized a panel of 26 national business and conservation leaders in 2015 to examine the current system of conservation funding and recommend a new mechanism to conserve all fish and wildlife. Known as the Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources, the group recommended Congress dedicate up to \$1.3 billion annually in existing revenue from the development of energy and mineral resources to the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program. These funds would be awarded to state wildlife management agencies for wildlife related conservation, recreation and education projects. In Montana, the funds would be used to more fully implement State Wildlife Action Plan priorities including on the ground conservation for a broad diversity of species and habitats. Federal House Bill 5650 "Recovering America's Wildlife" act was introduced during the fall of 2016 but needs to be reintroduced in 2017. If passed and fully funded, the federal act could bring \$22 million dollars annually to Montana but \$7 million dollars in non-federal match will be needed each year. Proactive and partner based projects will be critical to ensure the best use of these funds but prior to that a broad based effort to pass the act is needed. Wildlife enthusiasts, business owners, developers, researchers and others will be needed to argue it is in everyone's best interest to keep species from becoming federally listed and to keep wildlife and habitat healthy.