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## THE MONTANA CHALLENGE

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**The Montana Challenge** begins with a question posed by the USDA Forest Service and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. How can management of Montana's fish and wildlife resources best contribute to Montana's social and economic well being? By employing prominent socioeconomic researchers from across the Rocky Mountain region, and digging for authoritative public sector data, **The Montana Challenge** established an unexpectedly vital role of clean air, clean water, fish, wildlife, and wild lands in Montana's culture and economy. The Rocky Mountains are the fastest growing section of the U.S. in population, personal income, and total employment; while the Great Plains are in population and economic decline. Montana's counties reflect this trend with rapid growth along the mountains in the west, slower growth along the Rocky Mountain front, and rapid decline in the eastern plains. "Quality of life" is driving the Rocky Mountain West's population and economic growth and natural resource amenities are key to quality of life and economic prosperity. Montana and other Rocky Mountain states are in the midst of a transition from an economy based on natural resource commodities to a human resource based economy where jobs follow the people. Montana's prosperity depends on attracting people who create economic opportunities. Healthy ecosystems, healthy fish and wildlife populations, and broad public access create Montana's unique and desirable lifestyles. Montana's wild resources draw people and economic activity. Diversity is a source of strength for both ecosystems and economies. Human resource sectors are the most rapidly growing sectors of Montana's economy, especially in the western region. Montana's traditional natural resource based economic activities remain important to Montana, especially in the eastern region. Montana's challenge is to both utilize and protect its natural resources.