

WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY PRACTICES ON MONTANA'S PRIVATE LANDS

Carolyn M. Nistler, Ecologic, P.O. Box 11710, Bozeman, MT 59719

Donald R. Leal, PERC, 2048 Analysis Drive, Bozeman, MT 59718

The majority of Montana is privately held, maintained for agricultural production, and provides much of Montana's wildlife habitat. Landowners utilize different wildlife habitat management strategies according to location, type of agriculture production, and adjacent land value and use. In December 2007 Montana farmers and ranchers received a questionnaire included in the Montana Farm Bureau Federation newsletter to address trade-offs landowners consider when choosing wildlife-related land management practices. Within the first month, 77 questionnaires were returned (8% response rate). Preliminary results indicate about half (49%) of respondents do not participate in a natural resource conservation program, 17% participate in NRCS Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQUIP), and 14 percent participate in Montana FWP's Block Management Program. Of those who participate in an economic incentive program or enterprise, 60 percent derive < 5 percent of annual ranch income from participation in these programs. Nearly half (43%) of respondents who participate in an economically motivated conservation program feel that the income they receive offsets wildlife damage to their land/crops. Regardless of economic benefit, most farmers and ranchers (63%) practice wildlife tolerance on their lands and 58 percent provide water for wildlife throughout the year. Some improve wildlife habitat by planting food plots (18%), fencing riparian corridors (14%) and delay mowing for nesting birds (8%). These preliminary results indicate that landowners who receive some compensation for providing wildlife habitat may be more likely to tolerate wildlife abundance, and place emphasis on creating and maintaining wildlife habitat on their lands.