

## THE TALISMAN OF CONSERVATION

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There has been an awakening in the wildlife profession to the importance of the management practices that form the cornerstone of the North American Model of Restoration and Conservation. For too many years those of us working in this profession have taken for granted or have been ignorant of the fact that our social environment in the on-the-ground application of conservation is unique in the world. In Montana we are becoming increasingly aware of how extraordinary the people of this state are in finding practical and sound solutions to making wildlife fit on a landscape where people live, work, and recreate. Have you ever asked yourself what makes the North American Model tick in Montana? More importantly to all of us, have you ever asked yourself why Montana's application of the North American Model hasn't gone the way of neighboring states when it comes to population and habitat management? Montana's wildlife professionals have taken strong and effective stances on issues like pesticide applications, sagebrush control, ungulate [elk] feeding, land conservation, and other management practices such as population monitoring, wolf and bear management

plans, livestock grazing and so forth. Have these things happened because we are just that much better than other wildlife managers in other states, provinces, or countries? What impact has the U.S. Constitution had on our opportunities to do something different in the arena of conservation? Does it have to do with our Montana Constitution or our political heritage? What is the source of the passion in so many of our publics that they are compelled to simply show up and be heard? Is it the culture that we work in within the agencies? If so, how did it develop? Perhaps it is because we are the fourth largest state with a population under a million people, allowing a few to be more influential on decisions that effect restoration and conservation of species. Or, just maybe there is an unseen talisman at work, an obelisk representing something ancient and significant that has influenced the people, decisions, and politics? Does anyone know where the obelisk in Helena can be found that the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry likely erected in the process of making Helena the State's Capital and laying the cornerstone of its construction? Now be honest, talisman?, obelisk?, someone knows!