

WILDLIFE RESURRECTION™

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The use of the wildlife resource for the settlement of Montana produced a catastrophe by the end of the 19th century. But by the end of the 20th century wildlife were more abundant than at any time during the previous 130 years. The passage of protective laws during the late 19th and early 20th century coupled with the gradually increasing efforts to enforce them accounts for a portion of this resource rebirth. The remainder of the story is largely untold and is the subject of this presentation. Game bird resources were heavily affected by the “cow and the plow”. The new agricultural lands provided new habitats unsuited for native species. Pheasant introduction began before 1895, by private individuals, and became a state game farm program in 1929. Over 1 million were planted by the time the state program was discontinued in the late 1960s. In 1910, elk were considered to occur in numbers only in the Sun River-South Fork of the Flathead and Yellowstone National Park areas. Rod and Gun clubs held fund raising events and paid \$5 per elk to have the Northern Pacific Railroad deliver rail car loads of 40 elk to their towns from Gardiner. The plants began in 1910 near Butte, Hamilton and in the Glacier Park area. Elk continued to be transplanted until 1972 when the last of the 7458 animals were released. Similar programs for other species were developed after the Pitman-Robertson act was accepted in 1939 and the Wildlife Restoration Division of the State Fish and Game Department was established. Harvest of the biological surplus and habitat preservation programs became prominent in the last third of the century. This resurrection of Montana’s wildlife resource was an epic effort extending through 5 generations of citizens, 2 World Wars, 3 other major wars, an economic collapse and a 3-fold increase in human population. The effort encompassed many classic human and wildlife adventures.