

PROTECTING RIPARIAN AND WETLAND HABITATS IN THE MADISON AND MISSOURI VALLEYS AS PART OF THE MONTANA WETLANDS LEGACY ^{TWS}

Tom Hinz

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Bozeman, MT 59717

Although agencies and organizations across Montana have been in the business of protecting wetlands, riparian areas, and uplands for several decades, many of these programs have been operated independently or in limited partnerships. With federal funds, foundation grants, and other state, regional, national and international funding sources becoming increasingly more available, a fully-integrated collaborative approach to land and water protection makes most sense for Montana. In the area of wetland and riparian protection, the Montana Wetlands Legacy is such an integrated partnership. Formed in May, 2000, the Legacy partnership includes representatives of every major on-the-ground habitat protection organization in the state. In 2000, the Legacy adopted a short-term goal of protecting 100,000 acres of wetlands, riparian areas, and associated uplands throughout Montana by 2005. The issuance of the FERC order to PPL-MT for operation of its nine major dams on the Madison and Missouri Rivers over the next forty years provided a unique opportunity for conservation partners, including the Montana Wetlands Legacy, to partner with PPL-MT's sizeable and long term source of private funds for riparian and wetland protection. The Montana Wetlands Legacy partners have begun the process of matching PPL-MT funds with state and federal program dollars, as well as those from private conservation groups, to purchase conservation easements, manage grazing along streams, and to gather information on wildlife populations, distribution, trend and abundance in the Missouri-Madison area. Ultimately, through the Montana Wetlands Legacy and related partner efforts, we hope to protect the best of these important wetland and riparian habitats.