
PARTNERS OF THE AMERICAS MONTANA-PATAGONIA CHAPTER: CHALLENGES, DIRECTIONS, AND SUCCESSES

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From the steppe to the Andes, the small towns to the big ranches, outdoor tourism to oil and gas development, Patagonia has a lot in common with Montana. Partners of the Americas (POA) is a nonprofit organization that pairs regions in North and South America to share culture, foster understanding, identify common ground, and develop unique solutions

to local challenges. The projects undertaken by various POA chapters are as diverse as their membership and range from exchanges of professionals (e.g., doctors, lawyers, teachers, law enforcement) to charity activities (e.g., school building, clean water) to language learning. The Montana-Patagonia chapter of POA is comprised mostly of biologists and the majority of exchanges over the past 25 years have been related to wildlife management. Last fall, I traveled to Junín, San Martín, and Bariloche, Argentina and met with over 20 biologists from state and federal agencies, universities, and nonprofits to fortify the Montana-Patagonia partnership and help illuminate a path for the future. I'll discuss the history of the Montana-Patagonia partnership, and highlight important biological challenges in Patagonia such as problems with exotic species—especially red deer, mink, trout, and a variety of plants—and declining native species such as the huemul and pudú (deer) and huillín (otter). Other challenges include conflicts between ranchers and wild felids like the Andean cat, the lack of a public trust doctrine, habitat loss, and poaching. Finally I'll talk about where Partners is headed and how to get involved in this exciting partnership.