
THIRTY YEARS OF WETLAND CONSERVATION IN MONTANA

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In 1985 the Montana Legislature authorized the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to use funds from migratory bird hunting licenses "...for the protection, conservation, and development of wetlands in Montana", thereby creating the Migratory Bird Wetland Program (a.k.a. State Duck Stamp Program). Wetlands and their associated uplands provide critical nesting, foraging, brood-rearing, and migration habitat for waterfowl and other wetland-associated wildlife. Wetlands also provide critical ecosystem functions important for our communities and wildlife, including water purification, flood control, and groundwater recharge. FWP's Migratory Bird Wetland Program is dedicated to conserving wetlands and associated uplands to benefit Montana's wildlife, especially migratory birds, to enhance consumptive and non-consumptive recreational opportunities, and to maintain wetland systems for Montana's citizens. Since many of the opportunities were on private land, it was essential for FWP personnel to learn how best to work with farmers and ranchers to benefit their operations as well as wildlife and wetland values. In addition to the partnership of private landowners, many other agencies and organizations have been partners in habitat projects. The program has adapted to changing opportunities and conservation needs over time. We will chronicle the past 30 years of program implementation, showcase successes, and discuss a philosophy for continued wetland conservation into the future.