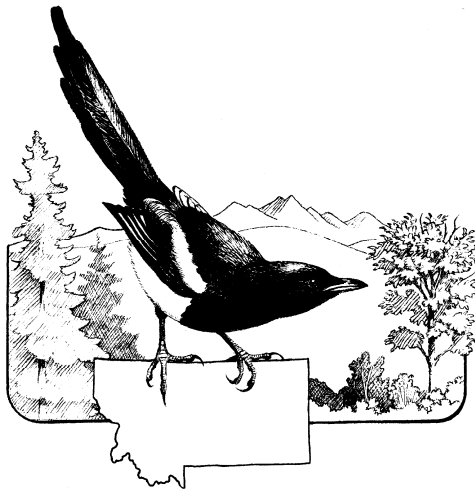


Montana Audubon Strategic Plan

2006-2011

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(Revised 5/31/07 and 1/24/09)*



Executive Summary and Introduction

Full Strategic Plan available upon request

mtaudubon.org

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I. Executive Summary

Montana Audubon’s mission guides our conservation work on a day-to-day basis:

“Montana Audubon promotes appreciation, knowledge and conservation of native birds, other wildlife, and their habitats.”

Founded in 1976, Montana Audubon has steadily built effective programs in public policy, education, and scientific research to serve its grassroots constituency organized into nine, community-based Audubon Chapters. Our vision for the future is to ensure that every species of native birds in Montana has a sustainable population and long-term protection in its natural habitats. In order to achieve our mission and vision, we need to shape an organization that is strategic and focused, has a long-term vision, and is responsive to changes on the Montana landscape. This plan was developed in order to accomplish these goals.

In keeping with its mission, vision, and goals articulated in this strategic plan, Montana Audubon will focus its efforts during the next five years to:

- Protect and enhance Montana’s wetland and riparian habitats through programs that integrate educational, scientific, and public policy strategies.
- Protect and enhance Central and Eastern Montana’s prairie grasslands habitats through programs that integrate educational, scientific, and public policy strategies.
- Provide leadership in bird monitoring and conservation projects where Montana Audubon can make a unique and significant contribution.
- Strengthen communication and build trustworthy and reciprocal relationships among Montana’s Audubon chapters, Montana Audubon, and National Audubon so that they may grow, prosper, and effectively carry out their interconnected missions.
- Increase and sustain Montana Audubon’s funding to a level that ensures its ability to successfully implement programs, hire and retain outstanding administrative and program staff, engage its chapters, and accomplish its goals and mission for many years to come.
- Raise the public profile and name recognition of Montana Audubon through improved branding,

marketing and communications, and media strategies.

- Develop Montana Audubon's human resources by (1) encouraging staff team building and professional development; (2) developing Board commitment, leadership ability, and fundraising skills; and (3) creating opportunities for members and families to participate at the chapter and state level.

We believe that this plan establishes a clear and focused direction for the next 5 years, is realistic for a Montana-based conservation organization, and includes a practical section on how we are going to develop the ability to adequately fundraise for identified goals. Montana Audubon's strategic direction considers the conservation needs of wildlife, takes into account the unique landscape and people of Montana, and then establishes the main focus for our program work: protection of the most threatened and/or important habitats that are critical for birds—wetlands, riparian areas, and grasslands. By concentrating efforts on species and habitats most in need of protection, our organization can make the greatest conservation impact in Montana. Our new strategic plan also reflects the unique aspects of Audubon, including our grassroots chapter network and the overriding interest our members have in birds.

II. History and Context

A. Montana Audubon. Founded in 1976, Montana Audubon works towards its conservation mission using programs in public policy, education, and conservation science. Our work is grassroots-based, with 9 Audubon chapters located throughout the state: Bitterroot Audubon (Bitterroot Valley), Five Valleys Audubon (Missoula area), Flathead Audubon (Kalispell area), Last Chance Audubon (Helena area), Mission Mountain Audubon (Mission Valley), Pintler Audubon (Butte-Dillon area), Sacajawea Audubon (Bozeman area), Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon (Great Falls area), and Yellowstone Valley Audubon (Billings area). Montana Audubon has had a lobbyist at the Montana Legislature since 1981; it opened a staffed office in 1989.

Our list of accomplishments is long, including passing numerous pieces of legislation to protect wildlife species and habitat (for example, spearheading successful efforts to reform the state subdivision laws to curb uncontrolled development (1993), protect medicinal plants on state lands (1999 and 2001), protect reptiles and amphibians from commercialization (2001), and protect Montana's native wildlife from exotic (introduced) wildlife (2003 and 2005); leading efforts in Montana to fight wetland-destroying projects; developing a citizen science program to monitor birds and bird habitat; and developing education programs that connect people to nature and provide them with the knowledge, skills, and inspiration to take informed action for the protection of birds and other wildlife.

Montana Audubon works by looking at the most critical wildlife habitats and then determining effective ways to protect these areas through public policy decisions, educational programs, and conservation projects. Our ability to combine professional staff with community-based volunteers enables us to make a difference for the state's birds and their habitats. Montana Audubon's carefully reasoned, science-based positions on habitat conservation and other environmental issues, and its desire and ability to work with diverse groups of Montanans to find solutions to problems, has earned the organization credibility and respect well beyond the conservation community.

One of the organizational issues we have been involved in over the last two years is our relationship with the National Audubon Society (NAS). During our discussions with NAS, both organizations decided

that a slightly more distant relationship was appropriate and that this new relationship would actually remove confusing obstacles to our conservation work. Although we continue to maintain a close working relationship to NAS, in April 2005 Montana Audubon reestablished itself as an independent Audubon state program. Because of this change, the Montana Audubon Board of Directors decided that it was important for Montana Audubon to undertake a planning process that would establish a clear direction for our work in the next five years—a direction that identifies the wildlife conservation needs of Montana, and fits our mission, values, resources, and new autonomy as an organization. As a result, we developed a strategic planning process that engaged the Board, staff, and chapters in an effort designed to ultimately lead to a stronger, more focused organization.

Montana Audubon currently has approximately 4,000 members, making it one of the largest conservation organizations in Montana. According to the Montana Conservation Voters Education Fund *List Enhancement Project* (LEP), as of 2004, Montana Audubon members were approximately 55% female and 45% male; in general, slightly older (average age 58) than members of other conservation organizations (average age 54), as well as the population of the state as a whole (average age 47). Our members tend to not join other conservation organizations, with over 50% of our members indicating that Audubon was the only conservation organization they belong to. Politically, two-thirds of our members were identified as registered voters that have voted in at least 3 of the last 4 elections (averaging 2.85 votes in 4 elections); this turnout is slightly higher than other conservation organizations (at an average of 2.65 votes in the last 4 elections), and substantially higher than state average (at 1.86 votes in the last 4 elections). Montana Audubon is also one of the few conservation organizations that have members in every legislative district in the State of Montana.

B. The Landscape. As the fourth largest state, Montana covers 94.1 million acres, from the prairies of eastern Montana to the old growth forests of the Columbia River Basin in the west. State or federal public lands make up approximately 35% of the state. Habitat types and wildlife species are diverse, with key habitat types described below:

- Riparian/wetlands areas make up less than 4% of the state's habitat, most of which is in private ownership. Riparian areas are Montana's richest wildlife habitat.
- Grasslands and shrublands cover 52% of the state. Montana holds the largest and most significant grasslands in the Northern Great Plains.
- Forests cover 24% of the state, primarily located in the western third of the state and the island mountain ranges in the east.

C. The Wildlife. Montana's geography, ecology, and climate all contribute to the natural diversity and abundance of wildlife in our state. The state provides habitat for 422 species of birds, including 262 confirmed breeding species. Wetlands and riparian areas provide the richest bird habitat with at least 134 (51%) of Montana's 262 breeding species using wetlands or riparian areas during all or part of the year. Grassland birds show the most declines of any group of birds monitored by Breeding Bird Surveys. Montana also hosts 108 mammal, 12 amphibian, 18 reptile, and 86 fish species. Eleven species of animals are currently listed as threatened or endangered: Bald Eagle, Piping Plover, Interior Least Tern, Whooping Crane, Black-footed Ferret, Gray Wolf, Canada Lynx, Grizzly Bear, Pallid Sturgeon, White Sturgeon, and Bull Trout.

Montana has wildlife resources that are the envy of the nation—and Montanans are intimately connected to our state's wildlife resources. Birds play an important role in this interest. In fact, according to a 2001 poll by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Montana ranked first in the nation for birdwatching, with 44% of our state's residents participating in this activity. Out-of-state visitors account

for approximately 45% of the birdwatching done in the state.

D. The People. The combination of low population densities and below-average income levels, make reaching Montana citizens about our mission—and supporting the programs to do so—a challenge. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2004, Montana had 926,865 people at a density of 6.2 people per square mile (ranked 48 out of 50 states for density). The population was evenly split (at 50%) between males and females; 23% of the population was under 18 years; and 13 % was 65 years and older. The total kindergarten through grade twelve school enrollment in Montana was 139,000. Our population was 90.3% white, 6.5% Native American, 2.2% Hispanic, and 1.2% other minorities. There were 369,000 households in Montana; the average household size was 2.4 people. Families made up 65% of the households in Montana. In 2004, Montana ranked 47th out of 50 states for median household income, at \$35,239, with 14.0% of its population living in poverty. Montana’s one Representative in Congress holds the largest congressional district in the lower 48 states. Some regions of Montana are growing very rapidly; 16 counties grew more than 14% between 1990 and 2000. The largest growth in the state is in western Montana, and near cities (such as Bozeman and Billings) in south central Montana.

E. The Challenge. In order for Montana Audubon to develop the most effective programs possible, it must shape its programs to the state, its people, and the landscape. These resources provide our greatest challenge—and opportunities.

III Mission Statement

Montana Audubon promotes appreciation, knowledge and conservation of native birds, other wildlife, and their habitats.

IV. Niche

Among our state’s conservation organizations, Montana Audubon fills a unique niche: working to preserve our state’s native birds and their habitats. Audubon’s interest and activities focused on birds—at both the state and chapter level—attract members different from that of any other organization. Members often join because of an interest in birds and birding. Montana Audubon’s education and citizen science programs then connect this appreciation of birds to the importance of bird habitats. Once members understand this connection, they can become advocates for habitat protection through Montana Audubon’s policy work and Important Bird Area program. While birds inspire individuals, Montana Audubon’s programs direct that interest and enthusiasm towards conservation action—ensuring that birds will continue to enrich the lives of future generations.

V. Values and Beliefs

These core values are the foundation for Montana Audubon’s mission, purpose, and vision. Montana Audubon believes that:

- Society has a responsibility to protect and conserve birds and other wildlife and their habitats, not simply for human needs and desires, but to maintain the integrity of natural systems.
- Enjoyment and knowledge of birds are important factors that motivate people to conserve and protect bird habitats.
- Healthy natural communities sustain healthy human communities.

- Persistent citizen action and commitment are essential to maintain *and* restore the health and diversity of birds and other wildlife.
- Through a science-based approach to conservation, we can best protect the health and diversity of birds and other wildlife.
- Audubon members are persuasive advocates for birds and wildlife protection when they are knowledgeable, connected to local landscapes, and active in their communities.
- Developing an appreciation for birds and other wildlife enriches the human experience.

VI. Montana Audubon's Vision for the Future

Montana Audubon is a science-based conservation organization whose primary focus is to protect birds, other wildlife, and their habitats. In order to become more effective in its work, Montana Audubon has decided to adopt a bolder, more focused, and more dynamic vision as we seek to build a stronger, more vibrant organization during the next five to ten years.

In our long-term vision for the future, we see Montana as a place where all native bird species have a sustainable population and long-term protection in their natural habitats. In order to achieve this vision, Montanans must grow to recognize and appreciate the state's natural heritage, and actively work to protect the habitat of birds and other wildlife. They must also be willing to manage human activities with an understanding and appreciation of wildlife's needs, and a commitment to conservation of habitat.

In this vision for the future, we see Montana Audubon as an organization that:

- Strives to make the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat relevant to every Montanan. In order to do this, we must demonstrate the relevance of wildlife to those to whom it is not readily apparent, and galvanize those who share our vision;
- Develops a membership that uses its passion for birds as a positive force to protect birds and their habitats.
- Works closely with its statewide network of Audubon chapters and its members to achieve its mission. In a big state, these citizens are the eyes, ears, and voices for conservation issues at the local level.
- Successfully reaches out to citizens with diverse geographic, age, gender, and cultural backgrounds to come together to celebrate birds and work toward their conservation.
- Collaborates with others and brings together diverse constituencies to develop workable solutions to some difficult problems facing all Montanans in the years to come.
- Is a highly credible, powerful force, capable of shaping public thinking, influencing decision-makers, and inspiring actions that benefit birds and other wildlife.
- Inspires its membership to celebrate the wonder and mystery of birds.

- Routinely welcomes and develops new leadership, and whose leadership works as a team to accomplish our organization's mission.
- Provides a supportive culture for employees and volunteers, investing the necessary talent, time, and money on issues that they are focused on.

VII. Constituency and Other Important Stakeholders

Montana Audubon constituents, beneficiaries, and stakeholders include the following:

Primary Constituency: The individuals and organizations that Montana Audubon serves most directly with the majority of its resources include the state's Audubon Chapters and their dedicated leaders, Audubon members located throughout the state, and our grassroots activist program members.

Beneficiaries and Stakeholders: In order to achieve our conservation goals, we must identify or develop common ground with diverse groups of people. In doing this we will increase both membership retention and growth, and provide new faces and new energy for our projects at the chapter and state level.

Individuals and institutions that have a stake in the work of Montana Audubon, include:

- Partner organizations for specific projects;
- Other organizations with similar goals; and
- Government agencies that work on wildlife and wildlife habitat issues.

While we believe that all residents of Montana and all tourists visiting Montana profit from our work, the organizations and individuals who most notably receive benefits from our efforts, but are not (yet) members of our organization include:

- All residents of Montana that have an interest in birds, birding, and wildlife;
- All tourists visiting Montana with an interest in birds and wildlife;
- Montana enterprises that support or supply outdoor recreation and birding;
- Families and students who are interested in learning about the natural world around them;
- People moving to Montana for quality of life issues; and
- Communities in Montana that are interested in promoting birds, birding, and wildlife appreciation.

VIII. Five-Year Strategic Directions

- 1. Protect and enhance Montana's wetland and riparian habitats through programs that integrate educational, scientific, and public policy strategies.** *Riparian and wetland areas make up less than 4% of the state's habitat. However, these areas are Montana's richest wildlife habitat, providing habitat for 88% of Montana's bird species all or part of the year (370 of Montana's 422 species); breeding and nesting areas for at least 51% of Montana's breeding bird species (134 of Montana's 262 breeding birds); and essential breeding, foraging, and over-wintering habitat for many of Montana's other wildlife species. Currently, 17 of Montana's 20 threatened, endangered, or*

candidate species depend on wetlands and streamside areas for some part of their life cycle. Because riparian and wetland habitats occur as a limited element in the landscape, even positive population trends of riparian-dependent species can be quickly reversed by changes in riparian habitat availability and management. These habitats are currently threatened by such activities as increasing residential development; changes to water regimes from flood control, dam management, and bank stabilization; invasion by exotic plants; oil, gas, and coal development; global warming, and certain agricultural activities, such as inappropriate grazing regimes and clearing for agricultural practices.

- 2. Protect and enhance Central and Eastern Montana’s prairie grasslands and sagebrush-shrubsteppe habitats through programs that integrate educational, scientific, and public policy strategies.** *Montana holds the most extensive and most significant grasslands in the Northern Great Plains. Grassland birds show the most declines of any group of birds monitored by Breeding Bird Surveys; fewer than 30 % of the species show increasing populations. Prairie grasslands provide critical habitat for several bird species that are undergoing widespread population declines (e.g., Mountain Plover, Sprague’s Pipit, Baird’s Sparrow, Chestnut-collared Longspur, and McCown’s Longspur). Montana is blessed with relatively healthy numbers of these species, and preserving our prairie grasslands will help to ensure that these species do not become endangered throughout their range. Factors responsible for declines include activities and policies that convert existing native grassland to other uses and/or fragment, disturb, or degrade the habitat, including: the introduction of exotic grasses and other plants; oil, gas, and mineral development; certain wind farm development which fragments extensive grasslands or extols significant direct mortality, certain grazing regimes; residential development; unmanaged recreational use; sodbusting of native grasslands to convert to agricultural production, and agricultural practices that do not take into account sustaining or enhancing bird populations. More recently, the threats to our sagebrush-shrubsteppe habitats are increasing; many sagebrush-dependent bird species, for which the Greater Sage-Grouse is emblematic, are declining and face similar threats as stated for grassland birds.*
- 3. Provide leadership in bird monitoring and conservation projects where Montana Audubon can make a unique and significant contribution.** *Because global warming is fast becoming the most significant long-term threat to the conservation of birds and other wildlife, we will be leaders in the state of Montana on global warming issues and solutions. Additionally, our work will include projects that engage volunteers in citizen science and/or contribute uniquely to the protection of species of conservation concern. Although the majority of wildlife species in Montana depend upon the wetland, riparian, grassland and sagbrush-shrubsteppe habitats described above, there are other native species that warrant attention. We believe that together, both citizen and professional birders, can make meaningful contributions to wildlife conservation. Therefore, we will undertake projects that emphasize Audubon’s unique ability to combine volunteers with professional staff in citizen science projects. In this work, Montana Audubon is committed to bird monitoring for all Montana bird species, with an emphasis on species of special concern. Our work on general bird monitoring is focused on the Montana Bird Distribution project. Our work on species of special concern will focus on those projects where Montana Audubon is uniquely positioned to contribute to wildlife conservation or monitoring projects. As an example, Montana Audubon has recently worked to increase our understanding of the needs of Brewer’s Sparrow in sagebrush-steppe habitat, Black Swifts that depend upon waterfalls, and Lewis’s and Black-Backed Woodpeckers in burned forests. On the state’s current list (Oct 2008) of species of special concern, there are currently 128 vertebrate species, of which 64 species are birds.*

- 4. Strengthen communication and build trustworthy and reciprocal relationships among Montana's Audubon chapters, Montana Audubon, and National Audubon so that they may grow, prosper, and effectively carry out their interconnected missions.** *Conservation of native birds is more effectively accomplished when Audubon members, Audubon chapters, Montana Audubon, and National Audubon work collaboratively to foster and nourish programs engaging people in those conservation efforts.*
- 5. Increase and sustain Montana Audubon's funding to a level that ensures its ability to successfully implement programs, hire and retain outstanding administrative and program staff, engage its chapters, and accomplish its goals and mission for many years to come.**
- 6. Raise the public profile and name recognition of Montana Audubon through improved branding, marketing and communications, and media strategies.** *Audubon conservation efforts in Montana on behalf of bird and other wildlife are most effective when the public, public figures, and the media are aware of the commitment, expertise, and accomplishments of Montana Audubon on behalf of birds, wildlife, and the natural environment.*
- 7. Develop Montana Audubon's human resources by (1) developing Board commitment, leadership ability and fundraising skills; (2) encouraging staff team-building and professional development; and (3) creating opportunities for members and families to participate at the chapter and state levels.** *Montana Audubon can be most effective when its members, leadership and staff have the skills and knowledge to effectively carry out the mission of the organization and when the membership represents a variety of age groups and backgrounds and is committed to fostering new members and leadership, particularly among younger persons.*