“Three levels” of Audubon

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When I tell people I work for Montana Audubon, I often get a response like, “That’s great, I’m a member of the Audubon Society.” I then ask if they are also a member of *Montana Audubon*, and they come back with a quizzical, “Isn’t that the same thing?” There is sometimes confusion when the word “Audubon” is used in an organization’s name so with this in mind, I’d like to take a moment to explain the “three levels” of Audubon.

In 1976, the local National Audubon chapters in Montana came together to establish an independent organization that could deal directly with important conservation issues across the state. Perhaps this was done because of Montana’s physical remoteness and cultural distance from the National Audubon office in New York City. At the time, chapter leaders were especially interested in affecting policy change by lobbying the Montana Legislature. Thus, Montana Audubon, an independent entity from both National Audubon and its local chapters, was born.

While each “Audubon” shares nearly identical mission statements, they play different roles on the broader conservation stage. National Audubon frequently deals with issues on a continental, even global scale such as climate change and long-distance flyways. They also carry the heavy political clout one would expect from a big, century-old organization.

*Local chapters* of National Audubon tend to engage in very-localized conservation projects as well as education and outreach efforts. Montana Audubon’s niche in the “Audubon family” is somewhere in the middle; through our conservation policy, bird science and education programs, we seek to protect the wildlife and landscape qualities that we all cherish about our magnificent state.

In short, National Audubon, Montana Audubon and local chapters of National Audubon while historically related, are each *independent nonprofit organizations*. That said, we often work cooperatively, share data, information and occasionally even financial resources. Montana Audubon for example, in addition to other fundraising, receives a small percentage of membership dues from the chapters on a voluntary basis. It works in the other direction as well, with Montana Audubon contributing expertise and staff time to chapter-level projects.

Though a bit confusing, all three “levels” of Audubon fill important niches in working toward the goal of bird and habitat conservation. If you have further questions about the work of Montana Audubon, please feel free to contact David Cronenwett at david@mtaudubon.org.