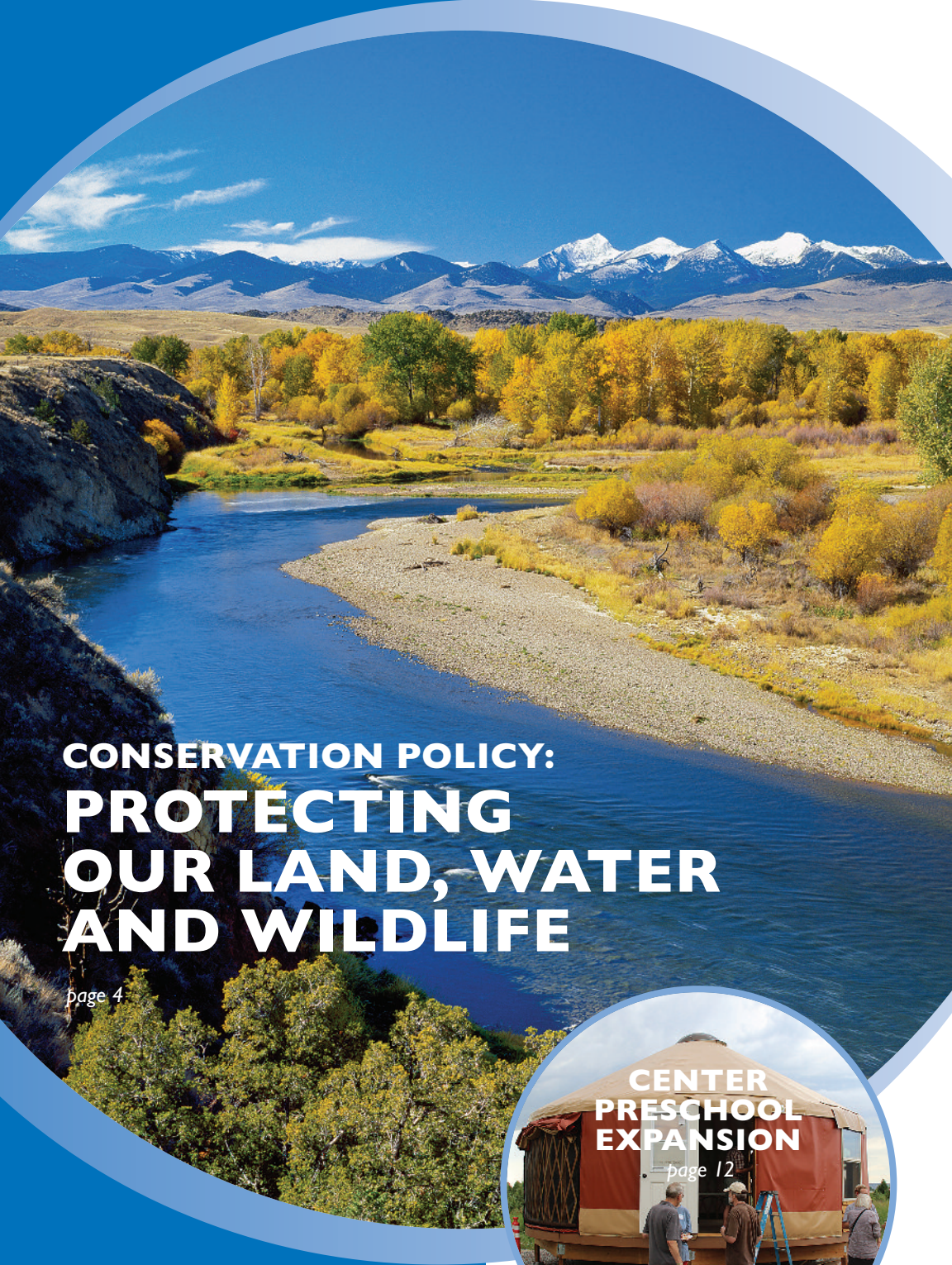


fall 2018



**CONSERVATION POLICY:
PROTECTING
OUR LAND, WATER
AND WILDLIFE**

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**CENTER
PRESCHOOL
EXPANSION**

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Our mission is to promote appreciation, knowledge and conservation of Montana's native birds, other wildlife, and natural ecosystems to safeguard biological diversity for current and future generations.

Founded in 1976, Montana Audubon has built effective programs in public policy, education, and bird conservation to serve its members and Montana's nine community-based Audubon Chapters.

Helena Office

PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624 • Phone: 406-443-3949
Fax: 406-443-7144 • info@mtaudubon.org • www.mtaudubon.org

Audubon Center

7026 S. Billings Blvd., Billings, MT 59101 • Phone: 406-294-5099
www.mtaudubon.org/center

Staff

Larry Berrin
Executive Director

Heather Bilden
Community Programs Lead

Sarah Chatwood
Preschool Lead

Emily Chilcoat
Volunteer Coordinator

David Cronenwett
Communications & Grant Writer

Nicole Eckstrom
Preschool Educator

Cathie Erickson
Accounting Specialist

Hannah Finch
Out-School Programs Lead

Norane Freistadt
Development Director

Alina Garner
School Programs Lead

Taisha Haggard
Teacher-Naturalist

Janet Johnston
Office Manager

Cat Lynch
Teacher-Naturalist

Mackenzie Ruppert
Preschool Educator

Amy Seaman
Conservation Program Manager

Holly Sessoms
Teacher-Naturalist

Carolyn Sevier
Center Director

Jennifer Walker
Teacher-Naturalist

Board of Directors

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Rachel Van Wingen, President
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Montana Audubon is a proud member organization of Montana Shares, a partnership of Montana-based nonprofits devoted to improving the quality of life in the Big Sky state.

THE VIEW FROM ABOVE

Since 1981, Montana Audubon has maintained a steadfast lobbying presence for conservation at the Montana legislature and the upcoming 66th Montana Legislative session is no exception. Our team will be researching, strategizing, testifying, to help ensure good bills are passed and bad ones are defeated. Last session was filled with wildlife, habitat, and funding issues that kept us busy with topics ranging from protecting the uncommon spotted skunk to prohibiting the commercialization of wildlife. We also worked on restricting pollinator-killing pesticides, addressing artificial feeding of elk, and securing funding for conservation programs like the Sage-Grouse Stewardship Act and Habitat Montana.

Our organization has traditionally worked well with community-based Audubon chapters to build influence at the grassroots in order to have a stronger voice for conservation at the state level. But now more than ever, momentum is also needed in the federal policy realm to move our conservation agenda forward. Today's divisive politics often creates a false portrayal of a fractured community, like hikers against bikers or hunters against birders. The reality is that conservationists across the board have shared values and interests, and are working toward the same ultimate goals.

In an effort to showcase our unified voice, in the coming year I will travel to Washington, D.C. with other executive leaders from Montana-based organizations to promote conservation in our state. We intend to sit down with our congressional delegation to address pending proposals that could harm Montana's cherished wildlife, while advocating for collaborative proposals like the Recovering America's Wildlife Act. Together we'll make it clear that Montanans won't stand for policies that harm our wildlands, wildlife, or waterways.

The ultimate goal of our policy work is to implement or maintain regulations that safeguard the well-being of Montana's birds and other wildlife. We base this work on sound science that leads to strong conservation policy, while promoting cooperation between diverse stakeholders. In this issue, you will learn about what we're doing to further that goal in the coming months. It's no secret that we're in the midst of one of the worst attacks on our public lands and wildlife we've ever faced as a nation, but with you behind us, we plan on moving forward with our conservation mission. Thank you for your support and helping us to stand up for birds and their habitats in Montana!

Larry Berrin, Executive Director



Conservationists across the board have shared values and interests, and are working toward the same ultimate goals.

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On the cover: Big Hole River and Pioneer Mountains
John Lambing photo.

CONSERVATION POLICY: PROTECTING OUR LAND, WATER AND WILDLIFE

THE STORY OF AMERICA

weaves together many complex narratives, including some familiar and dark chapters of plunder, greed and subjugation. This is especially true when examining our country's impact upon the landscape we inhabit: from our earliest beginnings come stories about the rapacious consumption of forests and wildlife, and later, the poisoning of waters and development of lands for industry, agriculture and other uses. They are a well understood part of our shared history.

However, there have also been important voices promoting restraint and greater stewardship of our natural resources.

By the late 19th-century, it was widely recognized that if meaningful actions were not taken, much of our unique wildlife and habitats, part of the once seemingly inexhaustible frontier, would be lost forever.

Laws and administrative infrastructure intended to conserve these natural assets, which all Americans hold in common, soon began to emerge. National lands were set aside as refuges, parks and forests, and regulations to protect birds and other wildlife from indiscriminant slaughter were enacted. State wildlife agencies in the early 20th-century took on game management and restoration activities across the country.

continued...



Bob Martinka



By the 1960s and 1970s, many of America's landmark conservation laws came into being: the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act, to name only a few.

Conservation policy has a long and effective history in the United States, playing a major role in the restoration of wildlife and protection of landscapes that culturally define us. Montana Audubon's founding in 1976 was born from the desire of local Audubon chapters to have a strong, statewide voice to advocate for conservation values at the Montana legislature. Driven by a collective vision to "protect birds, other wildlife and their habitats," the young organization set about working in the public policy realm to influence conservation across Big Sky country.

SINCE ITS FOUNDING, Montana Audubon and its partners have achieved several legislative accomplishments including: launching the nongame-checkoff program, resulting in significant annual wildlife funding for lesser-known species; banning "clearcut" forestry near streams to protect riparian habitat; leading reform efforts of Montana's subdivision regulations to curb uncontrolled development; shepherding a statewide ban on the sale of Russian Olive, an invasive shrub tremendously harmful to native bird habitat; helping enact legislation restricting the commercialization of native wildlife, and many others. In addition to these measures, Montana Audubon from its inception, has acted to defend existing environmental regulations from erosion and attack, efforts which are needed now more than ever.

Above: Great Horned Owl

SINCE TAKING OFFICE, the Trump administration has actively attempted to dismantle the foundational conservation laws and important environmental policies of the United States, (Endangered Species Act, Sage Grouse Conservation Plans, Clean Water Rule, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, many issues related to energy development on public lands, climate change, and others) which has a direct impact on the landscapes, species and quality of life in Montana. This onslaught has also had the effect of emboldening attacks on state-level regulations here at home. It therefore remains important for Montana Audubon to work at both state and federal policy levels where we can be most effective. One of our longest-standing activities has been to retain a lobbying team during Montana's legislative session to support good bills and defeat bad ones pertaining to lands, waters and wildlife. It is a tradition we've continuously maintained since the early 1980s. There are also many instances where our local expertise can influence federal conservation issues, such as those dealing with public lands and threatened or sensitive species that occur in Montana.

Over a 40-plus year history, we've learned the importance of being proactive. Taking a leadership role by promoting forward-thinking legislation can ensure meaningful conservation outcomes. We are currently involved with a campaign to support the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA), which if enacted, would annually contribute \$1.3 billion dollars (\$30 million in



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Montana) to state wildlife agencies for local wildlife conservation projects. We're a part of the statewide coalition which put Initiative 186 on the November 2018 ballot (see story page 15) in an effort to protect Montana's streams and rivers from irresponsible mining. Montana Audubon with several partner organizations, recently filed litigation against the Bureau of Land Management (see story page 10). The suit aims to ensure that the BLM follows its own regulations regarding oil & gas leasing on hundreds of thousands of acres of Sage-Grouse habitat in Montana and other states. We have also invested significant energy supporting the national push to permanently authorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund (see story page 9), maintaining popular support for federal public lands in Montana and working with national organizations to defend the integrity of the Endangered Species Act. Of course, beginning in January 2019, we will be actively promoting our strong conservation agenda during Montana's legislative session.

GOOD CONSERVATION POLICY

can help ensure a future for the natural world we all care about. This is why Montana Audubon has maintained a robust policy program for four decades; to protect Montana's birds, other wildlife and remarkable ecosystems into the future.

Montana Audubon announces the retirement of Janet Ellis, our long-time Senior Director of Policy. Look for a special communication in the coming months delineating Janet's accomplishments during her tenure with us and laying out Montana Audubon's Conservation Public Policy goals for the future.



Fall 2018 Raptor Migration in the Big Belt Mountains

Montana Audubon's annual Golden Eagle Migration Survey (GEMS) in the Big Belt Mountains kicked off on September 5, 2018 with a week of sunny skies. Unlike last season, which began with 18" of fresh snow on the ridge, weather this year at the 8,000' site proved less challenging. The count location sits along a 75-mile long northwest-southeast ridgeline where raptors harness prevailing winds to increase lift and speed during migration. This behavior often brings birds very close to observers, allowing their species, age, and occasionally sex to be determined as they pass by. Two strategically-placed owl decoys near the observation area often bring birds in closer still, as many raptors will swoop down to mob the offending "intruders."

This fall marks the fourth year of GEMS. Working with our partners Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest, we will conduct counts four days a week through early November, weather permitting. As this article reaches you, the numbers of migratory Golden Eagles passing through the Big Belt Mountains will be peaking, and the Rough-legged Hawks will be showing in stronger numbers. We have thus far counted four of Montana's falcons, all three accipiters, Northern Harriers, Osprey, Broad-winged, Swainson's, Ferruginous, and Red-tailed Hawks, and Bald and Golden Eagles.

In 2017, observers counted 2,929 raptors during 41 survey days between September 15 and October 31.



Golden
Eagle

Bob Martinka

In total, sixteen species were counted, including 2,159 Golden Eagles.

The GEMS site, known as a major thoroughfare for migrating Golden Eagles, recorded more of this species than any other U.S. migration site in 2017. Our team is excited to compile the 2018 totals. With a smaller survey effort this season, the number of birds seen per observation hour is the best comparison to the total number of raptors passing, from year to year. Migratory counts are one of the only ways to track the abundance of these apex predators, which are sensitive to human disturbance and indicators of environmental contaminants.

Unfortunately, Golden Eagle numbers in some locations are in decline. In 2018, therefore, we are also working hard toward the long-term logistical and financial support for the project.

You can follow the progress of our GEMS project with regular updates throughout the season by visiting our new Montana eBird portal: www.ebird.org/mt



America's Land and Water Conservation Fund Expires

At 12:00 a.m. on October 1 officials in Washington, D.C. allowed the nation's most successful conservation and recreation program in history to expire. While we are pleased that our Montana congressional delegation has shown support for permanent reauthorization of Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), we are disappointed that they were unable to work with their colleagues in Washington, D.C. to move forward legislation so vital to Montana families.

Created in 1964, LWCF protects public lands, public access and recreational opportunities by funding land acquisitions and community projects. In its over 50 year run, LWCF has touched the lives of almost every Montanan. Chances are that the last trail you hiked, or river you floated, or that ball field where you cheered on your nephew's soccer game was funded in part by LWCF. Everything from community swimming pools, parks, playgrounds, fishing access sites, trails, hunting access, to wildlife habitat have been protected by LWCF.

If you know any birders, you're aware of how serious they can be about chasing down the latest addition to their "life list" of species. It is not just avid birdwatchers who love to see wildlife: 49 percent of Montanans spend time exploring public lands to see birds, grizzly bears, elk, and all of our state's rich wildlife resources.

Created in 1964, LWCF protects public lands, public access and recreational opportunities by funding land acquisitions and community projects.

Birdwatching, along with other wildlife viewing, is big business in Montana, and across the nation. In 2016, wildlife watchers infused \$76 billion into local economies across the nation, nearly as much as hunting and fishing combined. In addition to buying equipment, they spend money on fuel, food and lodging as they travel to public lands in search of wildlife. Without access to those public lands, this huge section of our outdoor economy would suffer, leaving a gaping hole in the pocketbooks of working Montanans.

As part of Montana Audubon's River Initiative, we fully support The Land and Water Conservation Fund. The program is intended to provide \$900 million a year for public land acquisition, but it has only been fully spent once in the program's history. And now, the program has unfortunately expired. This will have a devastating effect on Montana's lands and outdoor economy. Millions of people travel to Montana each year to view wildlife across the state. We urge our Montana delegation to work swiftly with their congressional colleagues to fully fund and permanently protect the Land and Water Conservation Fund.





Standing up for Sage-Grouse

Some of the most biologically important and beautiful landscapes in the West are found in sage country, an ecosystem covering large parts of 11 states, sometimes called the Sagebrush Sea. Protecting the Greater Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) and their habitat from destructive oil and gas development not only benefits this iconic bird, but many other sage-dependent species. Several of Montana's Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are considered critically important sagebrush habitats. In 2015, the Interior Department adopted Greater Sage-Grouse resource management plan amendments to prevent an Endangered Species Act listing for the species. Among other requirements, these 2015 plans direct that in offering leases for oil and gas development, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) prioritize leasing lands outside of the bird's habitat in order to "limit future surface disturbance" in that habitat and "guide development to lower conflict areas and as such protect important habitat" for the grouse.

In 2017, and again in 2018, BLM violated the 2015 plans as part of the Trump Administration's policy of promoting fossil fuel production on public lands. First, BLM in 2017 issued new internal agency directives that purport to reinterpret the plans' requirements to prioritize oil and gas

leasing in areas outside of Greater Sage-Grouse habitat. Second, BLM in late 2017 and early 2018 offered hundreds of new oil and gas leases covering hundreds of thousands of acres of Greater Sage-Grouse habitat across Montana, Nevada, Wyoming and other states. This leasing, done pursuant to the 2017 directives, flatly disregards the 2015 plans' habitat prioritization requirements.

In response, Montana Audubon joined with other conservation organizations, including National Audubon Society, in filing litigation against the Interior Department and BLM to challenge the agencies' violations of the 2015 Greater Sage-Grouse resource management plan amendments with regard to oil and gas leasing, and in particular the BLM's failure to prioritize leasing lands outside of the bird's habitat. The lawsuit requests a declaratory judgment that the Bureau of Land Management violated the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the National Environmental Policy Act by approving oil and gas leasing contrary to the 2015 Sage-Grouse plans.

We are confident that our case is strong and believe this is an important course of action to protect Sage-Grouse and Montana's Important Bird Areas located in these crucial habitats.

Greater Sage-Grouse: State plans were developed in recent years to conserve the bird and its habitat. Its fate remains uncertain however, due to undermining by the Trump administration.



Bob Martinka



Berkeley Pit Waterfowl Hazing and Mitigation – A new plan is drafted

Since the November 2016 Berkeley Pit mortality event where approximately 3,000 Snow Geese perished, Montana Audubon has served on the Berkeley Pit Waterfowl Mitigation Advisory Board. Tasked with developing improved solutions for the hazing of migratory waterfowl, we have met regularly to help Montana Resources and Atlantic Richfield (MR/ARCO) present an improved mitigation plan to the Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. The draft is on pace for submission this fall, after one full year of implementation by the MR/ARCO employees and board review.

Since spring 2017, the improved efforts toward proper species identification and early detection of migrant pulses, have greatly increased understanding about what species are using the pit, and when. The American Coot was the most abundant migratory bird to stop on the pit's toxic waters, but improved identification also confirmed area use by Redheads, Northern Shoveler, American Wigeon, Gadwall, Ruddy Duck, Common Goldeneye, Eared Grebe, Ring-necked Duck, Mallard, Bufflehead, Common Loon, and others. Despite heightened vigilance and new hazing techniques, twenty-two mortalities occurred. Improved bird identification training will continue in 2018 and tools like a drone boat and aerial drone will be available to deploy during heightened migration events.

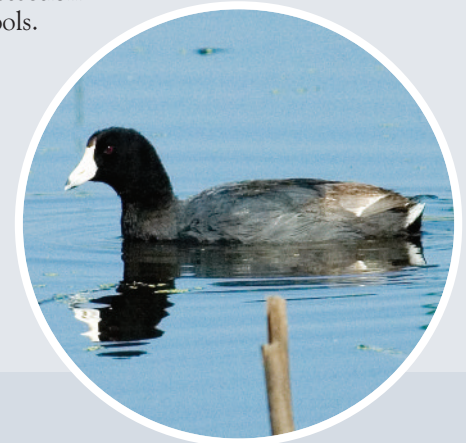
The American Coot was the most abundant migratory bird to stop on the pit's toxic waters.



Montana's Berkeley Pit is a glaring example of industrial contamination which strong conservation policy can prevent from happening in the first place.

During both fall and spring migration periods, the Advisory board was in weekly communication, regarding regional weather, migration events, and other causes for heightened awareness at the pit.

The 2018 draft plan reflects on this first year, and employs adaptive management techniques and demands for regular revision of hazing and mitigation recommendations to improve protection for all migratory birds in and around the Berkeley Pit. As we continue to convene, the board will continue to explore new and improved hazing and prevention techniques and better early detection tools.



Bob Martinka

Wildlife Grants Available

Montana Audubon will again make available small grants from the Audubon Wildlife Fund of Montana, a permanent endowment. The application deadline for the 2019 grant cycle is December 14, 2018. For information and a grant application, visit: mtaudubon.org/about/wildlifegrants/.

Projects funded through this program in 2018 included supporting Project FeederWatch with the University of Montana Bird Ecology Lab and the Golden Eagle Monitoring Survey (GEMS) in the Big Belt Mountains.



Spotlight: Fledglings Nature Preschool

In the fall of 2017, Montana Audubon learned that the number of students potentially attending programs the following year added up to more than double the existing capacity. If we wanted to go where the energy and opportunity clearly were, we would have to expand rapidly.

In the time since, we partnered with Yellowstone River Parks Association (YRPA) on the purchase and building of a yurt to serve as additional teaching space. Project funding included a big boost from Phillips 66 and the Harry L. Willett Foundation, aided by a grassroots effort by several community members. YRPA raised the other half of the funds and organized a large volunteer effort to build the structure. With the newly added space, we now have six additional classes and forty-three students, up from sixteen last year, a growth rate of more than 160%.

How we do preschool at the Montana Audubon Center

Fledglings Nature Preschool is a member of the Natural Start Alliance, a national coalition for those connecting kids with nature at the early-childhood level. Our program standard is 80% of time outdoors, which happens through every season and every type of weather. The emphasis, in addition to academic pieces like patterns and letter recognition, is on the building of executive function skills like problem-solving, self-monitoring, regulating emotions, and understanding different points of view.

Immersive, outdoor learning environment

By the end of the school year, participating kids know their environment. They've spent time climbing in cottonwoods, catching leopard frogs and insects, counting woodpeckers, watching

sunflowers bloom, and tending their own garden vegetables for snacks. Our programming and natural amenities allow kids to explore at their own level so they can develop individual relationships with the plants, animals, and the landscape as a whole. The Montana Audubon Center's fifty-four acres and adjacent Dutcher/Heritage system of trails and public parks allow for even more opportunities. The development of strong place-connection skills will help our Fledglings feel at home wherever they go.

Dedicated, professional staff

The caliber of our teaching staff at the Center is what makes our programs so successful. Sarah Chatwood, our preschool lead, was largely responsible for the creation of the program three years ago and its expansion since. With nearly twenty years of experience in outdoor education, her approach to working with kids (and their parents) is the foundation of the Fledglings program. Assisting her and each responsible for two of our six classes are Makenzie Ruppert and Nicki Eckstrom, both of whom moved to Billings (from Colorado and Pennsylvania, respectively) specifically to work at the Montana Audubon Center. We are fortunate to have all three on our early childhood education team.

Emergent curriculum

Outdoor learning has to be responsive to the environment. If the plan for the day calls for watching birds but there's a snake on the trail, we talk about snakes. When your classroom is outside, the learning is an endless chain of teachable moments and opportunities for unique experiences. The term "emergent curriculum" describes this loosely structured approach that allows the teachers to be responsive to changing conditions – in our case, the conditions of the classroom as well as the students themselves.



Our programming and natural amenities allow kids to explore at their own level so they can develop individual relationships with the plants, animals, and the landscape as a whole.

Risky play

Are our kids overprotected? How will they handle significant challenges as adults if they are not allowed to navigate minor challenges when they are young? We think about risk a lot with regard to our programs at the Center. While we do what we can to make sure our environment is safe, our

staff often reminds parents that "safe" does not mean the absence of risk or the occasional bumps that go along with it. We help children navigate those risks, they can then build the skills and resilience necessary to face any challenges they encounter through the rest of their lives.

Volunteer Spotlight: Mary Mullen

Start of volunteer work at Center: June, 2018
Hours of volunteer work to date: 30+
Professional work: Registered Nurse
Volunteer work: Landscaping, gardening, conservation practices
Hobbies: Birding, quilting, nature

As a participant of our Billings-area Montana Master Naturalist class in Spring 2018, volunteer Mary Mullen was interested in sustainability practices at the Center. She was especially intrigued by our grey-water treatment process (the Center does not connect with the City water system) and how the water



was being utilized for wetland plant propagation. The above-ground grey water treatment ponds required some upkeep, and Mary took on the task; researching similar systems and revitalizing the Center's ponds. "Revitalizing" involved completely clearing the four-foot deep pools of dirt and river rock that had become mixed together; then reconstructing the layers to create a more effective system. Mary completed the entire process with one of the ponds this summer and is planning to finish the second next year. Her work is a great example of how one volunteer can make a big difference in our efforts. Thank you Mary!

New Checklist of Montana Birds

Hot off the press is a 2018 Checklist of Montana Birds. The new list follows the official state bird list reviewed by the Montana Bird Records Committee annually, as well as recent taxonomic changes by the American Ornithological Society (June 2018).

Species are identified as breeding (B,b) or wintering (W,w) or 't' (no evidence of breeding) as per P.D. Skaar's Montana Bird Distribution. The checklist now expands to 433 bird species, with 283 documented breeding birds in Montana, and 233 overwintering residents.

The new cover includes a beautiful **Canyon Wren captured on film by Mr. Bob Martinka**. Funding for the printing costs was provided by the Montana Nongame Wildlife Checkoff, a fund that was spearheaded by Montana Audubon.

Pickup your free copy by stopping by our office in Helena or our center in Billings. You may also download from our website, mtaudubon.org.



Bob Martinka

Paid for by Montana Audubon, 324 Fuller Ave, N #5, Helena, MT 59601



Barred
Fruiteater

MERLIN TOURS TO COLOMBIA

In partnership with National Audubon Society and Holbrook Travel, Merlin Birding & Nature Tours is now offering an unforgettable trip to Colombia from **February 27 to March 9, 2019**.

We will explore the rich avian diversity of Colombia's Central Andes region, famed for its incredible species diversity. Join us as we experience the high-elevation Andes, humid tropical forests, wetlands, and highland savanna habitats in search of hummingbirds, tanagers, toucans and flycatchers, including an amazing array of rare endemics.

We will meet with community members to learn about local conservation efforts and how birding is being used as a sustainable development strategy. The tour fee includes a significant donation to support National Audubon's Colombia conservation efforts as well as Montana Audubon.

To learn more, please visit merlinbirding.com or call 406-461-5714

Initiative 186 – Montana has the power to vote YES for clean water!



For decades, Montana Audubon has championed the values that our state's healthy rivers and streams provide to wildlife and human communities. Comprising less than four percent of our state's area, river and stream-based ecosystems provide critical habitat for over half of Montana's breeding bird species and over one third of non-game species of concern. However, about 10,000 miles of this fragile habitat contain heavy metals or acidic pollution directly caused by inappropriate mining operations. This damage is long-lasting with Montana taxpayers frequently left with the cleanup bill, while birds and other wildlife are perpetually exposed to toxic levels of arsenic, lead, and mercury pollution.

During the 2015 and 2017 legislative sessions, opportunities to strengthen criteria upon which the Department of Environmental Quality could deny a mining permit, failed. New mines with the potential to cause long-term harm therefore continue to be issued permits. (The Black Butte mine project located on a major tributary of the Smith River, may receive a draft Environmental Impact Statement this fall.)

To protect wildlife-rich streamside habitat and as part of our *River Initiative*, Montana Audubon has committed to support Initiative 186, also known as, "YES to responsible mining."

This ballot measure is a clear and sensible directive granting the Montana Department of Environmental Quality the authority to deny new hard-rock mine permits if reclamation plans do not contain measures sufficient to prevent the pollution of water without the need for perpetual treatment. If enacted, I-186 would only affect new mines; existing operations would be unaffected.

Over the past several months, the initiative garnered over 46,000 signatures, easily qualifying it for the November election ballot. The power to vote YES for clean water is now in our hands! For more information, visit www.yeson186.org. If you vote by mail, your ballots have likely just arrived. For Montana's water, wildlife and human communities, be sure to VOTE YES on I-186 this November!

2018–2019 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

You can enjoy a fantastic day outdoors this winter and learn about the resident birds in your area by joining a Christmas Bird Count (CBC) near you!

These annual outings have been maintained by Audubon organizations around the nation since the year 1900 with the first Montana count in 1908. There were over 30 counts around the state last season.

This winter's CBCs will occur between mid-December 2018 and the first week of January, 2019. Please visit mtaudubon.org for more information about the CBC, which will post in late November.

Christmas Bird Counts are family-friendly, community events: all experience levels are welcome!



Pygmy
Nuthatch

Bob Martinka

Congratulations to our 2018 Award Winners

Montana Audubon honored the following outstanding individuals during our Kalispell bird festival:

Lewis Young, Lifetime Achievement Award

This year, Montana Audubon recognized an individual who contributed a great deal of time, energy and hard work to Audubon and conservation in Northwestern Montana for our Lifetime Achievement Award: Lewis Young. His many contributions to conservation include; working as a biologist for over 30 years on National Forests as a strong advocate for wildlife; striving to maintain sharp-tailed grouse in the Tobacco Valley near Eureka; developing an effective wildlife mitigation program for Libby Dam on the Kootenai National Forest and many others. He has also been active for many years with Flathead Audubon and other organizations. We applaud Lewis for his commitment to bird (and bat) conservation—as well as his work and contributions to the state of Montana.



Denny Olson, Educator of the Year

Longtime educator Denny Olson was awarded with our Educator of the Year Award for 2018. Denny has been teaching about nature and conservation for 46 years. He has authored five natural history books, and trained thousands of naturalists, teachers, and students in storytelling techniques. Over his career, he has presented to innumerable groups across the country but is best known in Montana for his extensive work in the Flathead region. Denny has forged an unlikely union between science, humor, and drama—and established a reputation as an innovative performer and conservation educator. Flathead Audubon—and the Kalispell area—are lucky to have such a dedicated educator in their midst!



Dan Bennett, Conservationist of the Year

Montana Audubon and Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon recognized Dan Bennett for his commitment to conservation with our 2018 Conservationist of the Year Award. He's been an active member of Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon for many decades. During his involvement with the chapter, he has utilized his skills as a paralegal to tirelessly research environmental issues. Dan has been the Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon Conservation Committee Chairman for many years. It's probably impossible to estimate the number of hours that Dan has provided to Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon. We appreciate Dan's work, and thank him for his tireless efforts and commitment to Audubon, birds, natural resource conservation, and the state of Montana!



Steve Gniadek, Citizen Scientist of the Year Award

It is our pleasure to honor Steve Gniadek with our 2018 Citizen Scientist of the Year Award, a professional scientist who is now turning into a volunteer "citizen scientist" in his retirement. He has contributed significantly to our understanding of birds—and many other wildlife species—particularly in the Glacier National Park Area, where he worked between 1987 and 2009. Steve has conducted extensive research around Montana, making significant contributions to the Montana Natural Heritage Program bird database. Whether working as a professional biologist, or advocating as a citizen, Steve has always been a strong voice for all wildlife and their habitats. He has a long-term history of standing up for what is right when it comes to wildlife, including birds.



Star Volunteers

These Montana Audubon volunteers have offered time, expertise, passion, elbow grease, advice, and a sense of humor as they've helped with recent events, projects, programs, and more. Thank you!

Sandra Abraham	Dona Hawkins	Jodi Mattson	Jessica Swanson
Dona Aitken	Randy Hawkins	Christian Meny	Nancy Thomas
Gary Aitken	Marilyn Hayes	Debbie Miller	Karen Thompson
Dan Altmaier	Ashley Heppner	Janice Miller	Kylie Tiller
Ser Anderson	Connie Herzig	Sharon Miller	Norma Tirrell
Susan Beale Spencer	Carl Hiltunen	Slim Miller	Stephen Turner
Lindsey Beasley	Liz Hiltunen	Mary Mullen	Jeff Van Tine
Ben Bejvan	Bruce Hodess	Lee Nelson	Raylene Wall
Sue Beldcher	Cindy Holder	Jim Oates	Rod Walette
Sherry Berrin	Jennifer Holm	Jessica Ostwalt	GINNY Waples
Gael Bissell	Sue Jackson	Lisa Pepper	Mark Ward
Heidi Bissell	Jett Johnson	Christine Peterson	Rebecca Ward
Dwayne Bondy	Kelvin Johnson	Barbara Pittman	Shellie Wherley
Steve Bowers	Piper Johnson	Cindy Poett	Catherine Wightman
Bill Bucher	Ruth Johnson	Harry Poett	Tom Wittinger
Gerard Byrd	Carolyn Jones	Martha Powers Swanson	
Charles Canterbury	Christine Jones	Chris Rapich	Thanks also to the
Elaine Canton	Jake Jost	Pennie Reed	following groups
Joe Chilcoat	Rich Jost	Shawn Richardson	of volunteers:
DeeDee Cress	Tami Jost	Beth Riggs	
Mark Cress	Theresa Kapust	Sherry Ritter	Audubon Center
Boo Curry	Hannah Knick	Wes Roemmich	Fledglings Families
Jill Davies	Boris Krizek	Eileen Ryce	Audubon Center
Peggy Detienne	Lisa Kvarniae	Allie Sandoval	LINKS Mentors
Cody Devres	Jo Lace	Shane Sater	Boy Scout Pack 3
Ronda Dishon	Gayle Lam	Sandy Schull	COR Enterprises
Mark Dunford	Kyle Lambdin	Sean Servis	Educational Talent
Katie Eaton	Kyle Lambdin	Morgan Sevier	Search Students
Cathie Erickson	Theodora Lambson	Rebecca Sharp-Hamlin	MSU-B Small Group
Ray Fadlovich	Ann Lauer	Rachel Shea	Communications
Danielle Farge	Billie Lee	Brian Shovers	National Honors
Bill Flemming	Gail Linne	Harold Silkwood	Society Students
Carol Flemming	Dan Lombardy	Don Skaar	Rimrock Foundation
Carol Fox	Jim MacIntyre	Lauren Smith	Riverside Builders Club
Christian Frazza	Lois MacIntyre	Valerie Stacey	RMC Freshmen
Alex Garner	David Mamayek	Danny Stark	Service Day
Tauzha Grantham	Rachel Manley	Linda Starr	Skyview High
Emily Hainer	Jacob Marshal	Sage Staven	Life Skills Class
Kaitlyn Harper	Nancy Matheson	Elle Stock	West High
Don Havig	Brian Mathis	Pete Strazdas	Life Skills Class

MEMORIAL GIFTS

Few tributes are as lasting as a gift that helps preserve Montana's birds and their habitats. We owe a special thanks to those of you who recently made a gift in memory of:

Pat Larmoyeux
Dwayne Zimmerman
Natalie Dietrich
Lorraine Hummel
Robert & Rachel Senner



Lazuli Bunting

Bob Marinka

What's Your Legacy?

A significant legacy for any conservationist is protecting outstanding habitats for native wildlife in perpetuity.



Important Bird Areas like Madison Valley and Ennis Lake, Owen Sowerwine Natural Area, and Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge, and are all reminders of human reverence for birds and other wildlife.

Ensure that this good work will continue by investing in a Montana Audubon Endowment. The gift principal is preserved in perpetuity; only the investment income from your gift can be spent to achieve lasting protection of wildlife and habitats. The original gift is never depleted, but continues to give, year after year.

Gift annuities are one of the simplest ways to convey a planned gift to Montana Audubon's endowments. In exchange for a transfer of cash or marketable securities, you can establish an annuity that guarantees annual payments to you, or you may choose to defer those payments, making additional funds available for Montana Audubon to help protect

places for birds, other native wildlife and the human spirit.

Montana donors may be eligible to receive significant tax advantages through the Montana Endowment Tax Credit. This program gives donors an incentive of 40 percent of the present value of a planned gift—up to \$10,000 annually—that can be taken as a direct credit (not deduction!) against your state income tax liability.

Contributions to Montana Audubon's endowments truly keep on giving. The Black Swifts, Harlequin Ducks and Greater Sage-Grouse win, the native cottonwood forests win, you win, and Montana Audubon's vital work continues.

For more information on how you may become a Montana Audubon endowment donor, please contact Norane Freistadt at norane@mtaudubon.org or at 406-443-3949.

NEW MONTANA eBIRD PORTAL LAUNCHED

It began with a simple concept — that every birdwatcher has unique knowledge and experience that can inform the scientific community. Today, eBird is the world's largest biodiversity-related citizen science project, with more than 100 million bird sightings contributed each year by birders through checklists that are archived and freely shared with others through a user-friendly website.

At our bird festival this year, we launched a new partnership with Cornell University to better connect Montana birders with the launching of Montana eBird. The web portal (www.ebird.org/mt) documents bird distribution, abundance, habitat use, and trends through checklist data collected within a simple, scientific framework. Montana birders can enter when, where, and

how they went birding, and then fill out a checklist of all the birds seen and heard during the outing. By simply adding /MT to the end of the eBird web address, you can access Montana-specific bird workshops, volunteer opportunities, sightings, rarities, recent photos, videos, and sound recordings. In addition, eBird's free mobile app also allows offline data collection anywhere in world, and the website provides many ways to explore and summarize your data and other observations from the global eBird community.



So next time you “eBird” don't forget to “slash MT-it” and see all the latest sighting in your state!

Eared Grebe

ANNUAL conservation FUND

Want to become a member of Montana Audubon and support our statewide conservation work? Give to our Annual Conservation Fund today!

Visit mtaudubon.org and click the gold “Support Us” button at the top of the page to learn more and to donate.

Many thanks for supporting Montana Audubon!

Bob Martinka



John Lambing

Save the Date!
June 7–9, 2019 in Glasgow

Montana Audubon is pleased to announce its 20th Wings Across the Big Sky bird festival, scheduled to take place in Glasgow, Montana on June 7–9, 2019. Our lead sponsor for the event is the American Prairie Reserve.

Presentations and field trips on grassland birds, prairie ecology and other unique features of Montana’s Glaciated Plains will be the focus this year. Please visit mtaudubon.org for updates and festival information in the coming months. We hope to see you there!



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