

Revised in 2008

# *A Planning Guide for Protecting Montana's Wetlands and Riparian Areas*



*A Planning Guide for Protecting  
Montana's  
Wetlands and Riparian Areas*

Written and Coordinated by

Janet H. Ellis

Jim Richard

Updated June 2008

This publication is a cooperative effort of

**Montana Watercourse  
Montana Department of Environmental Quality  
Montana Audubon**

Produced By  
Montana Watercourse  
PO Box 170575  
Montana State University  
Bozeman, MT 59717-0575  
[www.mtwatercourse.org](http://www.mtwatercourse.org)  
(406) 994-6671  
MTW-01-03 Updated 6/08

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# Acknowledgments

## Writing and Editing Team

Janet Ellis, Program Director for Montana Audubon, served as the primary author, researcher, and coordinator for this publication. Jim Richard, with over 30 years experience as a land use planning consultant, authored many of the land use planning tools and background information, and provided technical assistance and editorial advice throughout. Lynda Saul of the DEQ Wetlands Program assisted with project development and oversight, technical support, and funding. Karen Filipovich, Director of Montana Watercourse, provided project management, production of the final publication, and editorial advice.

## Review Team

A special thanks goes to the following individuals who provided sound advice, critical editorial counsel, and support for the project: Jackie Corday, Doris Fischer, Nancy Heil, and Mary Manning. We are also grateful to the dozens of contributors who either provided editorial advice on the publication as a whole or reviewed individual case studies: Mike Abrahamson, Gene Blackwell, Pat Byorth, Sarah Carlson, Karin Caroline, Tim Davis, Dennis Dellwo, Alan English, Karl Englund, Jeff Erickson, Jerry Grebenc, Ted Hawn, Tom Hinz, Randy Johnson, Todd Klietz, Karen Knudsen, Kris Knutson, Jennifer Madgic, David Martin, Joe Meek, Dennis Nelson, Helga Pac, Chris Phelps, Jolene Rieck, Frank Rives, Jody Sanford, Chris Saunders, Robin Steinkraus, Allan Steinle, Harold Stepper, Gary Sullivan, Mary Vandenbosch, Rich Weedle, Jim Wilbur, Wendy Williams, Amy Zarret, and Laurie Zeller.

Additional contributions were made by the following individuals: Denise Alexander, Jim Anderson, Tina Bernd-Cohen, Karl Christians, David Claman, Andy Dana, Linda Dworak, Jen Elliott, Jay Erickson, Bernie Hall, Ron Hanson, Dale Harkins, Rob Hazelwood, Mike Korn, Susan Lenerd, Randy Lilje, Brian Maiorano, Kathy Moore, Lindsay Morgan, Eric Mulcahy, Terry Murphy, Kate Supplee, Todd Teegarden, Charles van Hook, Doug Wicks, and Ellen Woodbury.

## Illustrations, Layout and Design Team

Illustrations, maps, and figures significantly improve the handbook's appearance. Joyce Bergen's drawings appear on the cover of the publication, as well as on the first page of each chapter. These drawings are reprinted with permission from the artist and the Washington State Department of Ecology; they originally appeared in the publication *Designing Wetlands* illustrations, locating the original artwork, and getting images scanned. Cedron Jones produced the case study maps. Geoff Wyatt, of Wyatt Designs, completed the figures 3,6, 7, and 8 on pages 2-3, 4-5, 4-6, and 4-8. Layout and design was provided by Janet Ellis of Montana Audubon, Devri Roubidoux of the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation and Michelle LeBeau of the Montana Watercourse.

## Sponsors

Financial support for the project came from the following agencies, foundations, and organizations: Montana Department of Environmental Quality; Environmental Protection Agency; Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks; Turner Foundation; Cinnabar Foundation; Montana Audubon; and the Montana Watercourse. The Department of Natural Resource & Conservation provided technical the support.

This document should be cited as:

Ellis, Janet, and Jim Richard. 2008. A Planning Guide for Protecting Montana's Wetlands and Riparian Areas. Revised edition. Bozeman, Mont., Montana Watercourse, publication MTW-01-03, 105 pp.

# *Acronyms*

ADID = Advanced Identification Process  
CIP = Capital Improvements Program  
Corps = Army Corps of Engineers  
CRJC = Connecticut River Joint Commission  
DEQ = Montana Department of Environmental Quality  
DNRC = Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation  
EPA = Environmental Protection Agency  
FEMA = Federal Emergency Management Agency  
FWP = Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
Heritage = Montana Natural Heritage Program  
LWQD = Local Water Quality Districts  
MCA = Montana Code Annotated  
MPDES = Montana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System  
MWCC = Montana Watershed Coordination Council  
NPDES = National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System  
NRCS = Natural Resources Conservation Service  
NRIS = Natural Resource Information System  
NWI = National Wetland Inventory  
PUD = Planned Unit Development  
SAMP = Special Area Management Plan  
SMZ = Streamside Management Zone Law  
TDR = Transfer of Development Rights  
USFWS = U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
USGS = U.S. Geological Survey  
WPCSRF = Water Pollution Control State Revolving Fund  
WRP = Wetland Reserve Program

# Preface

Montana's vast landscape and water resources are critical to the economy, public welfare, and the quality of life of the state's local communities. Each year, development and land use change modifies these resources. Wetlands and riparian areas, where water and land come together, are particularly sensitive to changes. As more and more people choose to build homes, recreate, or otherwise utilize the land next to Montana's streams, rivers, lakes, and ponds, and as property values increase, the pressures to develop these areas are increasing—often to the detriment of the very qualities that attracted buyers in the first place.

Wetlands and riparian areas are some of the most productive and valuable of Montana's natural areas, providing a wide variety of environmental and human benefits. The benefits of these two resources for local communities include:

- Improving water quality by filtering sediments and toxins out of water;
- Recharging wells and ground water supplies;
- Providing flood control;
- Enriching open space;
- Increasing real property values and marketability because of aesthetic attributes;
- Enhancing fish and wildlife habitat; and
- Improving recreational opportunities.

Many of the impacts to wetlands and riparian areas can be avoided by land use planning decisions made at the local level. This handbook is designed to assist local government officials, planning boards and planning staff, landowners, developers, community members, and other Montanans in identifying and using land use planning tools, both to advance local interests and to contribute to the protection of wetland and riparian resources. The handbook describes:

- *Chapter 1:* Why local governments should protect wetlands and riparian areas;
- *Chapter 2:* Montana's wetland and riparian resources;
- *Chapter 3:* How to build a local protection program;
- *Chapter 4:* How to develop on-the-ground conservation measures;
- *Chapter 5:* How Montana's land use planning tools can be used in protection efforts; and
- *Chapter 6:* Other tools and resources that may help local governments in their conservation work.

Wetlands include marshes, ponds, potholes, sloughs, and other areas covered with shallow water during all or part of the year. Riparian areas are the green zones of native vegetation next to rivers, streams, and drainages. Because of their similarities, both wetlands and riparian areas are covered in this guide.