

Clean and abundant water is vital to Montanans, our thriving communities and economies, and all of the biological organisms with whom we share the planet. As Montanans, our Constitution guarantees our fundamental right to a “clean and healthful environment”, including clean water. With just 1% of Montana under the cover of surface water, we must prioritize water management policies that preserve this limited resource. We recognize the importance of putting water to beneficial uses, and we acknowledge the state’s prior appropriation doctrine, that requires a water user to have a water right to put water to beneficial use and recognizes “first in right, first in time.” We also recognize the often significant connection between ground and surface waters and the need to retain flows for maintaining healthy wildlife populations and wildlife habitat. Native wildlife disproportionately relies on water-based habitats, including over 50% of the bird species nesting in Montana. We take the threat of decreased stream flow seriously and therefore support policies that allow water to be purchased for instream flows and efforts to limit the number and uses of exempt wells.



Beyond supporting abundant water, we also support high water quality standards. Scientifically sound management of municipal water systems, wastewater treatment facilities, public water project development, and air pollution all contributes to improving water quality. Additionally, supporting a transition to renewable energy directly contributes to improved water quality. There is an urgency in protecting our water from a diversity of contaminants including phosphates, agricultural runoff, industrial pollutants, and emerging pollutants, regardless of their source. Beyond maintaining clean and abundant water, proactive policy can provide for habitat enhancement and restoration activities.

The policy of Montana Audubon regarding Water Quality & Quantity is to:

- Educate the public and decision makers about the connections between water quality and quantity and the health of our communities
- Educate the public and decision makers about the connections between water quality and quantity and healthy wildlife habitats and species populations
- Support an enforceable and broadly protective Clean Water Act
- Advocate for the responsible allocation of water in closed basins, especially concerning exempt wells
- Educate the public and decision makers about emerging environmental pollutants, like caffeine, and the impacts on water quality
- Encourage development and application of scientifically sound management techniques to reduce water quality and quantity degradation and to reclaim and restore degraded water-based habitats
- Support programs and practices designed to enhance retention of surface water in its watershed of origin and to conserve natural reservoirs of underground water