

Wetland and riparian habitat makes up less than 4% of Montana's landscape yet provide a disproportionate value to our native wildlife's life-cycle needs. Wetlands, lakes, rivers, and streams provide important ecosystem functions, including: recharge groundwater, maintain base stream flows for fish and wildlife, supply crucial water for irrigation and human use, prevent flooding, and support downstream ecosystems by processing nutrients and pollution, and retaining sediment. These habitats also support a significant portion of Montana's outdoor economy, generating income for many Montanans and helping sustain small communities. Since these areas are so critical but so small, they must be protected. Montana Audubon recognizes that policy governing water and riparian areas is expansive; involves many players; and is spread across local, state, and federal levels.



This mix of legislative bodies results in a web of water quality standards, water use regulations (including the prior appropriation doctrine) water use and development permits, water body designations (like outstanding resource waters or Wild and Scenic), and statutes pertaining to streambeds, lakeshores, floodplains, private ponds, impact wildlife habitat. But sound wetland and riparian habitat management practices can provide for development alongside conservation and the enhancement or restoration of degraded habitats.

The policy of Montana Audubon regarding Wetlands & Riparian is to:

- Educate the public and decision makers about the importance of water-based habitats and the critical role they play for native species, human communities, and ecosystems
- Support strong water quality and quantity regulations
- Support the strict regulation of land use activities, like logging, close to riparian and wetland areas
- Support funding for management and eradication of noxious and invasive species that affect wetland and riparian areas
- Educate the public about the various values of unaltered streams, riparian areas, and wetlands to wildlife, ecosystem health, and community health
- Encourage mitigation and monitoring when disruption or development of wetland and riparian areas cannot be avoided
- Encourage and support the monitoring of restoration projects to inform best management practices and improve wildlife habitat restoration methods
- Advocate for the inclusion of standards-based conservation education in schools in Montana and across the country