

POSITION STATEMENT
of the
MONTANA CHAPTER OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY
Motorized Recreation in Wildlife Habitat

The Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society is a professional association of biologists active in wildlife research, management, education, and administration. The goal of the Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society (TWS) is scientific management of Montana's wildlife resources and their habitats. The principle objectives of the Society are: 1) to develop and promote sound stewardship of wildlife resources and of the environment upon which wildlife and humans depend; 2) to actively participate in programs designed to diminish human-induced environmental degradation; 3) to increase awareness and appreciation of wildlife values; and 4) to seek the highest standards in all activities of the wildlife profession.

While appreciating the popularity of various forms of motorized recreation, members of the Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society recognize that the potential for adverse impact to wildlife resources will attend extensive expansion of mechanized recreational use of public lands and waterways. In addition to biological and ecological concerns, it is also evident that ethical aspects of mechanized relationships with wildlife need to be addressed. Issues pertaining to wildlife include fair chase concepts associated with hunting, both purposeful and indirect harassment, disruption and habituation of wildlife, as well as issues associated with responsible viewing and appreciation of wildlife.

Substantial advancements in the technology of motorized recreation has rendered most traditional public land travel plans insufficient. Responsible resource management demands that provisions for motorized recreation be carefully planned and implemented to prevent irreplaceable wild land and biological communities from diminishing or becoming irreparably compromised.

Wildlife habitat management responsibilities on public land in Montana rests with the following agencies: U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Refuge System), National Park Service, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (School Trust Lands) and Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (Wildlife Management Areas). The Montana Chapter of TWS urges these agencies, as public land natural resource stewards to:

- comprehensively address travel management on public lands through revision and implementation of travel plans based on full compliance with their respective enabling legislation¹,
- follow impact disclosure and public participation processes defined by the National Environmental Policy Act and the Montana Environmental Policy Act, and
- assure that proposed motorized recreation projects receive full wildlife evaluation, and individually comply with all regulations.

Conscientious implementation of applicable regulations will help to assure protection of fully functional wildlife habitat on public lands.

Wildlife management responsibility in Montana resides with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP). Motorized recreation programs administered by MFWP include the:

- * **Montana Snowmobile Grant Program** (Snowmobile Registration Decal Fees, 23-3-616 M.C.A.; Montana Distributors Gasoline Tax, 60-3-201(b)(5), M.C.A)
- * **Montana Motorboat Program** (Motorboat Registration Decal Fees 23-2-516, 23-2-533 M.C.A.; Montana Distributors Gasoline Tax, 60-3-201 M.C.A.)
- * **Montana Off-Highway Vehicle Program** (OHV Decal Fees, 23-2-804 M.C.A.; Montana Distributors Gasoline Tax, 60-3-201(6)(b))
- * **National Recreational Trails Act** (or Symms National Recreation Trails Act of 1991).

The Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society urges the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission, in exerting its budget control and policy-making responsibility over MFWP, to assure that the following concerns are addressed when the motorized recreation program funding sources are utilized:

- fully evaluate wildlife sensitivity and habitat effectiveness as they may be compromised by implementation of motorized recreation projects and programs,
- comprehensively address the ramifications of motorized impacts on biological, ecological, aesthetic and traditional values,
- obtain and evaluate information necessary to make informed decisions about implementation of motorized recreation proposals on public land wildlife habitats.

To this end, the Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society encourages allocation of funds from the aforementioned programs dedicated to environmental review, research, education and enforcement. It is recommended that these resources be dedicated as necessary to obtain wildlife information in areas identified as sensitive, or defer motorized recreation projects until the required information becomes available. The objective of these allocations would be to assure that the motorized recreational vehicle Programs administered by MFWP are responsible to, and compatible with, Montana's natural resources including wildlife, air, water, soils and vegetation.

The Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society resolves to convene a committee to address *Motorized Recreation in Wildlife Habitat*, to assist wildlife and land management agencies in developing **guidelines** to address habitat and sensitivity needs of wildlife that should be considered in the planning and implementation of motorized access projects.

The committee will monitor the travel planning efforts and grant programs over the coming year and periodically report to the Executive Board regarding agency progress toward adoption and further development of these recommendations.

The Montana Chapter of the Wildlife Society, in its commitment to preserving our wildlife heritage, pledges to utilize the full extent of our professional expertise when addressing programs that have the potential to compromise what many generations of resource conservationists and managers have protected and passed to our custody.

Adopted: March 5, 1997

1. USFS - National Forest Management Act; BLM - Federal Land Policy and Management Act; Bureau of Reclamation - Public Law 89-72; USFWS - National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act P.L.89-669 and Refuge Recreation Act P.L.87-714; National Park Service Organic Act of 1966; MDNRC 77-1-203 M.C.A.; MFWP 87-1-201 M.C.A.)