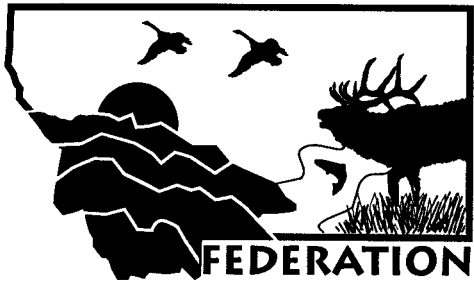


# MONTANA WILDLIFE



## **I Hunt – I Fish – I Vote Giving Back!**

Montana has the highest number/per capita of resident hunters and anglers (more than 232,000) in the country; imagine the potential voting power. According to statistics from the U.S.F.W.S., if all hunters and anglers living in Montana would have voted in the 2004 presidential elections we would have equaled 90% of Montana's entire vote.

How important is a candidate's position on wildlife, hunting and fishing issues? The same research indicates that 8 in 10 of voting sportsmen and sportswomen said that a candidate's position on related issues – is a determining factor of how they will vote.

Hunting and fishing are also economically powerful. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks reports more than \$1 billion are generated from hunting and fishing – annually. Hunter and angler spending supports approximately 11,500 jobs with more than \$270 million. A comparison between the average cash receipts from wheat of approximately \$688 million, and cash receipts from hunting and fishing of \$721 million is an eye-opener.

All of these figures, and there is plenty more supporting evidence, demonstrate the power and immense potential that hunters and anglers can have on decision makers and policies.

Real change can only be accomplished by citizen action. Whether passing public access bridge/right-of-way legislation, management plans for fish and wildlife, balancing the needs of wildlife with the need for energy sources, evaluating hunting and fishing regulations, or travel management planning – citizen participation is crucial.

As we go about our daily lives, trying to make a living, running out on the weekends to take our children fishing or to enjoy some "down time" casting a fly, pursuing elk, deer, or pronghorn to fill the freezer, going afield with our favorite trained or "less than well trained" retrievers, pointers and setters, or camping – its often easy to forget how much goes into preserving these opportunities. Grassroots efforts, local hunter and angler groups and organized state groups dedicate thousands of hours assuring that we can all enjoy these outdoor experiences. The fish and wildlife diversity we sustain today and the quality of hunting and fishing opportunities are available not by accident.

The I HUNT I FISH I VOTE message in this edition does not target any individual wildlife, hunting or fishing issue – it considers an issue large in scope – it is a reminder to not take what we enjoy for granted. If hunters and anglers want to ensure these opportunities we cannot be apathetic, we cannot just head out the door and always expect to find elk in that favorite spot or our streams filled with world class trout.

It's time to give back! It doesn't require an individual to have a fat checkbook or to contribute hundreds of hours lobbying. Supporting and contributing to local and state wide issues can mean writing a letter or making a phone call to a policy maker or your local newspaper; ten or twenty letters in comparison to a hundred, two hundred or more communications will influence decisions. Contributing \$10, \$20, or \$50 to an organized group for an entire year combined with other contributors can make or break a budget that can successfully move forward a specific issue – for instance bridge access along county roads. Ask yourself, how much was that recent trip with a son or daughter to the lake to cast a bobber or to the forest to spot bighorn sheep really worth? And, what are Montana hunting, fishing, and outdoor opportunities really worth to the more than 170,000 non-resident hunters and anglers?

Adding your name to a letter, making a phone call, or contributing financially can make the difference in Montana's wildlife, hunting and fishing future – it really takes very little time. Whether you join an email network such as is available through many clubs in Montana and MWF, or simply send \$20 to a local club or a state organization – it is time for sportsmen and sportswomen to give back for all that we enjoy.

In November we will elect policy makers that will determine our wildlife, hunting and fishing future. PLEASE VOTE! Who we entrust to represent our interests is just as vital as recognizing the values of grassroots efforts to preserve our outdoor and wildlife opportunities and giving back. We cannot take either for granted.

