



Access to Public Lands

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Perspective

FWP's Mission and Vision

► Mission Statement

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks through its employees and citizen commission and board, provides for the stewardship of the fish, wildlife, parks, and recreational resources of Montana, while contributing to the quality of life for present and future generations.

► Vision Statement

Montana is a place where people have abundant opportunities to connect with the world-renowned fish, wildlife, and state parks resources that define our state, and where a responsive and relevant FWP has the resiliency and public support it needs to lead the way in making sure these resources remain an essential part of Montana's culture, economy, and high quality of life.

About Montana FWP—who are we?

- ▶ 700 + employees,
- ▶ Organized into Fisheries, Wildlife, Parks, Enforcement, and Communication-Education, and Technology Services Divisions
- ▶ 8 employees fully dedicated to access for the public--to both private and public lands,
- ▶ Many more employees work constantly on access issues (game wardens, area biologists, etc.)
- ▶ FWP is a land-owner: wildlife management areas, fishing access sites, state parks, and conservation easements

Why is public land access important to FWP?

- ▶ For hunting
- ▶ For fishing
- ▶ For river and terrestrial recreation (55 state parks)
- ▶ For habitat
- ▶ For wildlife population management
- ▶ For research and science





Yellowstone Wildlife Management Area

FWP has 83 Wildlife Management Areas across the state to maintain vital habitat and provide for public enjoyment. WMA's also provide access to adjacent state and federal lands.



Haymaker

Wildlife Management Area

In 1957 the Montana Fish & Game Commission purchased this Wildlife Management Area using sportsmen's dollars from hunting license fees. The area provides winter range for big game and spring calving grounds for elk. The area is managed to conserve wildlife habitat for future generations.



*Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks*

Fishing Access Sites

Montana has 332 fishing access sites

- ▶ FAS's on streams, rivers and lakes
- ▶ From one to several hundred acres in size
- ▶ Used for angling, boating, rafting, hunting, hiking, wildlife viewing, and picnicking
- ▶ Camping is available at some FAS's for a small fee
- ▶ Funding to purchase FASs has come from angling license dollars, federal match to the license dollars, and motorboat registration fees
- ▶ There is no charge to use FASs



Boulder Forks Fishing Access Site

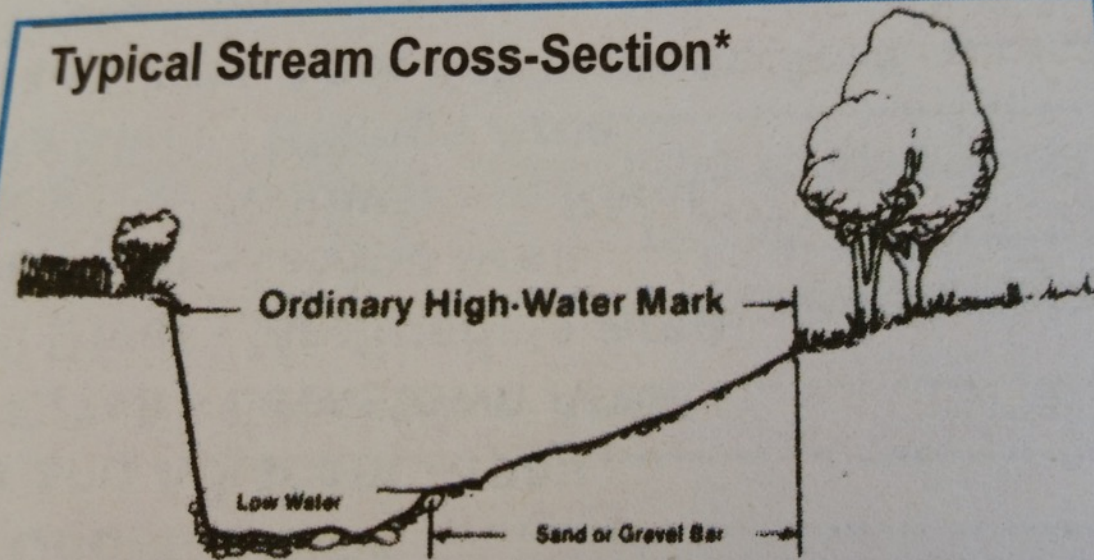
Montana's 1985 Stream Access Law

The generally says: All surface waters capable of recreational use may be so used by the public without regard to ownership of the land underlying the waters.

The access law states that, when legal access is gained to a stream or river, recreationists may legally go up and down a stream from that point as long as they stay within the high water mark.

Anglers or recreationists may not take short cuts across private property or walk above the high water mark when following the stream or river, or when exiting the river without prior landowner permission.

Typical Stream Cross-Section*



* Although this is typical of some stream cross-sections, many other situations exist. Also, vegetation such as grass, sedges or willows can exist within the ordinary high-water marks. When in doubt, refer to the definition of ordinary high-water mark.

Block Management Program

- ▶ Cooperative program between FWP and private landowners
- ▶ Voluntary for landowners—they can determine species and time restrictions
- ▶ Funded by license sales through annual contracts
- ▶ 1300 landowners and 7.3 million acres enrolled for the 2018 hunting season
- ▶ Tracts range from 50 to 100,000 acres
- ▶ Land owners receive a complimentary sportsman license package, liability protection, livestock loss reimbursement, signs, sign-in books, and patrol, plus up to \$15,000/year payment



BMA's provide hunting opportunities on private land and adjacent public lands sometimes only accessible through the BMA

Other access programs

- ▶ Unlocking Public Lands: \$750 state tax credit to landowners who allow access through their property to state and federal land
- ▶ HB 454: for elk permit areas, 1:4 ratio of permits to landowner: public. Landowner and permittees can only hunt on lands made available to the general public. No transferability.
- ▶ Access easements

Why does FWP need access to public lands?

- ▶ Access to wildlife populations—provide opportunity for hunting and wildlife viewing, provide for survey and inventory, and provide for population management
- ▶ Access to streams—provide opportunity for angling and survey and inventory
- ▶ Access to recreation opportunities
- ▶ Access to deal with wildlife conflicts

Conclusions

Access is
incredibly
important to
FWP's mission

FWP expends
considerable
time and funds
to maintain and
acquire access

FWP uses all
tools available
to address
access needs

Access will
continue to be a
challenge with
changing private
land ownership
and land use
patterns