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Montana Natural Heritage Program Honored with Multiple Awards

(HELENA)---The Montana Natural Heritage Program (MTNHP), a program of the Montana State Library that is operated by the University of Montana, was recently honored with two awards that recognize its work in making information on Montana's diverse species and habitats more widely accessible.

MTNHP was presented with the NatureServe Scientific and Technological Achievement Award "in recognition of outstanding and innovative efforts to provide scientific basis for conservation decisions" at the 2015 Biodiversity Without Boundaries Conference. This award recognizes MTNHP's work in making the vast amounts of data more widely available and more easily accessible, primarily through its new on-line "Species Snapshot", which can be found at <http://mtnhp.org/SpeciesSnapshot/>.

The Species Snapshot allows interested persons to search nine types of species (mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, invertebrates, vascular plants, bryophytes, and lichens) using various filters, including: statewide; county; senate or house district; BLM Field Office; forest boundary; FWP Region; and township. Species can also be sorted by "Status", which informs users how that species ranks as indicated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, or MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks, among others.

"The work of the Natural Heritage Program serves as the backbone of major decisions related to conservation and development in Montana," said Allan Cox, MTNHP Program Manager. "Our scientists are out in the field and we partner with many other state and federal agencies to collect data that provide better and more effective management of Montana's natural resources. We also make the data available online and we are continuously thinking of innovative ways to make this vast amount of information even more accessible to other public agencies, scientists, industry, land managers, and the general public."

MTNHP also won this award in 2006.

MTNHP was also honored as a 2015 Montana Wetland Stewardship Award Recipient for its work in digital mapping of Montana wetlands and riparian areas. New digital mapping based

on high resolution aerial imagery has identified more than two million acres of wetlands and 600,000 acres of riparian areas in Montana. These maps, available in multiple electronic formats, provide crucial data for protection, restoration, conservation, and management. Managers, planners, scientists, and watershed groups now have fast, free access to information on the type, size, location, and distribution of wetland and riparian resources.

These maps, one of 15 official Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data layers for the State, are used at every level of government and in the private sector, and are being incorporated into statewide hydrography and land cover data sets as the most current source of water resource mapping. Approximately 80% of Montana's riparian and wetland areas have been mapped. View the MTNHP Wetland and Riparian Mapping Center at: <http://mtnhp.org/nwi/>.

"We are extremely proud of our team at the Montana Natural Heritage Program," said Cox. "Their dedication, thoroughness, and innovation in making information about Montana's species and ecosystems available for free to anyone who is interested is unparalleled."

Learn more about the Montana Natural Heritage Program and access its information at: <http://mtnhp.org>.

Through its statewide programs, the Montana State Library empowers Montanans; enhances learning in families and communities; builds 21st Century skills; and provides opportunities for civic participation. For more information about the Montana State Library, visit <http://msl.mt.gov> or contact Sara Groves, Marketing and Communications Coordinator, at (406) 444-5357 or via e-mail at: sgroves@mt.gov.

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