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The Newsletter of the Montana Natural Heritage Program

Spring 2006

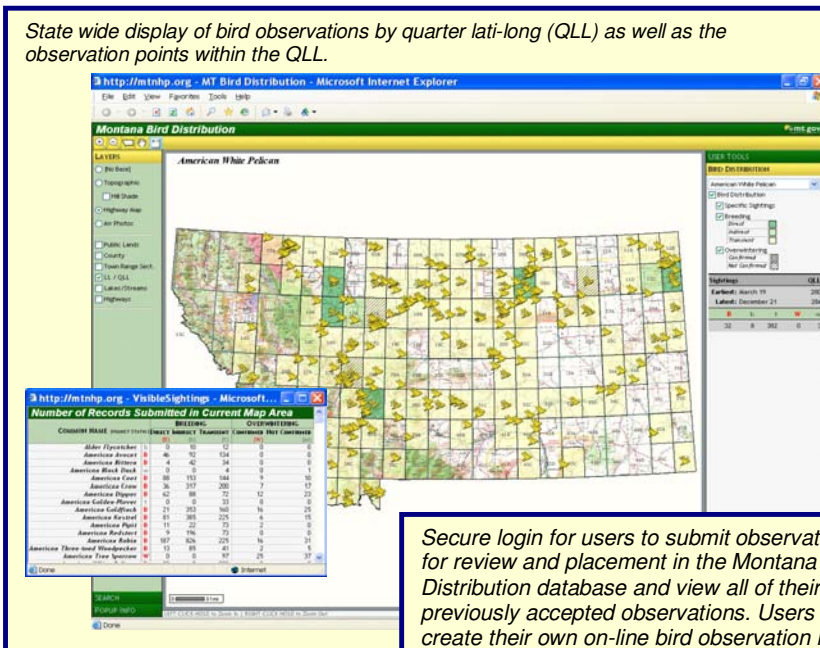
NEW WEB PORTAL LAUNCHED

We are excited to announce the Natural Heritage Information Portal, a new state-of-the-art web tool for accessing information on Montana's biological resources. The first version – now available on our website – serves the Montana Bird Distribution database, which displays the statewide distribution of bird species by quarter

degree of latitude and longitude, consistent with P.D. Skaar's Montana Bird Distribution publication (Lenard et al. 2003).

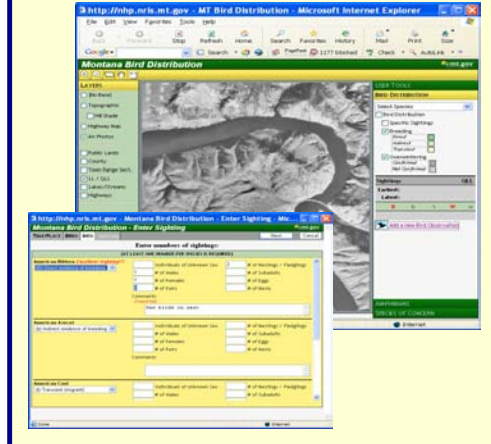
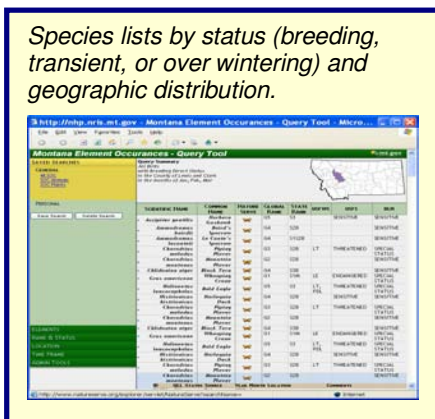
Using this new tool, anyone wishing to contribute data can enter precise locations for bird sightings in an easy-to-use, map-based interface. Users can also view detailed information on sightings they have entered,

State wide display of bird observations by quarter lati-long (QLL) as well as the observation points within the QLL.



Secure login for users to submit observations for review and placement in the Montana Bird Distribution database and view all of their previously accepted observations. Users create their own on-line bird observation lists.

Species lists by status (breeding, transient, or over wintering) and geographic distribution.



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as well as general locations for all records statewide. Several different base maps can be selected, including the state highway map, topographic and shaded relief maps, and air photos.

The Future...

The NHIPortal will expand to become our principle tool for disseminating Natural Heritage Program data. As time and funding allow, we will be adding data on other animals, plants, and ecosystems. Among the datasets targeted for addition over the next year are:

- Amphibian observations and photos from the Montana Amphibian Inventory Project
- Statewide aquatic data linked to our ecological classification of streams and rivers
- Animal observations from the NHP/MFWP Point Observation Database.
- Element Occurrences for Plant and Animal Species of Concern, linked to Field Guide information.

Contact: Allan Cox
(444-3989)



Director's Scope: Changes Behind the Scenes

For more than 20 years, the Montana Natural Heritage Program benefited from a unique partnership between the Montana State Library and The Nature Conservancy, with the Conservancy operating the program under contract with the state. This will change on July 1, 2006, as the University of Montana takes over that contract to administer the Natural Heritage Program. Fortunately, this change will be virtually invisible to most partners and users, as great care has been taken to ensure that all the program's services, staff and other strengths will remain in place.

This decision resulted from a thorough study that began in the fall of 2004. Several options were considered, including transferring staff and full operational responsibility into state government, or transferring the contract to a university or other non-profit. Since the NHP is assigned by statute to the State Library, management by another entity can occur only under a contract with the Library. Continued management by TNC was also considered, although political and financial factors have lessened the benefits of that arrangement over the years.

We gathered extensive stakeholders input through a Web survey and the NRIS Advisory Committee, which identified several factors key to the Heritage Program's success:

1. The politically neutral setting and information-focused mission of the State Library.
2. The strong methodological framework shared with the larger Heritage Network.

3. The great diversity of partnerships and funding.
4. The highly dedicated and entrepreneurial staff.
5. A relatively high level of independence and autonomy.

Based on this input, we identified several "Guiding Principles" for evaluating alternatives, to ensure that any changes would maintain the Program's strengths and record of success. Included in these principles were:

- Ensuring no change in NHP products and services to partners and users.
- Retaining existing staff talent and expertise.
- Keeping all components of the program together as a unit under single management.
- Retaining all funding sources and levels, and increasing financial security.
- Maintaining diversity of partnerships and flexibility in partnering, with no increase in administrative costs.
- Maintaining the program's political neutrality and autonomy, and its focus on providing high quality scientific information.
- Keeping the program within the State Library's Natural Resource Information System.
- Finding a managing institution that strongly desires and values the program, will advocate effectively for it, and is committed to sustaining it.

The option that best met these Guiding Principles was to transfer the NHP contract from TNC to the University of Montana. This approach would keep the program within the State Library and retain all services, funding and partnerships. In addition, because of the University's flexibility, this option would result in the least disruption for staff. The University has been enthusiastic about taking on administration – and providing additional support – for the NHP, with endorsements from several academic departments, all the way up to the President's Office.

Negotiations are nearly complete between TNC, the State Library and the University, and the transfer is scheduled for July 1, 2006. The NHP will be operated as a special program under the Office of the Vice President for Research & Development. The current NHP program and staff will remain in place, ensuring full continuity of partnerships and services. All projects and funding agreements will be transferred to the University and carried out as planned.

As a result of this assessment, we've formed an NHP Partners Committee to provide ongoing input and to improve communication with and among partners. The Partners Committee will also help ensure that we stay on-target in meeting the needs of our constituency.

I want to say a special "Thanks!" to the many agencies and individuals who provided input and participated in meetings and spirited discussions to help us work through this major challenge. It would not have been possible without your honest input and good advice!

Contact: Sue Crispin
(444-3019)

MTNHP Wins Major Award

Montana received the 2006 "Outstanding Technological Advancement Award" for a natural heritage program at NatureServe's International Leadership Conference in April. This award recognizes an impressive array of ground-breaking accomplishments by MTNHP staff, including:

- innovative new tools for accessing data via the web,
- new, more objective ranking procedures for species' status assessment,
- automating the creation of Element Occurrence records, thereby doubling

our holdings from 6,000 to 12,000 records in just one year; and

- adding quality ranks to all of our plant Species of Concern EO's.

The Montana Natural Heritage Program was selected for this award from the network of 75 natural heritage programs and conservation data centers in the Western Hemisphere, which are coordinated by our international affiliate, NatureServe.

All the achievements recognized through this award have focused on delivering more accurate, comprehensive and current information to our users – in formats that are easy to access and utilize. We're far from satisfied, however – our new Strategic Plan (page 5) reaches even higher, as MTNHP staff continue innovating to meet Montanan's needs for information about our unique natural heritage.

Contact: Sue Crispin
(444-3019)

Huge Database Updates Underway

Major changes have occurred, and more are coming, in the NHP databases. Over the past year, NHP staff have mounted a huge push to enter new information on species occurrences and observations. As a result, our Element Occurrence (EO) database has **more than doubled** in size since this time last year — going from 6000 to over 15,000 records — and another 25,000 records were added to the Point Observation Database (POD)! Major enhancements to various datasets are summarized below.

Plant Occurrence Database

Over 300 new occurrence records have been added to the Plant Species of Concern database, primarily from field surveys, but also from herbarium records. In addition, about 750 existing EO's were remapped with greatly improved precision; many were old records formerly represented on our maps by very large circles denoting "general" locations. Using collection and habitat data, staff were able to narrow the potential area of occurrence to, say, a lakeshore or roadside.

Animal Observation and Occurrence Databases

The Montana NHP maintains two primary databases on animal species distributions: Observations and Occurrences. The Point Observation Database (POD) tracks observations of species — the most basic type of locational data. Over the past year, we have added 25,000 new POD records and cleaned up an additional 26,000 records! (Special credit goes to Scott Blum, for much of the heavy lifting on this massive effort!)

Observations form the raw material for creating Occurrences — areas of confirmed breeding. In the past, creating Element Occurrence records for animals was a time consuming, one by one process. Montana NHP staff have led the heritage network in modernizing this process, by developing new semi-automated procedures for batch-loading validated records from POD directly into the Element Occurrence database. This creates a huge time savings and makes it possible to add hundreds of records at a time. For example Database Coordinator Karen Walker was able to create 638 new EO's in a single day; in the past, each EO could take up to several person-hours to process.

Taking advantage of these new procedures, our zoologists and data management staff have completed EO processing for 40 animal Species of Concern, including 20 that had no previous records in the database. We now have nearly 12,000 animal EO records (compared to 4,000 just a year ago).

Despite these great advances in efficiency, there's still a large volume of data to be processed. Over the coming months we will be working through this backlog, and applying new procedures and standards to fully review and update virtually all of our animal occurrence records. As a result, you will continue to see major improvements in our animal distribution data.

New Inferred Extent

Another addition to our Element Occurrence database over this past year is Inferred Extent. This feature expands the Element Occurrence, which is based strictly on where a plant or animal was actually observed, to include the surrounding area that is likely occupied based on home range and/or habitat. This adds a new level of biologically meaningful information to our Element Occurrences. Inferred extent has now been mapped for Sage Grouse and black-tailed prairie dogs, as well as several other species. You will see Inferred Extent on our data request maps and agency data portals. These new polygons cover a much greater area than was mapped for just the Element Occurrences.

Montana is the first state in the heritage network to implement Inferred Extent as a new level of information for our users. We feel that it will be extremely valuable and provide a more accurate representation of Species of Concern on the landscape. Inferred Extent is part of a comprehensive new mapping hierarchy that MTNHP has developed for animal species. This hierarchy is comprised of — going from small to large scale — observations, Element Occurrences, Inferred Extent, predicted habitat and state range. Staff will be working over the next year to add Inferred Extent as EO's are updated on a species by species basis. We hope to begin mapping predicted habitat areas by 2008.

Contact: Bryce Maxell (444-3655) or
Allan Cox (444-3989)

New Reports at <http://mtnhp.org>

- **Aquatic Surveys and Assessment within the Middle Powder River Watershed**, *May 2006*
- **An Integrative Biological Assessment of Sites in the Custer National Forest Ashland District**, *April 2006*
- **Riparian Bat Surveys in Eastern Montana**, *April 2006*
- **Montana's Rocky Mountain Front: Vegetation Map and Type Descriptions**, *February 2006*
- **Birds of Blaine County, Riparian Point Count Surveys 2005**, *January 2006*
- **Bat Surveys on USFS Northern Region Lands in Montana: 2005**, *December 2005*
- **Inventory of Plants, Plant Communities, and Herpetofauna of Concern in the Vicinity of the Snow-Talon Burn, Helena National Forest**, *December 2005*
- **Watershed Assessment of the Cottonwood and Whitewater Watersheds**, *December 2005*
- **Surveys of Significant Plant Resources and Related Vegetation Types for the Butte Office of the Bureau of Land Management**, *November 2005*
- **Aquatic Community Classification and Ecosystem Diversity in Montana's Missouri River Watershed**, *September 2005*
- **Conservation strategy for *Silene spaldingii* (Spalding's catchfly) in Montana**, *September 2005*
- **Bat use of highway bridges in south-central Montana**, *August 2005*

Botany Updates

Spalding's Catchfly Status Assessment

Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*) is one of only three Montana plant species listed as "threatened" under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (USFWS 2001). It is restricted to the inland Pacific Northwest, ranging from eastern Washington and northeast Oregon to north-central Idaho, northwest Montana and just into adjacent British Columbia.

While Montana supports just 15% of this species' total range-wide populations, we do host the largest population at The Nature Conservancy's Dancing Prairie Preserve. Estimated at 10,000 plants minimum, this population alone comprises a significant percentage of the total plants known range-wide. Other sizeable populations in Montana occur on the Flathead Indian Reservation and the Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge.

Typical Montana habitat for this plant is rough fescue grasslands on rolling kettle/drumlin topography, swales, minor draws,

and north slopes where moisture remains available a little longer into the growing season compared to adjacent drier slopes.

These sites often occur near the lower treeline or with scattered Ponderosa pine.

A range-wide status assessment of Spalding's catchfly, written in 2004, contained relatively outdated information for Montana. Thanks to survey work in 2004 and 2005 by MTNHP botanist Scott Mincemoyer (funded by the US



Spalding's Catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*)

Fish & Wildlife Service), we now have an up-to-date Montana Conservation Assessment (available on our website). Scott used predicted habitat modeling to help him locate two new populations, bringing the number of extant occurrences in Montana to eleven. Survey work is challenging because Spalding's catchfly can stay below-ground, especially during dry years, resulting in populations being overlooked or undercounted.

Observations Wanted!!

Remember to send us new observations for Species of Concern, so we can improve our databases. You can enter observations with our on-line Form or download field survey forms to complete and send in. Now you can also submit information on areas of high quality habitat or ecological significance!

Click "Submit Data" on our homepage:

mtnhp.org

Unfortunately, Montana populations continue to be vulnerable to invasive weeds; habitat loss and fragmentation, particularly in the Tobacco Plains; and to impacts associated with grazing, fire exclusion and small, isolated populations. Based on current information, successful conservation will depend on protecting existing populations, improving habitat condition, rebuilding populations, mitigating impacts of invasive weeds and grazing, and renewed monitoring and survey efforts.

For now, the MTNHP rank for this species remains S1 due to its combined rarity and the level of threats to populations. However, opportunities for beneficial management in Montana should be high since the majority of populations are on lands administered by state or federal agencies, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes or The Nature Conservancy.

Contact: Scott Mincemoyer
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EO Ranks Now Available for Plants

"Element Occurrence Ranks" provide information on the quality and viability of an Element Occurrence. For example, an "A" rank indicates a large, high quality, viable occurrence; a "B" rank a good quality occurrence, a "C" rank only fair, and a "D" rank poor. EO Ranks are extremely useful for conservation planning and environmental review. However, until now, this information has been available for only about 10% of our plant records, because of the difficulty in assigning consistent and meaningful ranks with often-sparse information.

Botanist Scott Mincemoyer noticed this problem as he reviewed information to update ranks for Plant Species of Concern, since the status of individual populations is central to determining a species' biological status. Never one to get discouraged easily, Scott went to work and soon came up with

a strategy for assigning EO ranks to 99% of our nearly 3000 vascular plant EO's!

How did he do it? "Sometimes the available data is less than optimal for assigning an EO Rank," said Scott, "but in most cases enough data is available on abundance and habitat quality to make an educated guess." In general, he used abundance as the main criterion, followed by habitat quality (keeping in mind that some species can cope with habitat disturbances better than others).

General guidelines for assigning EO ranks were:

An "A" rank if abundance was greater than 1,000 individuals.

A "B" rank for those with 100-1,000 individuals (or as low as 50, depending on the species).

A "C" rank for occurrences with 10-50 individuals.

A "D" rank for those with less than 10 individuals.

A "Historical" rank to occurrences that had not been visited for 40 or more years.

When available data didn't fit one of these categories – e.g., an abundance statement like "500+ plants" or where the assessment was qualitative, such as "Abundant" or "Occasional", he assigned a range rank such as "AB" or "C?" Another complication was whether the collector or surveyor had counted genets or ramets. As with any data set, users of EO ranks need to understand the limitations of the data and the process used to create them.

Thanks to Scott's efforts, EO ranks for plants are now being provided in all Species of Concern data requests.

Contact: Scott Mincemoyer
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2006 Field Projects

mtnhp.org/about/projects.htm

- Wetland Mapping: The Status and Trend of Wetlands in Montana's Developing River Valleys (*Location: Bitterroot Valley*)
- Watershed Assessments: Lewistown Watershed
- Sagebrush Succession in Southeast Montana
- Montana Gap Mapping, Ecological Support (*Location: central and eastern Montana*)
- Enhancement of National Wetlands Inventory Classification and Mapping (*Location: Gallatin Valley*)
- Grassland Bird Response to Grazing in North Valley County
- Filling Data Gaps in Small Mammal Distributions in Montana (*Location: Statewide*)
- Inventory of Bats and Terrestrial Mollusks on U.S. Forest Service Lands (*Location: USFS Region 1*)
- Amphibian and Aquatic Reptile Inventory Program (*Location: Statewide*)
- Goshawk Status Assessment on the Kootenai National Forest
- Missoula (BLM) Plant Surveys
- Surveys for Globally Rare Plants (*Location: state-wide*)
- Surveys and Monitoring for *Silene spaldingii* (Spalding's catchfly) and *Howellia aquatilis* (Water howellia) (*Location: northwest Montana*)
- Surveys for Plant Species of Concern in Southeastern and Southcentral Montana
- Predictive Modeling of Rare Plant Species and Vegetation Types (*Location: southeast and southwest Montana*)

New Strategic Plan for MTNHP

The Mission of the Montana Natural Heritage Program is to be Montana's source for reliable, objective information and expertise to support stewardship of our native species and habitats, emphasizing those of conservation concern.

This statement kicks off our new 4-Year Strategic Plan. It was created with broad input from partners and information users, thanks to a Web survey that drew over 170 responses in the spring of 2005, including state & federal agencies and businesses, as well as non-profit organizations, academia, tribes, and private citizens. According to this survey, the biggest needs for biological resource information are:

- Data that is current, accurate and as comprehensive as possible
- Improved information on species status, including changes, trends, and key risks
- More extensive information on vegetation and habitats
- Greater availability of information via the Web

Our top-ranked products and services are:

1. Species of Concern Ranks / Lists
2. Field Surveys and species inventories
3. Staff expertise and consultation
4. Field Guides: on-line information about species and habitats

Land stewardship mapping and species/habitat management studies were also top priorities for some user groups.

Improving and expanding top-ranked services will be a big priority over the next four years. Right now, we're working particularly hard on a major update of our species distribution databases (see page 3) and on ecological mapping and documentation – focusing especially on wetlands and aquatic systems.

We feel that having a clear strategic plan is important to keep us focused on meeting the top needs of our partners and information users. By making our plan public, we also hope to build more awareness and understanding about what we're doing, and invite ongoing dialog about key information needs as well as our effectiveness in meeting them. Although this plan is intended to direct only the activities of the Natural Heritage Program, its success clearly depends on extensive cooperation with and major contributions from our many partners. Thanks to everyone who provided their insights!

The full 4-Year Strategic Plan is available on our website.

Contact: Sue Crispin
(444-3019)

Search Tool for Species of Concern

We now have a web tool that enables you to generate current lists of Species of Concern directly from our internal databases. Using this application, you can search for plant or animal groups using global and state ranks and/or federal agency status (US Fish and wildlife Service, the US Forest Service, and the US Bureau of Land Management). You can then download the resulting lists into a text file or a spreadsheet.

The search report also includes links to our Montana Plant and Animal Field Guides, which provide descriptive

information and photos, and links to NatureServe Explorer, where you can view rangewide status maps and obtain global summary information.

MTNHP still publishes updated Species of Concern reports on a semi-annual basis, however this new tool allows users to generate lists that reflect any changes to species status ranks or agency designations in the interim between printed publications.

You can access the Species of Concern Search at <http://mtnhp.org/speciesofconcern/>

Contact: Allan Cox
(444-3989)

Ecology Updates

Powder River Yields Rare Aquatic Insects

The Powder River is a vast drainage representing one of the last undammed, large prairie river systems in the United States. In southeastern Montana, it flows through a relatively intact natural landscape with sweeping meanders across the valley bottom, side channels, oxbows, shifting islands and a functional floodplain. The Powder also provides key habitat for several fish Species of Concern, as well as important riparian habitat for many wildlife species that inhabit the prairie landscape. In spite of their ecological importance, prairie rivers have received relatively little study in the past, compared to cold-water streams farther west that support the more popular sport fisheries.

Last summer, MTNHP biological survey efforts focused on the Powder River, with funding from the BLM, to provide better information for resource management and decision-making in this increasingly important area for energy development. Our biologists' work, though by no means comprehensive, was very productive. Some of the biggest discoveries, predictably, focused on the smallest and least-studied critters: aquatic invertebrates

Surveys by Aquatic Ecologist Dave Stagliano and Biologist Coburn Currier turned up three mayflies of very limited distribution in Montana as well as a dragonfly new to the state. The Brimstone Clubtail (*Stylurus intricatus*), a bright green dragonfly with black stripes, was found at four sampling sites upstream of Broadus in sandy gravel habitat. Although fairly widespread in central and western North America (G4 rank), this species had never been documented in Montana. (For good images, see www.southwestdragonflies.net.)

Even more exciting, one of the mayflies Dave found was *Anepeornis rusticus* a sand-dwelling species that is ranked G1, having been reported only from Montana, Saskatchewan and Utah. Two other state-rare mayflies turned up as well: *Homoeoneuria*

alleni (G4, S2), a sand-dwelling species *Raptobaptania cruentata* (G4, S2), a riffle-dweller. (Since mayflies haven't earned the notoriety of dragonflies, they don't yet have common names – sorry!). Two other rare



One of several study sites along the Powder River

sand-dwelling mayflies were also found on the Powder a few years ago by Dan Gustafson (surveying earlier in the season) – *Anaetris eximia* (G2G4, S3) and *Lachlania saskatchewanensis* (G4, S1).

The larger objective of Dave's work is to apply biological assessment measures to evaluate the quality of aquatic biological communities in the Powder and its tributaries. His analysis found the reach upstream of Rough Creek to be most biologically intact (supporting the largest number of species expected for that type of stream habitat), with the reach at the Wyoming border and the Dry Creek drainage also ranking high. If you want to learn more about our aquatic classification and biological integrity measures, check out Dave's report on our website (*Aquatic Surveys and Assessment within the Middle Powder River Watershed*). A report on the larger survey effort that included other animal groups will be available later this spring.

Our aquatic ecology program has added a critical dimension to MTNHP's survey efforts and will continue to expand our knowledge of Montana's aquatic heritage – especially among the invertebrates. Thanks to Dan Gustafson at MSU for help in identification and ranking, and to the BLM for funding these surveys.

Contact: Dave Stagliano
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New Vegetation Maps Available

It's easy to understand why our recent survey of data users and partners ranked improved vegetation mapping as their number one priority for new MTNHP services. Effective resource management is very difficult without knowing the location and extent of various habitat types.

We recently developed new vegetation maps for two of Montana's nationally important habitat areas, the Rocky Mountain Front and the Centennial Valley. While these maps show all vegetation communities, we focused special effort on accurately portraying habitat types of particular interest to our funding partners, the USFWS (upland grasslands of the Rocky Mountain Front) and The Nature Conservancy (lower elevation ecosystems in the Centennial Valley). Maps were developed by creating a classification model with Landsat satellite imagery, ground truth plots, and environmental data.

Both maps and GIS data will soon be available on our website. A Rocky Mountain Front report with details on vegetation descriptions and the mapping process can be viewed at the publications link on our website.

Contact: Greg Kudray
(444-0915)

Did You Know?

Montana currently has 83 species of Odonates (53 dragonflies and 30 damselflies) either recorded or reported in the state. Many of these species are fairly common and can be found easily in many areas of the state. However, some are uncommon or rare including the Last Best Place Damselfly (*Enallagma optimolocus*) - the species for which this newsletter is named - found only in Montana; the Subarctic Darner (*Aeshna subarctica*) a dragonfly known only from Beaverhead and Granite counties; and the Brimstone Clubtail (*Stylurus intricatus*) a dragonfly only recently found in Powder River county (see article above). Currently Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the Montana Natural Heritage Program have identified seven Odonates as Species of Concern and another 31 as Potential Species of Concern.

Ecology Updates - Continued

Wetlands & Riparian Mapping

The MTNHP has secured three years of EPA funding to establish a wetland and riparian mapping center for Montana. Digital National Wetland Inventory maps have never been completely available for Montana (unlike most other states), and those that are available are over 20 years old. Additionally, our important riparian habitats were never mapped. The initial effort will focus on the rapidly developing Gallatin, Bitterroot, and Flathead Valleys and will be coupled with an analysis of wetland change from an early 1980's baseline to current conditions.

With partner funding, we hope to expand this program to other Montana regions and complete as much riparian and wetland mapping as possible. The field work associated with this effort will also help build our database with more information on specific wetland sites.

Contact: Greg Kudray
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Aquatic Ecosystem Guide

A Guide to the Aquatic Ecosystems of Montana's Missouri River watershed is now available on our website. Each major type, like the *Great Plains Perennial Spring*, is detailed with photos and comprehensive descriptions of the environmental setting, fish and macroinvertebrate communities, along with management considerations and state and global conservation ranks. You can view the information at: mtnhp.org/aquatics.

This information grew from a multi-year effort led by Dave Stagliano, our Aquatic Ecologist, and funded by The Nature Conservancy and the Bureau of Land Management. Dave integrated biological data from many sources with environmental data to create an ecologically based classification of the Missouri River and all its tributaries. The aquatic classification system relates species assemblages to stream types that can be mapped. This allows biologists to evaluate the health of particular stream or river

stretches based on fish or macroinvertebrate samples.

Our next step, if we can secure \$30,000 in additional funding, will be to provide web access to our extensive aquatic ecosystem database. A web-based map would allow users to select stream reaches and view all the biological and environmental data assembled from various sources for that reach. By comparing actual sampling data to the reference conditions (expected species) for stream types, managers will be able to directly measure the biological health of aquatic systems.

Contact: Dave Stagliano
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Need Data?

Requests can be submitted using the NRIS **Request Tracker**. Just click "Get Data" on our homepage: <http://mtnhp.org>. You can also call at 444-5354 or email directly at mtnhp@state.mt.us.

Zoology Updates

Bats and Mollusks: Big Findings about Little Critters

Recent surveys have brought major advances in our knowledge of two inconspicuous animal groups: bats and land mollusks. Surveys funded by the U.S. Forest Service turned up four new species of mollusks never before documented in Montana – the Pale Jumping-slug (G3G4), found at one locality; the Pygmy Slug (G1G2) found at four locations, the Reticulate Taildropper (G5), from one location; and the Smoky Taildropper (G2), found at 8 localities. In addition, surveyors found other new sites for several mollusk Species of Concern – 5 for the Fir Pinwheel (G3), 6 for Berry's Mountainsnail (G5T2) and 1 for the Striate Disc (G5). Most were found west of the Continental Divide, on the Lolo, Flathead and Kootenai Forests. This information, along with surveys scheduled for 2006, will result in better

status-assessments and likely down-ranking of some species in the state.

Bats surveys, funded by the US Forest Service last summer resulted in 10 new county records for nine species of bats, including four new species recorded in Gallatin County alone. One new record for



Smoky Taildropper (*Prophysaon humile*)

Lincoln County was the Fringed Myotis, a state Species of Concern.

Other bats surveys focused on riparian corridors of eastern Montana, and were funded by BLM. These resulted in new records for four Species of Concern, including Townsend's Big-eared Bat (2 capture sites, 2 vocalization sites), Spotted Bat (3 vocalization sites), Fringed Myotis (2 vocalization sites), and Eastern Red Bat (1 capture site, 9 vocalization sites). The capture site for Eastern Red Bat was near Culbertson in Richland Co., and the vocalizations came from scattered locations along the Yellowstone and Powder rivers, increasing the likelihood that these animals are breeding in Montana. Spotted Bat locations were all from Yellowstone County, where this species was first documented in Montana.

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see "Staff Contacts" on our Website*



New Fish Poster Available

Just released: a beautiful, full-color poster of Montana's Fish Species of Special Concern, featuring color images, range maps and status ranks for 16 native fish, from the Paddlefish to the Pearl Dace. Posters are available for pick-up from Helena NHP and FWP offices, as well as field offices of FWP, BLM and the USFS throughout Montana.