



Montana Natural Heritage Program

Montana Audubon

2017 Conservationist of the Year Award

In order to do our conservation work, it is incredibly valuable for us to understand where wildlife species live in our state, how they are distributed, and how their populations change over time. Having a centralized, dedicated location to collect and store all this information is invaluable.

Because of the critical role they play in the acquisition, storage, and retrieval of information about wildlife and ecosystems, Montana Audubon is pleased to recognize the Montana Natural Heritage Program with its 2017 Conservationist of the Year Award.

Since the Heritage Program was established by the state legislature in 1983, the program, which is housed in the Montana State Library, has become Montana's primary source for reliable and objective information on where Montana's native species and habitats exist today—and where they existed historically, with an emphasis on those wildlife species and habitats of conservation concern. As examples of its work, Montana Audubon is particularly grateful for the Heritage Program's storing and maintaining of the state's Montana Bird Distribution database, mapping our Important Bird Area boundaries, as well as developing the first detailed maps in the state for Montana's wetland and riparian habitats.

The Heritage Program depends on its many partners for most of the information it collects. These partners include state and federal agencies, scientists, consulting firms, and citizens. And when the information is not being gathered by partners, Heritage Program scientists work to find the funding to collect original survey data for species and habitats that are little known, and in locations that are seldom visited.

Through their work, the Heritage Program has become the state's one-stop-shopping source for reliable information and expertise to support stewardship of our native species and habitats. The information found within this program serves every citizen in the state of Montana.

So how is this data used? In addition to entities like Montana Audubon using this information to track birds and other wildlife, the Heritage Program is a primary source for

animal, plant, wetland, and land cover information used in environmental reviews conducted by local, state, federal, and tribal governments, as well as private consulting firms, for better understanding the impacts of mining, timber sales, subdivisions, utility and pipeline corridors, oil and gas developments, highway construction projects, and more. Having this information centralized and made readily available on the Heritage website, allows environmental and species status reviews to proceed quickly, and saves untold dollars to both the private and public sectors.

In sum, good information is critical to protecting and maintaining our state's valuable natural heritage—especially as the state continues to grow and develop. Montana's Natural Heritage Program is a diverse resource for our citizens and economy, and is central to the quality of life for the state of Montana.

For these reasons and more, we are pleased to recognize the Montana Natural Heritage Program with our 2017 Conservationist of the Year Award.