

Strategic Framework for Montana Natural Heritage Program

July 2020 through June 2025



Purpose

The Montana Natural Heritage Program is the state's source for reliable information and expertise to support stewardship of our species and biological communities, emphasizing those of conservation concern. We strive to provide easy access to that information in order for users to save time and money, speed environmental reviews, and inform decision making.

What we Value

- Comprehensive, current, accurate, and scientifically credible information on Montana's species and biological communities with an emphasis on those of conservation concern.
- Being responsive to the information and training needs of our partners.
- Providing neutral, trusted, timely, and equitable service to all our information users.
- Transparency to our data users in setting work priorities and providing information products.

Our Roles

- We work collaboratively with our partners to gather distribution and status information for Montana's species and biological communities.
- We centralize information gathered by our partners on the distribution and status of Montana's species and biological communities.
- We create value-added information products, including conservation status ranks, species of concern occurrences, predicted habitat suitability models, and national wetland and riparian and land cover mapping products.
- We provide ready access to distributional information on the species and biological communities of Montana through our Map Viewer and Species Snapshot web applications.
- We summarize basic information about the distribution, status, taxonomy, identification, biology, ecology, and management of species and biological communities in accounts on the Montana Field Guide and other information products.
- We collaborate with other members of the NatureServe network to document the global distribution and conservation status of species and biological communities.

Strategic Result 1

What we will do:

Secure sustainable funding to achieve the statutory mission of the program

How we will do it:

- Secure adequate funding for core botany, ecology, zoology, and information service functions by communicating program needs through the executive planning process and to the Montana legislature through House Bill 2 and House Bill 633.
- When limited by legislative funding, secure adequate supplemental funding for core functions and information services from federal, state, and nongovernmental partners that are dependent on those functions and services as well as staff expertise.
- Secure adequate funding for partner sponsored projects in order to fully fund staff positions and meet specific information needs of partners.
- Maintain and strengthen the partnership between the Montana State Library, the University of Montana, and the Montana University System.
- Empower partners to articulate the value of our information and data delivery services to help secure adequate funding.

Why we will do it:

Adequate funding allows recruitment, retention, and development of staff and expertise in order to maintain and advance information services that support our user's information needs

Strategic Result 2

What we will do:

Ensure that information on species and biological communities is comprehensive, current, and accurate

How we will do it:

- Complete modern statewide wetland and riparian mapping for the entire state and update mapping to the latest standards as needed.
- Convene a land cover working group and create and update statewide land cover, land use, habitat change, and other associated products with partner feedback and collaboration.
- Conduct field inventories of aquatic, wetland, and terrestrial vegetation communities across Montana to assess their current distribution and status and support a variety of mapping and modeling efforts.
- Obtain survey, detection, and status information from existing data sources and through field surveys for species belonging to taxonomic groups that are currently under-represented in the program's information systems or higher programmatic priority and of particular interest to partners.
- Enlist outside expertise as needed to fill information gaps for species and biological communities.
- Maintain up-to-date information in the Montana Field Guide for the distribution, general biology, ecology, and conservation status for all species and biological communities.
- Fill-in information gaps in species and biological community accounts on the Montana Field Guide to ensure basic information is available for all species and communities listed, prioritizing species and habitats of conservation concern and those that are of particular interest to partners.
- Crosswalk Montana and national classification and conservation status ranking systems as appropriate.
- Ensure data quality and reliability by continual automated and targeted manual review.
- Review and update conservation status ranks and documentation of underlying scoring for all species and biological communities, prioritizing those of conservation concern and of particular interest to partners.
- Use existing survey and distribution information to create value added products such as range polygons, predicted habitat suitability models, and predicted biodiversity maps.

Why we will do it:

Users are able to make informed and timely decisions because they have common access to comprehensive, current, and accurate information on species and biological communities from a single trusted source

Strategic Result 3

What we will do:

Make our information readily available to partners and ensure that they are aware of, and trained in, the use of our information products

How we will do it:

- Develop innovative website and other information tools using the latest technologies that both facilitate the centralization of information and provide ready access to the full suite of information sources the program manages.
- Collaborate with partners on trainings that help users understand our data, how to access what they need, and what the appropriate uses of the information are.
- Monitor how staff expertise, data, and web applications are used by partners in order to evaluate and improve services.
- Partner with the larger Montana State Digital Library to leverage staff expertise and web tools to support users.
- Develop and record training webinars appropriate to various levels of data access that can viewed on our website.
- Evaluate, and where possible, expand outreach to our network of partners (e.g., conservation districts, county government, local citizen groups, and citizen scientists).

Why we will do it:

Users are able to save time and money and make more informed decisions through direct access to staff expertise and by readily accessing information through innovative and easy-to-use web applications they are proactively trained on

Strategic Result 4

What we will do:

Adapt to changing user needs

How we will do it:

- Regularly engage partners and users through partner's meetings and trainings to solicit advice, identify opportunities, and better understand user challenges, needs, and priorities.
- Employ staff that maintain currency in their disciplines and exhibit professionalism and responsiveness in their service to users.
- Maintain and strengthen the partnership between the Montana State Library, the University of Montana, and the Montana University System.
- Engage in partner funded project work that enhances our data holdings and staff expertise, with emphasis on species and biological communities of conservation concern.
- Empower staff to identify new solutions and services.

Why we will do it:

Our information products and tools will only remain valuable to our users if they adapt to ongoing legal, regulatory, environmental, fiscal, technological, social, and other changes